

Socialist in Form, National in Content
Soviet Culture in the Tatar Autonomous Republic, 1934-1968

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the roles of ethnic minority cultural elites in the development of socialist culture in the Soviet Union from the mid-1930s through the late 1960s. Although Marxist ideology predicted the fading away of national allegiances under communism, Soviet authorities embraced a variety of administrative and educational policies dedicated to the political, economic, and cultural modernization of the country's non-Russian populations. I analyze the nature and implementation of these policies from the perspective of ethnic Tatars, a Muslim Turkic group and contemporary Russia's largest minority. Tatar cultural elites utilized Soviet-approved cultural forms and filled them with Tatar cultural content from both the pre-Revolutionary past and the socialist present, creating art and literature that they saw as contributing to both the Tatar nation and to Soviet socialism. I argue that these Tatar cultural elites believed in the emancipatory potential of Soviet socialism and that they felt that national liberation and national development were intrinsic parts of the Soviet experiment. Such idealism remained present in elite discourses through the 1930s, 1940s, and into the 1950s, but after Stalin's death it was joined by open disillusionment with what some Tatars identified as a nascent Russocentrism in Soviet culture. The coexistence of these two strands of thought among Tatar cultural elites suggests that the integration of Tatar national culture into the broad, internationalist culture envisioned by Soviet authorities in Moscow was a complex and disputed process which produced a variety of outcomes that continue to characterize Tatar culture in the post-Soviet period.

This dissertation is based on significant archival research and utilizes various state and Communist Party documents, as well as memoirs, letters, and other personal sources

in both Russian and Tatar. It challenges traditional periodization by bridging the Stalin and post-Stalin eras and emphasizes on-the-ground developments rather than official state policy. Finally, it offers insight into the relationship between communism and ethnic difference and presents a nuanced vision of Soviet power that helps to explain the continuing role of nationalism in the contemporary Russian Federation and other post-communist states.

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NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

This dissertation utilizes a modified version of Edward J. Allworth's 1971 system for the transliteration of Tatar in the Cyrillic script. My version is as follows:

А а	a
Ә ә	ä
Б б	b
В в	v
Г г	g
Д д	d
Е е	yï, e
Ж ж	zh
Ж ж	j
З з	z
И и	i
Й й	y
К к	k
Л л	l
М м	m
Н н	n
Ң ң	ng
О о	o
Ө ө	ö
П п	p
Р р	r
С с	s
Т т	t
У у	u
Ү ү	ü
Ф ф	f
Х х	kh
Һ һ	h
Ц ц	ts
Ч ч	ch
Ш ш	sh
Щ щ	sch
Ъ ъ	”
Ы ы	ï
Ь ь	,
Э э	e
Ю ю	yu, yü
Я я	ya, yä

INTRODUCTION

In the introduction to *Imagined Communities*, likely the most widely-read study of nations and nationalism among contemporary scholars, Benedict Anderson argues that “since World War II every successful revolution has defined itself in *national* terms.”¹ Going further, Anderson states his support for Eric Hobsbawm’s 1977 claim that “Marxist movements and states have tended to become national not only in form but in substance, i.e., nationalist.”² It is clear that, in looking at the People’s Republic of China, the People’s Movement for the Liberation of Angola, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, and other communist revolutionary states and movements, communism’s major historical role in the twentieth century was as a vehicle for national movements and as a means for achieving nationalist goals. Despite this, historians often remain conflicted about the relationship between nationalism and communism, tending to view them as opposed or competing ideologies rather than as complimentary blueprints for political action. This trend is even more pronounced with regards to the Soviet Union, which even Anderson regards as “refusing nationality” in its desire to become a Marxist utopian internationalist state.³ However, by overlooking the very real connection between nationalism and communism, and especially by denying the Soviet Union’s resemblance to other Marxist states in this regard, historians have obscured the way in

¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised Edition (New York: Verso, 2006), 2.

² Eric Hobsbawm, “Some Reflections on ‘The Break-up of Britain’”, *New Left Review*, 105 (September-October 1977), 13. Cited in Anderson, 3.

³ *Ibid*, 2. Anderson argues that “refusing nationality” actually makes the Soviet Union more akin to Great Britain in its resemblance to pre-national dynastic states, rather than as a precursor to some sort of future internationalist state formation.

which nationalism, national identities, and concepts of the nation were central to individuals and groups living within the first, and arguably most important, Marxist state. Moreover, such an approach belies a Russocentric bias in our understanding of Soviet power by assuming that communism was imposed, in one way or another, by a mostly-Russian but ideologically-internationalist Bolshevik elite on a multicultural, multinational empire. This thereby denies the agency of non-Russian peoples to see communism and socialism as a vehicle for national liberation, salvation, or development.

This dissertation explores how non-Russian Soviet cultural elites, especially musicians, poets, and playwrights, conceived of their activities in both national and socialist terms. Utilizing a case study focusing on the Soviet Union's Volga Tatar population, I argue that Tatar artists produced national content through the adoption of officially-sanctioned socialist forms of culture, including not only art forms like the opera but also Soviet ideological narratives such as wartime heroism. This dissertation flips Lenin's well known maxim that nationalities policy should be "national in form, socialist in content" and suggests that the lasting result of Soviet efforts with regards to its non-Russian populations was that ethnic minority cultures were to be developed and celebrated in recognizably Soviet ways without the loss of distinctly national meanings. Significantly, however, the transformation of non-Russian cultures, while devised in Moscow, was carried out primarily by the minorities themselves. I argue that Tatars maintained substantial creative authority not only in making art but also in attributing ideological value (national and socialist) to art and artists. Thus, Tatars understood the construction of socialism as synonymous with nation-building and the development of

Tatar culture, using Soviet socialist cultural forms and narratives to create what they viewed as culture which was both authentically Soviet and authentically Tatar.

What did it mean to produce authentic national content through socialist forms? Tatar cultural elites provided a variety of answers to this question. Tatar composers sought to preserve elements of Tatar folk music. Tatar poets mimicked the folk themes and literary language of pre-Revolutionary Tatar poet Gabdulla Tukai (tat. Ghabdulla Tukay). Plays on the stage of the Tatar State Academic Theater dramatized village life before the Revolution. Tatar historians highlighted Kazan's unique role in Russian, Eurasian, Islamic, and global histories. In each of these fields, Tatar cultural figures maintained a connection to a past that distinguished them from other Soviet peoples. But the exact limits of this culture were not always clear. Moscow demanded that Tatar culture be permeable, and that it not encroach on the boundaries of other cultures, especially that of the Russians. This all meant that, despite being empowered through Soviet ethnic particularist policies, Tatar cultural elites were limited in their artistic prospects. This dissertation explores the way in which Tatar elites stretched the limits that Soviet ideology imposed upon them, but also how the culture produced within these limits remained, in their minds, authentically Soviet.

Soviet policies of ethnic particularism began with the delineation of national territories and “affirmative action” promotional policies for non-Russians in the 1920s.⁴ At the same time, the Bolshevik leadership and the country's artistic avant-garde had yet

⁴ Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001); Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge & the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).

to decide the issue of how socialist culture should look (and sound), with more radical elements asserting that nearly everything from before the revolution had to be tossed out in favor of a new and authentic “proletarian” culture.⁵ After his ascension to power, Stalin championed “socialist realism,” art whose content promoted Soviet values, and became an advocate for art forms such as the novel, the symphony, the opera, and, of course, poetry.⁶ Stalinist culture became the norm for all-Soviet peoples and, by the 1930s, the process by which non-Russian peoples were granted their own cultural institutions and professional organizations was in full swing. For Tatars, this shift in culture was accompanied by purges of the pre-Revolutionary Tatar intelligentsia, a suppression of Islam, and the elevation of a new generation of cultural figures, many of whom were born in the countryside at the turn of the century and who reached adolescence or early adulthood around the time of the 1917 Revolution. It is this group of figures, most of whom received substantial tutelage both in the Tatar capital, Kazan and in Moscow, who feature centrally in this dissertation.

My focus on cultural elites stems from my interpretation of the “national question” in Soviet history. Whereas the most well-known study of Tatars, Azade-Ayse Rorlich’s *The Volga Tatars*, is subtitled *A Profile in National Resilience*, I follow Rogers Brubaker in asserting that “‘national struggles’ were and are not the struggles of nations, but the struggles of institutionally constituted national elites – that is elites institutionally

⁵ Robert Leach, *Revolutionary Theatre* (London: Routledge, 1994); Katerina Clark, *Petersburg, Crucible of Cultural Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995); Lynn Mally, *Revolutionary Acts: Amateur Theater and the Soviet State, 1917-1938* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000).

⁶ Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual, Third Edition* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000).

defined *as national*.”⁷ The Soviet Union’s emphasis on nationality as a marker of both personal and societal identity, and the fact that Tatar cultural elites held their authority as both Tatars and as cultural figures, means that understanding these individuals on their own terms has significant implications for the roles of nationalism and national identity in Soviet history. This dissertation focuses on three such individuals in particular, and contextualizes their biographies within developments in the cultural scene in the Tatar Republic. Analyzing each of these figures offers a unique window into how being Tatar shaped their views about themselves, their work, and about Soviet society as a whole. Moreover, the institutional support afforded to each of these individuals as both Communist Party and professional organization members underscores the extent to which empowering officially-designated national elites was a central aspect of Soviet policy towards its non-Russian peoples.

To be certain, scholars of the Soviet Union have long understood the importance of nationality expressed through the establishment of nationally-bounded territories, the formation and empowerment of institutionally-recognized national elites, and the adoption of national heritage as an important social marker. Famously, Ronald Suny referred to collapse of the Soviet Union along ethnic-national lines in 1991 as the “revenge of the past,” citing the Soviets’ significant nation-building policies in the 1920s and 1930s.⁸ Yuri Slezkine similarly cited the Bolsheviks’ “chronic ethnophilia” to

⁷ Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 25.

⁸ Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993).

explain how ardent internationalists had done so much of the legwork for the nationalists of the 1990s and beyond.⁹ The vast majority of literature on the Soviet Union’s nationalities policy (whether focusing on Moscow or on the national regions themselves) has explicitly or implicitly followed this approach, attempting, in part, to use the prism of nationality to explain how and why the Soviet Union collapsed.¹⁰ The almost-exclusive temporal focus of these studies is the 1920s and 1930s. This dissertation instead focuses its investigation of Soviet nation-building policies in what I refer to as the “middle era” of Soviet power – the mid-1930s through the late 1960s.¹¹ I contend that the war and the post-Stalin period were crucial eras in which important characteristics of modern Tatar culture took place, especially with regards to its relationship to Soviet ideological narratives and to ethnic Russians. I also include a chapter-length discussion of Tatar culture since the collapse of the Soviet Union, thereby addressing directly the issue of the Soviet legacy on Tatar culture.

What is striking in looking at the case of Tatar culture is the relatively consistent use of national discourses over this period. In contrast to studies in Soviet history which assert that Stalin “downgraded” nationalities policy or that resurgent Russian nationalism was the central aspect of the “national question” from the 1930s until the resurgence of nationalism in the 1980s, I argue that nation-building in the Tatar Republic continued

⁹ Yuri Slezkine, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism,” *Slavic Review* 53 (Summer 1994): 414-452.

¹⁰ Adrienne Lynn Edgar, *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Adeeb Khalid, *Making Uzbekistan: Nation, Empire, and Revolution in the Early USSR* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015).

¹¹ I borrow this term from Paul Stronski, see his *Tashkent: Forging a Soviet City, 1930-1966* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 2010).

along the lines established in the 1930s through at least the subsequent three decades. The nation was the ideological “master symbol” at the height of both Stalinism and de-Stalinization.¹² Still, the war, Stalin’s death, and the Thaw afforded new opportunities to bring the socialist and the national in contact. Although the Great Patriotic War was not the event that ushered in Sovietization, as has been argued in the case of Kazakhstan, it did allow for the celebration of wartime heroism in a particularly Tatar way.¹³ The Thaw period saw a revival of historical thinking among Tatar cultural figures, with historians and poets exploring Tatars’ historical relationship with the Khans of the Golden Horde and with the Tsars of Muscovy. Tatars utilized their national history to assert their collective rights within the Soviet Union and to challenge what some perceived as the Russification of Soviet culture. But even these arguments were not made to deny Soviet internationalism – rather, they were made in an effort to demand that Soviet authorities live up to Marxist internationalist ideals of the equality of nations.

Another unique feature of this study is its focus on a nationality that continues to live within the boundaries of the Russian Federation. Almost all other studies that utilize a case study to investigate the application of Soviet nationalities policy in a particular locality focus on the Soviet periphery – especially Central Asia and Ukraine. In these

¹² My use of the notion of the nation as a “master symbol” follows Katherine Verdery’s study of communist Romania. I argue that the nation was not only ideologically central in communist nation-states but in the internationalist Soviet Union as well. See Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology Under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceausescu’s Romania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

¹³ See Roberto J. Carmack, “History and Hero-Making: Patriotic Narratives and the Sovietization of Kazakh Front-Line Propaganda, 1941-1945,” *Central Asian Survey* vol. 31, no. 1 (Jan. 2014): 95-112; Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of War: The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

areas, it is clear that Soviet internationalist ideology was fully supplanted by the discourses of the nation-state, although the role and extent of Soviet nation-building policies in this development varies widely across the post-Soviet space. Tatars, however, continue to live within a multinational state dominated by Russians, and even post-communist national discourses must be benign enough as to not draw scrutiny from Moscow. I argue that Tatar cultural figures of the 1930s and beyond were instrumental in delineating the boundaries of the Tatar nation and in developing a sort of ethnic particularism which championed Tatar identity, cultural productions, and history as integral parts of the Soviet heritage. Moscow tolerated this benign form of national expression in surprising ways, deferring to Tatar republican elites both when it came to the glorification of wartime heroes and when certain artists ruffled the feathers of their colleagues, whether Russian or Tatar. Because Soviet-era symbols and cultural forms did not collapse within Russia, they maintain a position of significance (and even reverence) in contemporary Tatar society, setting the Tatar experience apart from that of those in other former-Soviet countries.

One of the major advantages of this dissertation's periodization is that it speaks to a variety of significant debates within broader aspects of Soviet historiography that are not always considered in conjunction with a focus on Soviet nationalities. The professionalization of Tatar music, discussed in chapter 2, builds on the work of Kiril Tomoff by exploring the adoption of Russian-European artistic norms among Tatars, a process which was complicated by national divisions in the Tatar republic. How could Tatars adopt European art forms and could non-Tatars "experts'" contributions to Tatar culture be regarded as authentic? My discussion of the Great Patriotic War delves deeply

into the issue of collaboration among prisoners of war and offers potential explanations for why some Soviet citizens fought against their country. Although the famous Russian collaborator Aleksandr Vlasov remains a traitor in Russia to this day, my exploration of the rehabilitation and canonization of the alleged Tatar collaborator and poet Musa Dzhaliġ' [rus. Musa Zalilov; tat. Musa Jälil] sheds new light into the complex way in which Moscow dealt with the issue of rehabilitation after the war (and especially after Stalin). Finally, my discussion of Tatar culture during the Thaw addresses the impact of new literary openness on Tatar writers and explores how Tatar cultural elites dealt with the rise of the "Russian Party" in the post-war period.¹⁴ Existing scholarship on these topics has tended to focus on Moscow and Leningrad, or on ethnic Russians in the provinces, leaving little room for the Soviet Union's non-Russian peoples. But, as I argue, literary changes and the perceived Russification of Soviet society after the war must be taken into account if we are to understand the rise of non-Russian nationalist groups in the 1980s and 1990s.

This dissertation also contributes to perhaps the largest historiographical debate about the Soviet Union; whether or not there was a dichotomy between the state and society. The earliest scholarship on this issue contended that the Soviet Union was totalitarian in nature, and thus it was impossible to separate the realm of an omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient state from the society which it was meant to govern.¹⁵ By

¹⁴ Nikolai Mirtokhin, *Russkaia partiia: Dvizhenie russkikh natsionalistov v SSSR. 1953-1985 gody* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2003).

¹⁵ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Schocken, 1951).

the 1960s and 1970s, a new generation of historians rejected the “totalitarian model” and insisted on recovering Soviet society by studying history “from below,”¹⁶ examining in particular the ways in which Soviet citizens either opposed or rejected state power or ideology, or the ways in which Soviet citizens used state power and the opportunities it brought to benefit themselves. By the 1990s, this debate turned to the issue of belief – for some, the very act of “speaking Bolshevik”¹⁷ was tantamount to belief in the Soviet experiment; for others, revolutionary and Stalinist discourses were simply so powerful that, although agency among Soviet citizens was possible, discursive separation of the state and society was not.¹⁸ Still others contended that belief in the system often mingled with engagement in officially “anti-Soviet” activities or interests.¹⁹ However, virtually all of these approaches have left out the nationality issue when examining belief, focusing almost exclusively on the Russian heartland of the Soviet Union. My project addresses how groups of Tatars – local bureaucrats, native artists and performers, and the audiences

¹⁶ Significant examples of revisionist literature include Stephen F. Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution: A Political Biography, 1888-1938* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973); Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet Union, 1921-1934* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Lynne Viola, *Best Sons of the Fatherland: Workers in the Vanguard of Soviet Collectivization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); J. Arch Getty, *The Origin of the Great Purges: The Soviet Communist Party Reconsidered, 1933-1938* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1985). Revisionist approaches to the Soviet nationalities include Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Baku Commune, 1917-1918: Class and Nationality in the Russian Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974) and Gregory J. Massel, *The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia: 1919-1929* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974).

¹⁷ Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism As A Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

¹⁸ Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind: Writing A Diary Under Stalin* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009). See also Igal Halfin and Jochen Hellbeck, “Rethinking the Stalinist Subject: Stephen Kotkin’s ‘Magnetic Mountain’ and the State of Soviet Historical Studies,” *Jahrbucher fur Geschichte Osteuropas* 44:3 (1996): 457-463.

¹⁹ Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until it was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

of the aforementioned cultural institutions – fit into our broader understandings of Soviet society. For Tatars, Soviet discourse, like socialist form, was certainly a colonial imposition; but, I would argue that this did not make belief impossible. Instead, I ask how Tatar belief in the Soviet experiment existed alongside awareness of their distinct national heritage and examine the conscious melding of Soviet socialist resources with Tatar cultural heritage to build a Tatar nation in the years after Stalin’s death.

In the twilight years of Soviet power, and especially in the wake of the Soviet Union’s collapse, many scholars began to focus on the Soviet Union’s (or Russia’s) “imperial” nature or its status as an empire. Early proponents of such a position argued that emphasis on the imperial question would help to “broaden our view of the history of Russia, which is widely misconstrued as Russian national history.”²⁰ More recently, editors of the journal *Ab Imperio* have argued that Russia’s “imperial situation” or unique status as an imperial but also colonized²¹ power means that the oppressed anti-imperial rebels can act as colonizers, and the imperial administration can perform as nation-builders for minority groups.”²² Others have claimed that the Soviet Union was an “affirmative action empire”²³ or an “empire of nations,”²⁴ while some have focused on

²⁰ Andreas Kappeler, *The Russian Empire: A Multiethnic History* (Harlow, England: Pearson Education Limited, 2001), 2.

²¹ Principally by the West. See also Isaiah Berlin’s *Russian Thinkers* (New York: Viking Press, 1978).

²² Ilya Gerasimov, Sergey Glebov, Marina Mogilner, "The Postimperial Meets the Postcolonial: Russian Historical Experience and the Postcolonial Moment," in *Ab Imperio*, vol 2. (2013), 131.

²³ Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*.

²⁴ Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*.

the empire's "subaltern" populations, especially in the Central Asian republics.²⁵ In my project, I argue that imposition of Russian/Soviet cultural forms was a form of colonialism²⁶, but also emphasize the fact that the content was produced by Tatar nationals who were given substantial, although not unlimited, autonomy in producing and reproducing their culture in various mediums approved by Moscow. As Tatar officials and artists were necessarily "colonized" or inculcated with the forms and discourses of the Soviet center, they also utilized these tools to build the physical, rhetorical, and performative repertoire of Tatar nationhood that survived the Soviet Union's collapse and has endured to the present day.

Archival sources for this project come primarily from the National Archive of the Republic of Tatarstan (NART) and the Central State Archive of Historical-Political Documentation of the Republic of Tatarstan (TsGAIPDRT), both located in Kazan. As Tatar cultural elites were employees in state-run institutions and members of both professional organizations and, in most cases, the Communist Party, official documents provide a window into the world in which they worked. Moreover, as my interests lie with official culture, the way in which national discourses were utilized in state and Party records is crucial to this project. I consulted these records in a variety of collections, including fonds dedicated to the Tatar Ministry of Culture, the Tatar Union of Writers

²⁵ Douglas Northrop, *Veiled Empire: Gender & Power in Stalinist Central Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004); Marianne Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan: Islam, Modernity, and Unveiling Under Communism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006).

²⁶ For a similar argument, see the work of Marina Frolova-Walker, who examines Soviet "musical nation-building" in the Caucasus and Central Asia. Frolova-Walker, argues that, although institutions such as the Almaty Conservatory are now (following the collapse of the Soviet Union) used for Kazakh cultural purposes, they are still ultimately legacies of an imperial-type of rule by Russian Bolshevism.

and Union of Composers, collections dedicated to individual cultural institutions such as the Tatar State Theater of Opera and Ballet, Tatar State Academic Theater, Kazan State Conservatory, as well as a few personal collections. Because of the nature of the Soviet Party-state, each of the above collections has both a state (housed in NART) and a corresponding Party component (collections housed in TsGAIPDRT), with the Party collections tending to include somewhat less but more consequential material, much of which is included in this dissertation. Documents contained in these collections include directives from Moscow, official correspondence between different institutions and organizations, minutes from Party meetings, reports, and other similar materials. In most cases, leading cultural figures appear as both state administrators and Party officials, reflecting their dual allegiance to republican national institutions and to the internationalist Communist Party.

This dissertation also makes use of materials found elsewhere in Kazan. Notably, I utilized personal collections for numerous composers located at the archives of the National Museum of the Republic of Tatarstan (GOMRT). In particular, the collections of Aleksandr Kliucharev and Nazib Zhiganov [tat. Näjip Jihanov], which include personal correspondence, calendars, Party cards, and drafts of reports and speeches, feature prominently in chapter 2. I also utilize published collections of Zhiganov's correspondence and public writings that I acquired at the Nazib Zhiganov Apartment-Museum. Although most of this material is still "public" – published works typically include newspaper or journal articles, speeches given to regional or national conferences for professional organizations – it underscores the fact that cultural elites were not talking only to their Party colleagues or only to other artists of a similar caliber. Indeed, cultural

elites, as distant as they may have been from average Soviet citizens in terms of their social standing, level of education, or occupation, nevertheless sought to communicate their efforts with society at large. Despite the availability of these published collections, the vast majority of the documents I employ have not yet been utilized by historians within or outside of Tatarstan. I argue that this reflects the way in which cultural activities outside of Moscow or Leningrad have been left out of our understanding of Soviet society, especially when these cultural activities do not easily constitute controversial or dissident behavior.

My decision to focus my archival research in Kazan stems from my interest in telling the story of Tatar culture from the Tatar perspective. However, I supplemented my research in Kazan with additional archival resources. Most prominently, I utilized collections at the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art (RGALI) in Moscow which deal with the life, death, and posthumous rehabilitation of the Tatar poet Musa Dzhaliil', who was captured by German forces in 1942 and allegedly collaborated with them prior to his death in 1944. Because I was not allowed to consult certain materials due to their concerning still-living individuals or their specific content, and because materials in neither Kazan nor Moscow clear up the uncertainties in Dzhaliil's narrative, my discussion of the war also relies on those testimonies gathered by the Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System that directly mention wartime collaboration of Tatars with the Nazis or, in some cases, Dzhaliil' himself. Along with a small number of published autobiographical accounts by Tatars both inside and outside of Russia, my work on Dzhaliil' was also aided by online collections through the Plötzensee Memorial Center (PMC), an organization focusing on the victims of Nazism who were murdered at the

Plötzensee prison in Berlin (including Dzhaliil' himself). I use these varied materials to illuminate the conditions under which Dzhaliil' may or may not have collaborated and to thereby draw greater attention to the significance behind Moscow's decision to allow Kazan to rehabilitate the poet.

Official materials are supplemented by samples of artists' work, notably in discussions of poetry and drama in chapters 3 and 4. Although I am primarily interested in the way cultural elites frame their work, during some particularly tumultuous episodes stemming from intra-Party debates or disagreements, investigation of the text in question is helpful. In chapter 4, where conflict takes center stage, arguments about the nature of particular texts are contextualized using the text itself, where possible. Unfortunately, in some cases, original works are lost and only Party-approved versions are available. Nevertheless, even censored works allow us to understand what *was* acceptable, even if we do not necessarily know what *was not*. Poetry is also a central element of chapter 3, where Dzhaliil's *Moabit Notebooks* [rus. *Moabitskaia tetrad'*; tat. *Moabit däftärläre*], allegedly written in German captivity, became the main tool which Tatar cultural elites used to argue that Dzhaliil' had not collaborated and that he had remained true to the Soviet Union even after his 1942 capture. I emphasize the fact that Dzhaliil's poetry glorifies heroic sacrifice for the homeland while also refraining from using the more ideologically-charged concepts of communism or the Party to assert that promoting a "national" hero superseded other priorities in the post-war period.

One of the most important considerations with regards to my source base is language. Russian's status as the lingua franca of the Soviet Union means that, by the

1930s, almost all state and Party documents use the Russian language. Most Soviet-era publications such as newspaper articles and biographies that I utilize also appeared in the Russian language. The fact that the nation-building process took place primarily in a language not of that nationality is an important factor when understanding the way in which Soviet policy, ostensibly geared towards protecting and even promoting its non-Russian peoples, was deeply homogenizing and russificatory. I have endeavored, however, to utilize Tatar language sources where possible, employing the Tatar versions of both Dzhaliil's and Salikh Battalov's [tat. Sälikh Battal] poetry in chapters 3 and 4, respectively. I also rely on Tatar language memoirs published after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In working with these memoirs, I am cognizant of the fact that their authors purposely wrote and published them in Tatar. Although Tatar-language publishing has increased since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the decision to publish in Tatar still reflects a conscious decision that these texts be delivered almost-exclusively to an ethnic Tatar audience. The same considerations should be taken for Soviet-era texts. Notably, Dzhaliil' wrote his final poems in Tatar using both the Arabic and Latin scripts (but not Cyrillic, adopted for Tatar in 1937). I explore the potential rationale for such a choice and argue that it represents the complicated nature of Tatar identity within internationalist (but often Russian-based) Soviet society.

My use of the sources discussed above fits within a larger conceptual framework influenced by the work of scholars and nationalism, imperialism, and postcolonialism. Partha Chatterjee's exploration of the British colonial mission in India, and especially his focus on Indian subversion of British cultural forms, has influenced my approach to Soviet cultural institutions, which I assert acted as sites for the melding of Soviet

ideology with Tatar national culture.²⁷ Albert Memmi's concept of "linguistic dualism" informs my understanding of the way in which Tatars spoke national content through socialist form.²⁸ I also rely on Homi Bhabha's theory of "mimicry" to explore how Tatar bureaucrats and artists were implicated in the Soviet colonial project of nation-building.²⁹ On that note, I engage with other postcolonial scholars who have questioned the division between empire and nation, and further assert that, in the Soviet experiment, nation, empire, and socialism were inextricably tied together, each reinforced and being reinforced by the others.³⁰

The dissertation is composed of five chapters. In the first chapter, I explore the historical background of my project, emphasizing the integration of Tatars into the Russian Empire and Soviet states. Of particular note is the role of the Tatar intelligentsia, which emerged in the late eighteenth century after Catherine the Great instituted policies of religious tolerance for the empire's Muslims. Kazan's status as a "window on the East" made it a crucial locus of imperial power, but also afforded substantial influence to the local Tatar nobility and merchantry. I argue that Tatars' unique partnership with the Russian state as emissaries to the empire's "eastern" peoples was an important precursor to the way in which Tatars were integrated in Soviet power. The chapter then explores

²⁷ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 6-9.

²⁸ Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965).

²⁹ Homi Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse" *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 85-92.

³⁰ Prasenjit Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003).

the fate of the 1917 Revolution in Kazan, highlighting the influence not only of local Tatar socialists (including Bolsheviks, Left SRs, and others) but also of the jadids, Islamic modernists who allied with the Bolsheviks in the hope of securing Tatar autonomy within a pluralistic Russian Federation. Next, I move to an examination of the origins of the Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (TASSR or Tatar Republic) and address the Bolshevik destruction of the most radical elements of the Tatar national movement in two sets of purges in 1928-32 and 1937-38. Finally, the chapter concludes with a brief overview of the status of Tatar culture in the 1920s.

Chapter 2 will address the history of professional music in the TASSR. I begin by summarizing Tatar music prior to the 1917 Revolution, emphasizing in particular any connections between Russian musical traditions and their Tatar counterparts. Unlike Russian music, which was increasingly professionalized and associated with high degrees of institutional education in academies and conservatories, Tatar music was professionalized only following the Revolution. I argue that the process of professionalization began in the 1930s with the founding of four major musical institutions from 1937-1945: the Tatar State Philharmonic, the Tatar State Opera Theater, the Tatar branch of the Union of Soviet Composers, and the Kazan State Conservatory. In this chapter I explore the roles of these institutions in the professionalization of Tatar music, with particular emphasis on how Tatar national music was increasingly produced using approved Soviet artistic forms, such as the opera or the symphony. Whereas most studies of Soviet nationalities policy focus on the 1920s as the major period of “nation-building” policies, I argue that it was actually the 1930s in which substantial and long-lasting developments began to occur in the Tatar Republic. I argue that Soviet

nationalities policies and the overall effort at social and cultural consolidation under Stalin must be understood as connected and self-reinforcing rather than as competing agendas.

Chapter 3 looks at the convergence of Tatar artistic production with the Great Patriotic War (1941-1945). This chapter examines the life, death, and afterlife of the Tatar poet Musa Dzhaliġ as a way of situating Tatar culture within major narratives about the war, including those related to the fate of Soviet POWs, the question of collaboration and collaborators, and the establishment of the cult of the war and the cult of heroism. Dzhaliġ, a leading figure in the Tatar cultural scene in the 1930s, was captured by the German army in 1942, and eventually joined the anti-Soviet Volga-Ural Legion before being executed by his German captors. Upon learning of his participation in the legion, the Soviet government officially labeled Dzhaliġ a traitor and discontinued any publication of his works. However, in the decade after the war, documents purporting to contain poems written by Dzhaliġ while in German captivity made their way to the Soviet Union, and, in 1956, the poet was posthumously rehabilitated and, in 1957, awarded the Lenin Prize for the wartime poems now known as the *Moabit Notebooks*. That same year, the opera *Dzhaliġ*, composed by Tatar musician Nazib Zhiganov, opened in Kazan, and in 1966 a monument to the poet was installed at the Kazan kremlin. I argue that Dzhaliġ's story illustrates the significant influence that Tatar national sentiment wielded even among non-Tatars in Moscow. Although Moscow was aware of Dzhaliġ's purported collaboration during the war and had officially labeled the poet a traitor in 1949, I assert that their desire to offer Kazan a national symbol overrode complex questions of wartime treason. This deeply complicates our understanding of the war and

illustrates that the Soviet drive for postwar unity had surprising results with respect to the country's nationalities.

Chapter 4 focuses on debates, disagreements, and controversies in the articulation of Soviet Tatar culture. As other scholars have shown, culture was tightly monitored and controlled in an effort to limit critiques of Soviet administration or ideology, but the boundaries of what was considered acceptable or not were often blurred. One of the main issues which concerned Tatar artists was how to explore themes related to the Tatar past – especially the role of Islam and legacy of the Tatar-Mongol yoke in Tatar culture. I argue that the fact that notable examples of Tatar exploration of the past faced heavy critique from Party leaders in both Kazan and Moscow illustrates the extent to which Tatar artists articulated a vision of Tatar culture which was not always in line with the broader Soviet culture. This fact is made clearer by the condemnation of the Tatar poet Salikh Battalov, who argued that elements of Soviet culture, such as the canonization of Pushkin, were anti-Tatar. In this chapter I assert that Battalov and others recognized and reacted to an increasing level of Russian primacy in Soviet culture, further exposing cracks in the Soviet plan to create a patchwork internationalist culture of all Soviet peoples.

Chapter 5 moves forward chronologically to focus on post-Soviet aspects of Tatar culture. Specifically, I am interested in how Soviet Tatar culture has been reappraised since the collapse of the Soviet Union. This chapter examines how cultural productions from the Soviet period have been reconfigured since the 1990s and how these works have been interpreted in the light of changing political and ideological values in the Russian

Federation. Notably, I address the ways in which certain elements of Soviet Tatar culture, most notably the celebration of Musa Dzhaliil', have remained almost completely static since 1991, despite the collapse of communism. I also engage with nationalist discourses that have either explicitly rejected the cultural achievements of Soviet artists and those that have ignored the Soviet period altogether and have instead returned to the imperial past in search of national symbols and discourses. This second tendency is, in fact, not altogether dissimilar from some of the works of Soviet Tatar artists themselves, who placed enormous attention on the pre-Revolutionary period as sites for the articulation of Tatar nationhood. This chapter sheds light on the discourses of post-Soviet Tatar nationalists and explores how minority nationalisms, which the Soviets attempted to co-opt through their nationalities policies, exist within diverse, multicultural states.

I argue in this dissertation that the nation-building policies which Lenin first established in the 1920s continued throughout the Soviet period and led to major changes in the nature of Tatar culture from 1934-1968. These changes involved the adoption of Russian artistic forms, the use of Soviet narrative tropes, and the aligning of historical thought along Marxist lines. However, although "Sovietization" was mandated by Moscow, much of the work of Soviet cultural policy in the Tatar Republic was undertaken by Tatars themselves. These cultural elites interpreted the goals of the socialist state as fundamentally in harmony with Tatar national development and filled socialist cultural forms with national content. This dissertation is a contribution to our understanding of how the Soviet Union's non-Russian peoples were "Sovietized" and does much to fill the significant historiographical gap in our understanding of Soviet

nationalities policy. The Tatar case indicates that cultural elites, working within the limitations of Soviet ideology, created vibrant expressions of national identity which both strengthened the idea of the nation as a discursive tool and helped to legitimize national loyalty to the internationalist Soviet project.

CHAPTER ONE

The Origins of the Soviet Tatar Cultural Elite

As the Soviet experiment approached its eventual collapse in August 1991, delegates from the newly-established Republic of Tatarstan gathered in Moscow to negotiate with the Russian government. According to one anecdote, the Russians asked the Tatar delegates, “so what do you want exactly?” When the delegates informed the Russians that they expected the Russian Federation to recognize Tatarstan’s declaration of sovereignty, the Russians demanded to know on what basis such a declaration had been made. Going further, they suggested that Tatarstan’s agitation for sovereignty could spread to other autonomous republics within the USSR’s union republics, to which the Tatar delegates simply replied, “that is your problem.” Finally, the Russians asked point-blank, “you, what, are leaving Russia?” In response, one of the Tatar delegates, the historian Indus Tagirov, told the Muscovites about a conversation he had previously had with Tatar President Mintimer Shaimiev. “In our entire 438-year history,” Tagirov told Shaimiev, “you couldn’t find even a single Tatar who would sign an agreement for Tatarstan to enter Russia, while all of Tatarstan’s neighbors have long recognized their voluntary entrance into Russia and have received in return honors and privileges.” The Tatarstan delegation summed up their position by stating “we are not entering into Russia, but we are not leaving her, either.”³¹ Tatar lawmakers thus approached the break-

³¹ Venera Iakupova, *100 istorii o suverenitete* (Kazan: Idel’-Press, 2000), 139-40.

up of the Soviet Union not with the hopes of independence, but with a desire for a revision of Tatarstan's relationship with Russian power.

Tatars occupy a unique historical position as both part of, and apart from, Russia and Russians. Recent studies have drawn clear connections between Ivan IV's conquest of the Kazan Khanate in 1552, and the subsequent integration of the region's ethnic Tatar population, with the origins of both Russian identity and the Russian state. Russia's association with the conquered Tatar people spilled into pan-European narratives of Russian backwardness, with Napoleon supposedly saying "scratch a Russian, find a Tatar." As the Russian Empire continued to expand over the following centuries, Tatars became intermediaries between Moscow and the empire's Muslim peoples, especially in Central Asia, acting especially as merchants within the imperial milieu. Over the course of the nineteenth century, Kazan became Russia's "window on the East," the site of one of Russia's first universities, home of a printing press, and the location for a Theological Academy dedicated to spreading Orthodoxy among the peoples of the Middle Volga, including not only Tatars but Bashkirs, Chuvash, Maris, and others. By the end of the century, leading Tatar intellectuals, influenced by the jadid approach to Islamic education, became advocates of the modernization and development of Tatar culture and society along quasi-Western or Russian lines. As the 1917 Revolution approached, Kazan had become a significant political, economic, educational, and cultural center for both Russians and Tatars. After the Revolution, the relationship between the new Bolshevik government and local Tatar elites, many of whom advocated radical politics but were not themselves communists, evolved from tentative partnership to eventual hostility. By the mid-1930s, the beginnings of a new partnership emerged, this time

between the Stalinist government in Moscow and a rising group of Sovietized Tatar cultural elites.

This chapter explores the historical relationship between Tatars and the Russian state in the years prior to 1934. Although Stalinist policies ushered in a dramatic transformation of Tatar culture through the adoption of Soviet cultural forms, narratives, and tropes, the preceding four centuries of Tatar-Russian interaction provided the basis for how Tatars in the twentieth century responded to Moscow's prompts. This chapter begins with an overview of Kazan's history as part of the Tsardom of Russia and the later Russian Empire. This is followed by an examination of Tatar political and cultural activities during and after the 1917 Revolution, including Tatars' aborted attempt to create an autonomous Muslim state in the Volga-Ural region and then the eventual formation, under Soviet auspices, of a much-smaller Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic in 1922. This section explores some of the major struggles in creating a "national" state in an ethnically divided region and also addresses the eventual purge of much of the pre-Soviet and early-Soviet Tatar intellectual and political elite in two waves of violence in 1928-32 and 1937-38. It was this violence that set the stage for the rise of a new generation of Tatar cultural elites that played a major role in delineating the shape of Soviet Tatar culture from the mid-1930s through the end of the 1960s. Finally, this chapter turns to a brief exploration of cultural and intellectual life in the early TASSR in order to provide a window into Tatar culture before the radicalization of Soviet society in the 1930s. Throughout this chapter I highlight interactions between the Russian/Soviet state on the one hand and Tatar intellectual and cultural figures on the other. I argue that, over the nearly five centuries since Russia conquered the territory of modern Tatarstan,

Tatars have come to be accepted as partners in Russian/Soviet statecraft. This process has been especially pronounced since the 1930s when steady Sovietization led to the elimination of alleged counterrevolutionary elements of Tatar society and the promotion of those elements of Tatar cultural heritage in keeping with Soviet ideology.

The Imperial Period and the Origins of Tatar Nationalism

The Volga Tatars are one of several Turkic groups who have historically occupied territories along the Volga and Ural Rivers. Unlike many of their Turkic and Finno-Ugric neighbors, whose populations were almost totally comprised of peasants and did not have much in the way of an indigenous nobility or merchantry, Tatars developed a stratified society and were the ruling people of the Volga Bulgar state from the seventh through the thirteenth centuries.³² By the late nineteenth century, there were large Tatar populations in the Kazan, Orenburg, Penza, Samara, Tobolsk, and Ufa provinces, with significant urban populations in Kazan, Orenburg, and Ufa, as well as smaller communities in Moscow and St. Petersburg.³³ The relative malleability of national and religious identities through the late imperial period led to an assimilatory process among some of the Tatars' neighboring peoples, such as the Turkic (but generally Orthodox) Chuvash and Finno-Ugric Mari.³⁴ Another neighboring ethnic group, the Bashkirs, were

³² Robert P. Geraci, *Window on the East: National and Imperial Identities in Late Tsarist Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 4.

³³ Azade-Ayse Rorlich, *The Volga Tatars: A Profile in National Resilience* (Stanford: Hoover Institution press, 1989), 43.

³⁴ Victor A. Shnirelman, *Who Gets the Past?: Competition for Ancestors among Non-Russian Intellectuals in Russia* (Washington, D.C.: The Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1996), 13-15. See also Agnès Nilüfer Kefeli, *Becoming Muslim in Imperial Russia: Conversion, Apostasy, and Literacy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press,

distinct from Tatars primarily by their nomadic, tribal lifestyle, and the Bashkir administration utilized the written Tatar language into the twentieth century.³⁵ Thus, although the Imperial Russian state treated these populations as distinct, Tatars generally enjoyed a leading economic and cultural role in the region, matched only by Russians themselves. This wide geographic dispersal and relative strength vis-à-vis neighboring populations had important consequences through the imperial and revolutionary periods, with such characteristics seen by the Russian state as potentially either helpful or threatening.

Ivan IV's conquest of the Kazan Khanate in 1552 was the culmination of several centuries of conflict on Muscovy's eastern borders. Kazan's status as the successor state to the Golden Horde, which had subjugated Moscow in the thirteenth century, was among the several motivating factors which encouraged Russian expansion in the region. However, the desire to settle old scores coincided with important economic goals, with Kazan's location along the important Volga River, connecting together Russia's West and East, North and South, providing a tantalizing object for Muscovy's leaders. The overwhelmingly Muslim population of Kazan and its environs also appealed to Orthodox Church leaders and to Ivan himself, who envisioned the city's conquest as part of Muscovy's crusade against non-believers. By 1556, resistance within Kazan was under control, the city's mosques were destroyed, and the remaining Muslim population was

2014), and Andreas Kappeler, *The Russian Empire: A Multiethnic History* (Harlow, UK: Pearson Education Limited, 2001).

³⁵ Charles Steinwedel, "Tribe, Estate, Nationality?: Changing Conceptions of Bashkir Particularity Within the Tsar's Empire," *Ab Imperio*, 2 (2002), 259.

exiled from the city, forming what is today known as Kazan's old Tatar quarter (*tatarskaia sloboda*) outside the city's walls. An influx of Russians and other Slavic peoples over the following decades and centuries did much to alter the ethnic character of the city, such that by the nineteenth century Russians accounted for over half of the region's population.³⁶ Many of the indigenous peoples of the Middle Volga were converted to Orthodoxy over the course of the region's integration, including the majority of the area's Finno-Ugric peoples and perhaps 10% of ethnic Tatars, although waves of apostasy continued throughout the period of Russian Imperial rule.³⁷

Russian suzerainty meant demographic changes, the institution of new religious policies, and the arrival of economic, especially agricultural, practices from the Russian heartland. It did not, however, mean total Russification or total subjugation of ethnic Tatars. As Matthew Romaniello notes in his study of the integration of Kazan during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the process of the region's incorporation into the Russian empire was slow, variable, and reliant on significant local support.³⁸ The extension of serfdom came along with the influx of Slavic peoples, but its harshest elements were never applied to the indigenous population.³⁹ Instead, Tatar landowners retained significant economic power in the region and were even able to own Russian

³⁶ Geraci, 3.

³⁷ Paul Werth, *At the Margins of Orthodoxy: Mission, Governance, and Confessional Politics in Russia's Volga-Kama Region, 1827-1905* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), 42-43.

³⁸ Matthew P. Romaniello, *The Elusive Empire: Kazan and the Creation of Russia, 1552-1671* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012).

³⁹ Werth, 39.

serfs (whereas Russian landowners could not leverage control over Muslim peasants).⁴⁰ Many Tatar nobles, both converts to Christianity and Muslims, joined the imperial administration both locally and in Moscow. As Robert Geraci has noted, the ability of the Russian state to be both punitive and conciliatory toward its non-Russian populations was one of the central aspects of Russian imperial identity.⁴¹ This position was partially as a result of the malleable characteristics of Russian nationality and its relationship to non-Russian peoples, such that Russians might “see these ‘other’ peoples of the East as present or future Russians” rather than as ethnically/nationally distinct groups.⁴² In practice, this meant that efforts to “Russify” Tatars and others ebbed and flowed, as did policies which instead stressed the viability of a multicultural, multiethnic Russian Empire.⁴³

By the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, policies of religious tolerance and the steady economic development of the Middle Volga region led to Tatars’ further integration into the activities of the Russian state. Catherine the Great’s creation of the Muslim Ecclesiastical Administration (the Muftiate) in 1788 established a parallel

⁴⁰ Geraci, 19.

⁴¹ Ibid., 9.

⁴² Ibid., 3.

⁴³ One of the most well-studied aspects of the Russian Empire’s attempts to “Russify” Tatars and other peoples of the Volga is the efforts of Orthodox missionaries. Whereas studies such as Geraci’s *Window on the East* explore this topic primarily from the Russian perspective, recent studies have focused on what conversion and apostasy meant to non-Russian peoples. See especially Mustafa Tuna, *Imperial Russia’s Muslims: Islam, Empire, and European Modernity, 1788-1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015) and Kefeli, *Becoming Muslim in Imperial Russia*. The malleability of national and religious identities also had consequences for the Bolshevik regime after 1917. See Paul W. Werth, “From ‘Pagan’ Muslims to ‘Baptized’ Communists: Religious Conversion and Ethnic Particularity in Russia’s Eastern Provinces,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 42, no. 3 (July, 2000), 497-523.

institution to that of the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church. Catherine invested the Muftiate with the authority to register Muslim communities, oversee the running of Islamic schools, and appoint mullahs in mosques and other institutions.⁴⁴ One scholar of Islam in the Russian empire asserts that the state sought to convert “religious authority in each community into an instrument of imperial rule” and encouraged Tatars and other Muslim peoples to “focus their allegiances, along with their complaints and aspirations, on the monarchy and its institutions.”⁴⁵ Unlike the Muslim peoples of the Caucasus and the Central Asia, who were brought into the Russian Empire only in the nineteenth century and remained under military jurisdiction until the revolution, Tatars benefited from regular administrative policy. These advantages were also coupled with the economic growth of the Kazan region and the increasing prominence of the Tatar merchant class. In 1812 Tatar-owned factories in Kazan accounted for 70 percent of the city’s leather goods production and about half of its soap production. Tatar merchants controlled the city’s Tatar neighborhoods and also had wide influence of the trade of Kazan-made goods both domestically within the empire and abroad to India, China, and Persia.⁴⁶ This situation contributed to Tatars’ standing as the empire’s best intermediaries between Moscow and its “eastern” peoples.

By the mid-nineteenth century, Tatars occupied an important position of power within the internal dynamics of the Russian Empire. Kazan’s university, Russian printing

⁴⁴ Geraci, 22.

⁴⁵ Robert D. Crews, *For Prophet and Tsar: Islam and Empire in Russia and Central Asia* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 2.

⁴⁶ Geraci, 23.

press, and theological academy made it an important center of Russian imperial power, to be sure, but its Muslim printing press (the only such press in the empire) and significant Tatar bourgeoisie reflected the duality of the region. Several waves of religious apostasy in the region signaled to the Russian state, and especially to the Orthodox Church, that religious tolerance had led to an unacceptable strengthening of the Tatar community vis-à-vis Russia and Russians. Apostasy among baptized Tatars coincided with “the spread of Islam among their neighbors who were originally believed to be animist.”⁴⁷ This process was known as “Islamicization and Tatarization” and, left unchecked, threatened to create a larger, unified, Muslim Tatar bloc in the Middle Volga and beyond. For Nikolai Il’minskii and other prominent Church-state actors in the second half of the nineteenth century, Tatars had usurped the natural role of Russians as the civilizers of the Middle Volga and Central Asian peoples.⁴⁸ In order to address this problem, Il’minskii spearheaded a comprehensive project by which apostasy would be combatted through liturgical translation and Tatarization would be countered with special educational attention to Kazakhs, Udmurts, Mari, Chuvash, and others. Il’minskii’s belief that “Tatars had become [Russians’] principal competitors” in the struggle for influence in Central Asia led to efforts to curtail Tatars’ political and religious position within the empire and its borderlands.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Elena I. Campbell, *The Muslim Question and Russian Imperial Governance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 64.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Geraci, 30.

The transition from a broader form of religious tolerance and limited inclusion of Muslims in the processes of imperial administration to growing suspicion of Tatars in particular coincided with important changes in Tatar intellectual life over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Prior to the development of narratives based on “national awakening” or ethnic solidarity, Tatar historical thought and intellectual self-identity was dominated by what Allen Frank calls “Bulgharism.”⁵⁰ Catherine’s creation of the muftiate encouraged the Tatar *ulama* to craft historical narratives which defined a regional “Bulghar” identity based primarily on religious affiliation among the various peoples of the Middle Volga. Such histories emphasized the historical connectivity of these ethnicities along religious lines rather than as a product of their shared experience under Russian imperialism. Although Russian policy through the muftiate attempted to manipulate Muslim religious identity towards imperial administrative needs, the Tatar *ulama* utilized their state-sanctioned authority to imagine a regional identity which existed both in conjunction with, and independent of, the Russian state. As the century wore on, however, the regional “Bulghar” identity gave way to more specifically “national” narratives which emphasized ethnicity over religion as the basis for communal belonging.⁵¹ The shift towards “national” thinking was deeply influenced by the emergence of jadidism, an Islamic modernist movement.

⁵⁰ Allen J. Frank, *Islamic Historiography and ‘Bulghar’ Identity Among the Tatars and Bashkirs of Russia* (Boston: Brill, 1998).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 159.

Jadidism originated in Crimea and the Middle Volga in the last decades of the nineteenth century and led to the formation of a European-oriented Muslim intelligentsia across the empire.⁵² The jadids were, first and foremost, Muslim reformers who sought to revitalize Russia's Muslim communities through the introduction of new educational methods, such as the utilization of the "phonic method" of language learning and the introduction of "secular" subjects such as natural history and economy into Islamic schools. The role and impact of the jadids in the closing decades of the Russian Empire has been the subject of significant scholarly debate. Several of the earliest studies of the jadids tended to carve out an exceptional role for Crimean and Volga Tatar reformers, contrasting their agency with a passivity or illogical resistance among the bulk of the empire's Muslims, especially in Central Asia.⁵³ Such an approach has since been countered by those skeptical of both the jadids' impact and their positive portrayal by historians, with one scholar suggesting that such an approach implies that what came before the jadids must have been "centuries marked, we are to believe, by nothing but darkness, ignorance, intellectual and cultural stagnation, and a refusal to engage with the

⁵² For an excellent description of the influence of "European modernity" on the origins of the jadids, see Tuna, *Imperial Russia's Muslims*, 146-170. See also his article, "Pillars of the Nation: The Making of a Russian Muslim Intelligentsia and the Origins of Jadidism," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* vol. 18, no. 2 (Spring, 2017): 257-81.

⁵³ See Alexandre Bennigsen and Chantal Lemerrier-Quelquejay, *Islam in the Soviet Union*, trans. Geogrey E. Wheeler and Hubert Evans (London: Pall Mall Press, 1967); Rorlich, *The Volga Tatars*; Edward J. Lazzerini, "Beyond Renewal: The Jadid Response to Pressure for Change in the Modern Age," in *Muslims of Central Asia: Expressions of Identity and Change*, ed. Jo-Ann Gross (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), 151-166; Helene Carrere d'Encausse, "The Stirring of National Feeling," in *Central Asia: A Century of Russian Rule*, ed. Edward Allworth (New York, 196), 178-91. See also more recent studies such as S. Frederick Starr, *Lost Enlightenment: Central Asia's Golden Age from the Arab Conquest to Tamerlane* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

world outside the pages of religious texts.”⁵⁴ What is generally agreed upon is that jadidism was a response to both internal changes in the empire’s Muslim community and external changes vis-à-vis the Russian state and society in the latter half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

I argue that an important, although not necessarily direct, connection exists between the jadids and Soviet Tatar cultural elite in terms of both their political activities and their cultural priorities. As Mustafa Tuna has argued, the jadids “looked to Europe as a model of emulation,” seeking to adopt new methods of instruction that would allow educated Muslims to more fully engage with a rapidly modernizing Russian society.⁵⁵ Inspired by Crimean Tatar jadid Ismail Gasprinskii’s efforts in the 1880s, other jadids adopted numerous new elements into their curricula, including the sciences, social sciences, and even the arts such as painting, music, and theater.⁵⁶ These elements of education enabled Tatars to become fluent in non-religious texts, to participate in discussions of various subjects, and to become more connected to the non-Muslim world around them, thereby partially helping to integrate them into Russian society. Madina Golberg identifies a second wave of Tatar jadids, the *iashliar* (literally “youth”), as

⁵⁴ Devin DeWeese, “It was a Dark and Stagnant Night (‘til the Jadids Brought the Light): Clichés, Biases, and False Dichotomies in the Intellectual History of Central Asia,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 59 (2016), 39-40. On the issue of the jadids’ significance, Frank and Kefeli argue in their respective studies that “traditional” forms of knowledge continued to dominate Tatar intellectual life even after the spread of jadidism throughout the empire.

⁵⁵ Tuna, *Imperial Russia’s Muslims*, 7.

⁵⁶ Tuna, 170. For a description of Gasprinskii’s reforms, see Edward J. Lazzerini, “Ismail Bey Gasprinskii, the Discourse of Modernism, and the Russians,” in *Tatars of the Crimea: Their Struggle for Survival*, ed. Edward Allworth (Durham: Duke University Press, 1988), 149-169.

crucial in tying together the socio-education goals of their predecessors with a culturally-minded approach that saw the more steady adoption of Western art forms and social mores.⁵⁷ The *iashliar* engaged in secular pursuits such as theater and art to such an extent that some of their predecessors worried that the youth might also pick up Russian social vices. In this way, distinct elements within the jadid movement emphasized communal progress and salvation through the modernization not only of education but also of culture. As we will see, this approach combined with the growth in the jadids' political activity during and after the Russian Revolution to place jadids or jadid-influenced Tatars in important roles in the emerging Bolshevik administration.⁵⁸ Thus, the jadid platform, through various means, became a central element of the Soviet Tatar cultural elite's plans for the Sovietization of Tatar culture from the 1930s through the late 1960s.⁵⁹

Due to the Tatar diaspora across the empire, crafting a national identity with clear boundaries was difficult. Nevertheless, the "Bulgharist" historiographical legacy served as an important kernel for the activities of jadid writers like Gaiiaz Iskhaki (tat. Gayaz Iskhaqiy) (1878-1954), who, not unlike his counterparts in the Russian intelligentsia, felt frustrated by the perceived failures of societal modernization and

⁵⁷ Madina V. Goldberg, "Russian Empire – Tatar Theater: The Politics of Culture in Late Imperial Kazan," (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 2009), 36.

⁵⁸ The best study of jadids' turn to political and social action in the context of the Russian Revolution is Adeeb Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

⁵⁹ In a similar way, Isabelle Kreindler famously argued that Il'minskii's education reforms may have indirectly influenced the shape of Soviet nationalities policy under Lenin. See Isabelle Kreindler, "A Neglected Source of Lenin's Nationality Policy," *Slavic Review* vol. 36 no. 1 (1977): 86-100.

development.⁶⁰ In his 1904 novel *Extinction After Two Hundred Years*, Iskhaki argues that the Volga-Ural ‘ulama have sold out the well-being of the Bulghar nation in favor of wealth and power, and that their continued authority within Tatar society would lead to the death of Bulghar culture.⁶¹ Borrowing tropes and features of “Bulghar” historiographies, Islamic theology, and jadid practice, Iskhaki used his novel to articulate a program of robust action and national revitalization that was taken up by his heirs. According to Danielle Ross, Iskhaki represented the beginnings of a generation of Tatar intellectuals who positioned themselves as Tatars, as Muslims, and as active participants in a broader Russian society and state as well.⁶² Thus, although the “national” aspect of their identities came to the forefront, these new intellectuals were conscious of their connections to the empire’s other Muslim peoples. At the same time, they recognized their status within a Russian-dominated society and adopted Russian dress, learned the Russian language, and became acquainted with and active in Russian political culture.

In the aftermath of the 1905 revolution, Muslim communities throughout Russia gained significant political and social rights. Tatars in particular benefited from a significant boom in publishing capabilities not only in Kazan, but in other cities with large Tatar populations as well.⁶³ Kazan alone was home to twenty Tatar publishing

⁶⁰ Danielle Ross, “The Nation that Might Not Be: The Role of Iskhaki’s *Extinction After Two Hundred Years* in the Popularization of Kazan Tatar National Identity Among the ‘Ulama Sons and Shakirds of the Volga-Ural Region, 1904-1917,” *Ab Imperio* 3 (2012), 347.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 349-51.

⁶² *Ibid.* For his efforts, Iskhaki was arrested in 1907 and sent to Arkhangel’sk. He was forced to emigrate from Soviet Russia in 1920, settling in first in Germany before relocating to Turkey in 1939, where he lived until his death. Iskhaki’s works were banned in the Soviet Union until Perestroika.

⁶³ Campbell, 138.

houses, the bulk of which printed pro-jadid publications.⁶⁴ The Crimean Tatar jadid educator Ismail Gasprinskii suggested in 1881 that the literacy rate among Kazan's Tatars was likely around 50-60%. In 1905, state officials estimated that about 80% of Tatars in the city were literate, with the province's governor in 1915 writing that he considered nearly all Tatars literate in their own language.⁶⁵ Official statistics, however, provided much lower literacy rates.⁶⁶ At the very least, levels of literacy in Kazan were high enough to make possible a significant market for local publications and for the growth of a Tatar literary and intellectual community. Partially due to the fact that Iskhaki himself lived in Kazan on and off from 1893 through 1907, many of his prominent students also ended up in the city.

Among the most prominent of this group was the poet Gabdulla Tukai (1886-1913). Himself the son of a village imam and a madrasa dropout, Tukai also enrolled in Russian-language courses and became well-versed in Russian literature. Ross argues that Tukai interpreted Iskhaki's novel to mean that the task of creating a "modern literature and literary language for the Tatars" was one of the central ways in which the Tatar nation could be protected from extinction.⁶⁷ Tukai considered himself, and was

⁶⁴ For a detailed exploration of Tatar publishing in the early twentieth century, see Abrar Karimullin, *Tatarskaia kniga nachala XX veka* (Kazan: Tatarskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1974).

⁶⁵ Helen M. Faller, *Nation, Language, Islam: Tatarstan's Sovereignty Movement* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2011), 36.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, Helen Faller notes that Tatar scholars have generally attributed this discrepancy to Tatars' fear of persecution should they self-report their literacy to state officials.

⁶⁷ Ross, 356.

considered by his peers, to be the Tatar Pushkin, whose role it was to elevate the Tatar nation through his own literary efforts. But creation of a modern literature alone was not enough; Tukai also followed Iskhaki in emphasizing the role of the city of Kazan as the “spiritual axis of the Tatar nation.”⁶⁸ Although Tukai himself was influenced by radical socialist politics, he himself avoided illegal activities and confined his efforts to his literary works.

Numerous other Tatar thinkers, influenced by Iskhaki and by Tukai himself, also gravitated towards Kazan and made it not only the center of Tatar nationalist literature but the center of Tatar nationalist politics as well. The city’s resources, combined with its historical significance, made its emergence as the capital of a dispersed Tatar population possible.

Tatar politics between 1905 and 1917 were a product of both the unique position of Tatars and the overall conditions facing all of the Russian empire’s peoples. Educated Tatars engaged in a wide variety of political activities from writing and propagandizing, to participating in empire-wide Muslim congresses, to becoming members in political parties (Muslim and All-Russian), and even to serving as representatives in the State Duma.⁶⁹ But the new political atmosphere also made worse the cleavages within Tatar society. Tatar nationalists like Tukai increasingly saw the ‘ulama not only as backwards-looking and corrupt, but as “national enemies” who had partnered with imperial

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Rorlich, 105. For the major study of Tatar participation in the Duma, see Diliara Usmanova, *Musul'manskaia fraktsiia i problemy 'sbody sovesti' v Gosudarstvennoi Dume Rossii (1906-1917)* (Kazan: Master-Lain, 1999).

authorities to clamp down on jadids and other liberal or radical elements of Tatar society.⁷⁰ Pushed by the tsar's broken promises after the October Manifesto, and the complicity of the traditional Islamic elite, many of the first wave of jadids active in imperial politics emigrated abroad.⁷¹ Others instead gravitated towards socialist parties, seeing connections between Iskhaki's critique of the reactionary ulama and the Marxist interpretation of class struggle.⁷² In the wake of the October Revolution, jadids realized that state power could be used to achieve their goals and became active participants in the new Bolshevik government, if not Bolsheviks themselves.⁷³ These jadids articulated a nationalist agenda that married together national development and communism and were instrumental in securing the Volga-Ural region for the Soviet cause during and after the Russian Civil War. However, their national and cultural priorities would, in the long run, alienate them from Moscow and lead to their excision from Soviet politics.

Muslim National Communism and the Origins of the Tatar Socialist Republic

The Bolshevik Revolution was, in part, an anticolonial revolution. Lenin condemned imperialism as the highest form of capitalism and argued that the Russian Empire had long been a "prisonhouse of nations" which had sought to repress and russify

⁷⁰ Ross, 362.

⁷¹ Rorlich, 121-22. This first wave of Tatar emigrants was followed by another larger wave in the wake of the 1917 Revolution. The largest Tatar diaspora communities settled in Germany, Japan, and China (these three primarily in pre-Revolutionary, interwar, or immediate post-war periods), Turkey, the United States (San Francisco and New York City), and Australia. See Abrar Karimullin, *Yasmish, yasmish...* (Kazan: Tatarstan kitap nashriyati, 1996) 21-49, 79-86, 197-208.

⁷² Ross, 368. For more on Tatars' political activities and their relation to other Turkic peoples, see Serge Zenkovsky, *Pan-Turkism and Islam in Russia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960).

⁷³ Khalid, *Muslim Cultural Reform*, 283.

its diverse population. Eager to convince the peoples of the empire that communism was not simply a new guise for Russian nationalism, Lenin proclaimed that non-Russian peoples would be allowed self-determination and the freedom of secession if they saw fit to leave Soviet Russia. In dealing with the so-called “national question,” Lenin argued that the ultimate source of nationalist separatist movements in Russia was “great Russian chauvinism,” and argued that the Bolsheviks needed to make temporary concessions to the nationalities in order to join them together in a single federation. Eventually, Lenin asserted that Soviet policy towards its non-Russian peoples would be “national in form, socialist in content.” This formulation of Soviet nationalities policy guaranteed territorial autonomy for non-Russian groups and offered protections for minority cultures under the assumption that these cultures would celebrate socialist values. Following Bolshevik victory in the Russian Civil War, Lenin initiated a policy of *korenizatsiia* (indigenization), hoping to staff the administrations of the new national republics with cadres made up of the titular nationalities.⁷⁴ Although meaningful power was centralized in Moscow, local authorities in the national republics had significant power in drawing boundaries, operating republican administrative organs, and controlling cultural and educational policy.

The two revolutions of 1917 opened up a variety of new possibilities for Tatar nationalists. After February, the country’s Muslim elites laid out plans for their status within a new, democratic Russia and began creating institutions which would serve them.

⁷⁴ Yuri Slezkine, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism,” *Slavic Review* vol. 53, no. 2 (Summer, 1994), 414-52.

Formed in March 1917, the Muslim Central Executive Committee (and its corresponding local chapters) served as the Muslim version of the new Provisional Government.⁷⁵ In seeking out their political futures, the country's Muslims were divided between asserting territorial autonomy (favored by Central Asians, Azeris, and Crimeans) and extraterritorial, cultural autonomy (favored by Tatars). Outnumbered in the first All-Russian Muslim Congress in 1917, the Tatars held a second Congress in Kazan from July-August in which they, along with some delegates from Crimea, Bashkiria, and the North Caucasus, again issued a resolution in favor of extraterritorial cultural autonomy.⁷⁶ This divergence underscored a very real divide between Tatars and other Muslim populations within the empire. Whereas the Muslims of Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Crimea were concentrated in specific geographic spaces, the 3.7 million ethnic Tatars in the Empire were spread across much of the Volga-Ural area, as well as in small pockets in Siberia and Central Asia.⁷⁷ Tatars thereby benefited from (and perhaps were hindered by, in the long run) extraterritoriality in a way in which other Muslims did not. Significantly, however, there were notable Tatar figures who already advocated for autonomy on a territorial basis encompassing much of the Middle Volga and Ural regions

⁷⁵ Rorlich, 126.

⁷⁶ I. R. Tagirov, *Istoriia national'noi gosudarstvennosti tatarskogo naroda i tatarstana* (Kazan: Tatarskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 2000), 157; Rorlich, 129. See also Daniel Evan Schafer, "Building Nations and Building States: The Tatar-Bashkir Question in Revolution Russia, 1917-1920," (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1995).

⁷⁷ "Pervaia vseobschaia perepis' naseleniia Rossiiskoi Imperii 1897 g. Raspredelenie naseleniia po rodnomu iazyku, guberniiam i oblastiam," accessed 7 May 2019, http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/rus_lan_97.php?reg=0.

in July. Tatar delegate F. Karimi considered “denationalization and russification” the logical result of cultural autonomy without actual boundaries.⁷⁸

The Bolshevik seizure of power in October (November) complicated Tatars’ attitudes towards prospects of autonomy. On the one hand, Lenin’s anti-colonial stance and his directive “To the Toiling Muslims of Russia and the East” suggested that the Bolsheviks’ efforts might leave significant room for autonomy on Tatar terms.⁷⁹ On the other, however, some Tatars were alarmed by Lenin’s efforts to destroy the indigenous revolution in Ukraine and by the Bolsheviks’ organization of a Turkestan administration in Tashkent which did not include ethnic Central Asians.⁸⁰ With respect to Tatars, the Bolsheviks were willing to make symbolic concessions, but were also interested in subordinating independent Muslim organizations to centralized oversight.⁸¹

In light of the new political climate, delegates at a Muslim assembly in Ufa in late 1917 (mostly Tatars and Bashkirs) voted in favor of securing territorial rather than cultural autonomy. On 19 November the assembly proclaimed the existence of an autonomous Idel-Ural (Volga-Ural) state within a federative Russia.⁸² The proposed state had the benefit of a relatively interconnected economy and also went a long way in

⁷⁸ Rorlich, 129.

⁷⁹ For more, see the epilogue in Khalid, *Cultural Reform*.

⁸⁰ I. R. Tagirov, 154-55.

⁸¹ Rorlich notes that the “Suyumbike Tower of Kazan was transferred to the trusteeship of the Kazan Socialist Committee... [and that] for a short period of time, the Bolsheviks even tolerated the crescent moon that Tatars had placed on the Suyumbike Tower after taking down the double-headed eagle.” Rorlich, 131.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 132.

uniting the dispersed Tatar population of the region. In a statement issued by the assembly, the delegates implored Bashkirs to “merge with the general Tatar movement,” citing that the two groups “are one people by blood, by spirit, by tradition, and by religion.”⁸³ The Idel-Ural State would be the first of several attempts to unify the Tatar-Bashkir community into a single administrative unit during the century.

Although the Bolsheviks did not discount the idea of a Tatar-Bashkir state out of hand, they were suspicious of the Idel-Ural state precisely because it had been founded independently of their control.⁸⁴ In February 1918, the Kazan Soviet, controlled by the Bolsheviks, ordered the arrest of the Muslim leadership in the city, and after a month-long struggle, Kazan was fully under Bolshevik control.

During this period, the percentage of Bolsheviks who were ethnic Tatars was quite low – even by 1920, only about 25% of Bolsheviks in the region were Tatar.⁸⁵ As the Civil War began in the spring of 1918, Bolshevik authorities sponsored their own organizations to mobilize Tatar support, attempting to counter the perception that they represented an outside Russian force.⁸⁶ The Bolsheviks had the advantage that some

⁸³ *Izvestiia Vserossiiskogo Musul'manskogo Voennogo Shura*. – 1917, 24 dek. Cited in Tagirov, 164.

⁸⁴ In a likely-apocryphal account, Lenin in 1919 had a conversation with leading Tatar politicians in which the Tatars asserted that Bashkirs should be included in a Tatar state due to the negligible distinction between the two nationalities. In response, Lenin chided the Tatars for exhibiting “chauvinist” traits and insisted that he would not tolerate Tatar nationalism. See Kotkin, *Stalin vol 1.*, 371.

⁸⁵ V. G. Sarkin, N. A. Subaev, F. S. Khabibullina, and F. S. Filimonov, eds., *Partiinaiia organizatsiia Tatarii v tsifrakh i dokumentakh, 1917-1977 gg.* (Kazan: Tatarskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1978), 47. Even by the late 1970s, Tatar Party membership was disproportionately low compared with their numbers in the Tatar Republic as a whole.

⁸⁶ Rorlich, 133.

Tatars in Kazan were already active in socialist politics. Moreover, as Ross suggests, Tatars influenced by Iskhaki's work also emphasized class conflict and radical change as necessary to national survival, indicating the possibility of accommodation or partnership with the Bolsheviks.⁸⁷ As such, the indigenous Tatar support for the Bolsheviks was based upon the belief that socialist politics were a means to nationalist goals. Much as the Bolsheviks partnered with Left SRs and other left-wing socialists through the Civil War, in the Middle Volga and elsewhere nationalists became the preferred indigenous representatives of communist ideology where actual Bolsheviks were few. Two of the most consequential Tatar supporters of Bolshevik aims were Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev (1892-1940) and Galimzhan Ibragimov (1887-1938).

Sultan-Galiev was born in a village near Ufa and had received jadid education before his conversion to radical politics. In 1917, he participated in the first All-Russian Muslim Congress before joining the Kazan Socialist Committee and eventually becoming a Bolshevik in November of that year. In 1918, Sultan-Galiev became head of the Bolshevik-organized Central Muslim Military Collegium, an institution instrumental in increasing literacy (basic and political) among Tatar recruits.⁸⁸ In an article published that year in the pro-Bolshevik newspaper *Krasnoe znamia*, Sultan-Galiev (under the pen name Kan-Temir, the founder of the Nogai Budzhak Horde) argued that "at the time of the revolution, the Tatar-Bashkir nationality was one of the more repressed objects of Russian imperialism" and that the divisions between these groups had been artificially

⁸⁷ Ross, 362.

⁸⁸ Rorlich, 135.

fomented by the Russian state and by Russian settler populations.⁸⁹ In the coming years, Sultan-Galiev would be expelled from the Party and eventually executed on Stalin's orders for charges of factionalism and "bourgeois nationalism" due to his continued emphasis on nationality and nationalism as central issues in the relationship of the country's Muslim peoples to the Russian center.

Like Sultan-Galiev, Ibragimov also originated near Ufa, and during the revolutionary events of 1917 gravitated towards the Left SRs. Ibragimov was one of the first Tatar nationalists to join the Bolshevik-organized Kazan Socialist Committee in early 1918 and thereby positioned himself with the communist cause against the country's independent Muslim movement. Ibragimov's most prominent activities were editorial, publishing in both Tatar and Russian newspapers and journals to spread the Bolshevik message to larger segments of the Tatar population. He later became one of the prominent defenders of the use of the Arabic script for the Tatar language, which Soviet authorities discontinued in the 1920s in favor of the Latin alphabet. In 1938, long after his relocation to Yalta for health reasons, Ibragimov was arrested and executed for his support of "sultangalievism." Sultan-Galiev and Ibragimov represented the radical Tatar intelligentsia that the Bolsheviks relied upon through the 1920s, but both would eventually be executed, making way for a new generation of Sovietized Tatar elites.

⁸⁹ Kan-Temir (Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev), "K voprosu o Tataro-Bashkirskoi Sovetskoi Respublike," *Krasnaia znamia*, No. 2, 12 July, 1918; No. 3, 19 July, 1918. Cited in *Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev. Stat'i, vystupleniia, dokumenty*. Eds. I. R. Tagirov, B. F. Sultanbekov, I. G. Gizzatullin, D. R. Sharafutdinov (Kazan: Tatarskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1992), 72-90.

The hope for a unified Tatar-Bashkir administrative unit, even one fully under the control of Bolshevik authorities, was extinguished in 1919. In that year, Lenin and Stalin made an agreement with representatives from Bashkiria to recognize an autonomous Bashkir Republic (BASSR) in order to help secure the area against counterrevolutionary White forces. In May 1920, the All-Russian Central Executive Committee and the Sovnarkom announced the formation of an autonomous Tatar Republic with the express goal of providing a united, compact territory for the Russian Republic's second largest nationality (behind Russians themselves), despite the fact that many Tatars were still living in the new Bashkir Republic or other neighboring regions.⁹⁰ As such, one of the major issues which faced the new Tatar administration was a familiar one for nationalities across the country. Specifically, how and where were boundaries between and among ethnically diverse republics to be drawn?⁹¹ Inevitably, large pockets of Bashkirs, Chuvash, Mari, and others, not to mention Russians, were included in the new Tatar republic, and many Tatars were left out. Initial plans for the TASSR's boundaries outlined a total republican population of 5,102,442 inhabitants in 1920, approximately 54% were Tatar-speaking (this included members of the other ethnicities) and 35% Russian-speaking. Only about 8.6% of the population lived in cities (79.5% of which were Russian-speaking) compared to 91.4% in the countryside (Tatar-speaking groups made up 57.5% of this demographic).⁹² Moscow, however, was not content with Tatars'

⁹⁰ S. A. Faizullin, *Administrativno-territorial'noe ustroistvo tatarskoi ASSR v 1920-1930-e gg.* (Kazan: Tatarskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 2015), 5.

⁹¹ For the classic treatment of this issue, see Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*.

⁹² Faizullin, 26-27.

plans for the republic and, at the end of 1921 pressured the TASSR to accept an almost 46% reduction of its territory (mainly to the benefit of the BASSR) and a population loss of somewhere between 38.8%-43.4%.⁹³ In all, this left almost 75% of ethnic Tatars outside of the TASSR, and made Tatars the largest single ethnicity within the neighboring BASSR.⁹⁴

The formation of the TASSR was both a defeat and a victory for Tatar nationalists. Although Sultan-Galiev, Ibragimov, and others had failed to secure a large territorial basis for their republic, or to avoid the creation of a separate Bashkir autonomous unit, Lenin had nevertheless agreed that the tenets of national self-determination must be followed despite the fears of local Russian communists.⁹⁵ Just as significantly, Muslim Tatars had successfully petitioned for the inclusion of the Kriashens, Baptized Tatars who followed the Orthodox faith, into the ethnic category of “Tatar” for the purposes of the census, thereby increasing their numbers and denying Kriashens any legal basis for forming their own autonomous regions apart from or within the Tatar republic.⁹⁶ At first, the TASSR, under the leadership of Sakhib-Garei Said-Galiev (1894-1938), pursued policy only nominally connected to the legacy of the Tatar

⁹³ The Soviet census of 1926 counted 2,594,032 total residents of the TASSR (1,164,342 Tatars), a somewhat lower figure than what was expected; this was likely as a result of the 1921-22 Volga famine. See “Vsesoiuznaia perepis’ naseleniia 1926 g. RSFSR i ee region. Naselennye mesta. Nalichnoe gorodskoe i sel’skoe naselenie,” accessed 4 May 2019, http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/rus_26.php?reg=289.

⁹⁴ Peter Christopher Mizelle, “‘Battle With Famine:’ Soviet Relief and the Tatar Republic 1921-1922,” (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia 2002), 44.

⁹⁵ M. A. Saidasheva, *Lenin i sotsialisticheskoe stroitel’stvo v Tatarii 1918-1923* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo ‘Nauka’, 1969), 84.

⁹⁶ See Werth, “From ‘Pagan’ Muslims...,” 514-15.

national movement, including some language and educational reforms. Said-Galiev, a former ally of Sultan-Galiev, had broken with his colleague by arguing that Tatar backwardness, while partially the product of Russian imperialism, could not be solved without Russia's help.⁹⁷ He further justified the preponderance of ethnic-Russians in both the republican administration and in the economy by saying that Tatars had not yet developed a sufficiently large or literate proletariat to occupy these positions. Said-Galiev's stance on these issues alienated him from more nationally-oriented Tatars who sought to use Soviet power to benefit the lives of Tatars, not Russians, who were, after all, Tatars' historical oppressors.

The conflict over how "national" the republic's administrative goals was further exacerbated by the Volga famine of 1921-1922 which claimed about five million lives.⁹⁸ As the famine spread in 1921, Rauf Sabirov and Kashaf Mukhtarov, two of Sultan-Galiev's allies, took charge of the Tatar government and organized relatively successful relief efforts. However, Moscow's perceptions that famine relief was disproportionately used to benefit ethnic Tatars over Russians and others eventually led to further changes in republican leadership.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Mizelle, 46-48.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 2. The famine killed between 500,000-2,000,000 people in the TASSR, the majority of them peasants. This accounted for roughly 10% of the TASSR population, with a further 13% fleeing to other areas of the country. The exact number of ethnic Tatar deaths is unknown, but given that Tatars made up the largest share of the republic's peasant population, it is probably to conclude that the majority of famine-related deaths were suffered by ethnic Tatars. The famine, combined with an inflow of ethnic Russians in the 1920s, reduced the Tatar share of the TASSR's population to less than 50% by the mid-1920s.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 390-92. Both Sabirov and Mukhtarov were executed in 1937 for "sultangalievism."

From Moscow's point of view, and from the view of local Russians, it was clear that the TASSR was dangerously close to pursuing nationalist policies clearly at odds with the internationalist character of the Soviet state. Beginning in 1924, Tatar *raionirovanie* policies aimed to establish ethnically homogenous administrative units within the TASSR so as to make linguistic *korenizatsiia* easier given the republic's diversity.¹⁰⁰ The TASSR also passed legislation that allowed for the preferential treatment of ethnic Tatar peasants over Russians, giving them better agricultural land near railways and along rivers. Legislation also taxed Russian villages more highly than their Tatar counterparts on "purely ethnic grounds."¹⁰¹ The attempted removal of Russians from these areas almost led to violence and precipitated a number of petitions from villages hoping to separate from the TASSR, in which Russian villagers "often referred to a sense of second-class status."¹⁰²

Whereas these local efforts were easily nipped in the bud, either by pressure from Moscow or by the TASSR's own self-corrections, a much more visible struggle was taking place with regards to Sultan-Galiev's divergence from the official Party line on nationalism and imperialism.¹⁰³ Sultan-Galiev and his associates interpreted Lenin's critique of imperialism as the basis for an argument by which Russia's Muslim peoples were "proletarian nations," and that therefore movements for national liberation or

¹⁰⁰ Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, 59.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ See Stephen Blank, "Stalin's First Victim: The Trial of Sultangaliev," *Russian History* vol. 17, no. 2 (Summer 1990): 157-178.

development were intrinsically “socialist” in character.¹⁰⁴ For proponents of “national communism,” as scholars describe Sultan-Galiev’s ideology, it was necessarily to decolonize Russia’s Muslim peoples by affording them their own institutions, notably their own communist party, and to weaken the hold of ethnic Russians over non-Russian territories (in practice this might mean expulsion of Russian settlers). Although Sultan-Galiev and his allies had been helpful in asserting Bolshevik control over the Middle Volga, authorities in Moscow, most notably the Commissar of Nationalities, Joseph Stalin, were becoming increasingly suspicious of “national communism.” Tatars were not alone in their “decolonizing activities” – Slavic settlers faced expulsion in Central Asia as well – but it was an ethnic Tatar that Stalin saw fit to turn into an example.¹⁰⁵

The trial and expulsion from the Communist Party of Sultan-Galiev in June 1923 signaled the death-knell for Tatar nationalists who still hoped to secure meaningful (political) autonomy within Soviet Russia. As Stephen Blank notes in his study of Sultan-Galiev’s trial, the Twelfth Party Congress at which the Party condemned “local chauvinism” and “local nationalism” was a logical outgrowth of Bolshevik centralizing initiatives since the Tenth Party Congress’ assault on “factionalism.”¹⁰⁶ It was also, however, about *korenizatsiia*.¹⁰⁷ Although the policy received widespread criticism both

¹⁰⁴ Alexandre A. Bennigsen and S. Enders Wimbush, eds., *Muslim National Communism in the Soviet Union: A Revolutionary Strategy for the Colonial World* (Chicago: The University of Chicago press, 1979), 42.

¹⁰⁵ Martin, 59-67.

¹⁰⁶ Blank, 157.

¹⁰⁷ Martin, 228-31.

from local Russians and from Tatar members of the Party, Stalin was dedicated to its presence as a way of building up local cadres of titular nationalities (in the long run overcoming the current need to rely on ideologically-suspect “national communists”).¹⁰⁸ But some of the critiques of *korenizatsiia* – specifically, that it was doing more to promote nationalism than to weaken it – could be addressed by critiquing Sultan-Galiev, the most widely known “crypto-nationalist.”¹⁰⁹ The case against Sultan-Galiev emphasized that it was his efforts to create a Muslim national opposition through coordination with the Central Asian Basmachi movement that were unpardonable, thereby drawing clear boundaries about how far *korenizatsiia* and nationalities policy would go. Sultan-Galiev himself was not actually punished beyond his public condemnation, being made by Stalin “into an example as a means of intimidation and control”¹¹⁰. In fact, despite frequent administrative overturn in the TASSR and Tatar Party, a full-fledged attack on those affiliated with “sultangalievism” came only in 1928, followed by a second phase during the Great Terror of 1937-38.¹¹¹

The elimination of Tatar “national communists” began in 1928 with Sultan-Galiev’s final arrest and imprisonment at Solovki. That December, “the majority of the Tatar members of the Tatar Obkom were arrested” on charges of “sultangalievism” and “treason” and quickly executed. This included both Rauf Sabirov and Kashaf

¹⁰⁸ In 1923, the Tatar ASSR had 3,483 Party members, of whom 28.5% were ethnic Tatars. See Stephen Kotkin, *Stalin vol. 1: Paradoxes of Power, 1878-1928* (New York: Penguin Press, 2014), 502.

¹⁰⁹ Martin, 229-30.

¹¹⁰ Kotkin, *Stalin vol. 1*, 502.

¹¹¹ Bennigsen, et. al, 90-91.

Mukhtarov, who had led the TASSR during the 1921-22 Volga famine.¹¹² In the following January other members of the TASSR's leadership were arrested, including the People's Commissar of Education and the First Secretary of the Tatar Komsomol. This violent purge of Party and republican leadership (seemingly targeting only ethnic Tatars) was followed by a wider attack on Tatar "cultural, scientific, artistic, and literary institutions" including the Scientific Society of Tatarology of Kazan, the Oriental Institute of Kazan, the Tatar Literary Association, the Union of Proletarian Writers of Tatarstan and the state publishing house Tatgosizdat.¹¹³ The full-scale assault on the Tatar political and cultural intelligentsia at this early date was one of the most notable such purges of ethnic minority leadership in the country.¹¹⁴ Ultimately, it is difficult to calculate the exact number of Tatars who were executed or otherwise removed from their positions during this period. Similarly opaque is the effects of the Great Terror on Tatar leadership in 1937-38, although it is well-established that ethnic minority intelligentsias were specifically targeted during this period. It seems that many of those targeted in 1937-38 had already been removed from positions of power or otherwise sidelined as a result of the earlier 1928-32 purges and the resulting fallout, again suggesting that it was

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 91. In 1928 Sabirov was the First Secretary of the Tatar Obkom and Mukhtarov was chairman of the Central Executive Committee of the TASSR.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ This wave of violence remains relatively unknown and understudied in both Russian and Western historiography.

the earlier wave of purges that mattered.¹¹⁵ What is clear, however, is that the Great Terror coincided with important changes in the TASSR's subordination to the RSFSR.

The twin purges of the Tatar intelligentsia in 1928-32 and 1937-38 occurred alongside the rise of new cadres in the TASSR's cultural and political institutions. Tatar cultural elites who figure prominently into this work, Nazib Zhiganov (1911-1988), Musa Dzhaliil' (1906-1944), Salikh Battalov (1905-1995), and others, were all beneficiaries of Bolshevism and Stalinism. As has long been established, the Soviet Union's popular support through the tumultuous 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s rested on the fact that social mobility was possible, and that individuals from social and geographic peripheries could move towards the center to achieve power, stability, belonging, meaning, and even comfort.¹¹⁶ The violence of the 1920s and 1930s in particular opened up space for new voices, while also drawing implicit boundaries around what those voices could acceptably express.

But the new generation was also a beneficiary of the Tatar national movement, which had succeeded in carving out a "national" space within an internationalist Soviet Union. Whereas the political aspirations of real autonomy or even independence were quelled, the jadidist-informed quest for cultural development and national revitalization remained a central goal for Tatar cultural figures throughout the Soviet period. These

¹¹⁵ See Bulat Sultanbekov, *Istoriia Tatarstana: Stranitsy sekretnykh arkhivov (Istoriko-publitsisticheskie ocherki)* (Kazan: Tatarskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1994), 164-82.

¹¹⁶ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet Union, 1921-1932* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

figures believed that socialist development and nation-building were interlinked concepts and that one could not be achieved without the other. Making use of the significant investment that Moscow made into the sphere of culture, Tatars composed operas and symphonies, wrote poems and novels, crafted heroes and reimagined history, thus preserving “national” culture through “socialist” forms.

Tatar Identity in the Soviet Context

Considering their status within the Russian Federation, Tatars today frequently refer to both Kazan’s age and Tatars’ adoption of Islam as points of pride.¹¹⁷ Soviet authorities engaged with this history cautiously, aware not only of the presence, in 1917, of a powerful and nationally-orientated intelligentsia, but also of the fact that nearly 400 years after their integration into the Russian state Tatars maintained a strong, distinct culture. And yet it was necessary to Sovietize Tatar culture, smoothing the edges of Tatar identity while also making sure not to engage in what Lenin referred to as “great power chauvinism.” This delicate balancing act involved reforms in education, increased oversight over artistic performances, and the careful preservation of those elements of pre-revolutionary Tatar culture which could be made into effective ideological tools for the Soviet state. However, as I argue here and throughout this dissertation, substantive Sovietization of Tatar culture, which I understand primarily as the adoption of Soviet socialist cultural forms, tropes, and narratives for the presentation of national content, did not occur until the 1930s. Nevertheless, the first 17 years of Soviet power (1917-1934)

¹¹⁷ Kazan is approximately 150 years older than Moscow and 700 older than St. Petersburg. Tatars adopted Islam in 922, 66 years before Vladimir of Kiev’s adoption of Orthodoxy.

were significant in that activities and events during this period laid the groundwork for the significant development of Tatar culture under Soviet auspices from 1934-68 (and beyond).

The task of forming a version of Tatar identity compatible with Soviet socialist ideology began, unsurprisingly, with educational reform. The Bolsheviks believed that the ultimate fate of the revolution rested on their ability to forge individuals' values, beliefs, and ways of thinking through institutional measures.¹¹⁸ At the forefront of such efforts was the People's Commissariat for Education (Narkompros), a broad organization dealing with matters as diverse as the elimination of illiteracy, the publication of new literary works, and the oversight of artistic repertoires in theaters and other institutions. In the 1920s, the Tatar Narkompros was occupied primarily with the creation and maintenance of state, secular schools.¹¹⁹ This effort, however, had mixed results for the first decade of Soviet power, with marked changes developing at the end of the 1920s and, especially, in the 1930s and beyond. From 1921-23, for example, state schools in Kazan fell from 150 to 84, with enrollment similarly dropping from 20,000 in 1919 to 14,000 in 1923 due to civil war and famine.¹²⁰ These challenges encouraged authorities to try a different approach, limiting the time spent on religious topics in Islamic schools, forcing such schools to not teach overlapping curriculum with state schools, and making

¹¹⁸ This they shared with Tatar jadids.

¹¹⁹ For a broad overview of the activities of the Tatar Narkompros, see G. M. Latypova, *Deiatelnost' Narodnogo komissariata prosveshcheniia TASSR v 1920-e gg.* (Kazan: Glavnoe arkhivnoe upravlenie pri Kabinete Ministrov RT, 2013).

¹²⁰ Gary Guadagnolo, "Creating a Tatar Capital: National, Cultural, and Linguistic Space in Kazan, 1920-1941" (PhD diss., University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 2016), 34.

sure that mullahs were state-approved. By 1925-26, the number of religious schools in the TASSR was 800, with some cantons reporting more students enrolled in religious schools than in state schools. Repressive measures in 1927 and early 1928 finally reduced the number of religious schools to 70 by May 1928.¹²¹ Repression of religion coincided with Stalin's drive for industrialization and urbanization to stimulate the growth of state schools where technical and, especially, Russian-language curriculum provided the basic skills necessary for life in the new Soviet economy.

Language education was also an important consideration for the Tatar Narkompros, which had to create a curriculum which encouraged Tatar-language education among Russians and Russian-language education among Tatars. In 1921, the Tatar Central Executive Committee and Sovnarkom mandated Tatar-language education for all Russians in "secondary schools, technical schools, and universities" as well as in "upper grades of primary schools" for city residents.¹²² By 1927, however, only a handful of Russian schools in Kazan offered the required classes, and this, coupled with vague curriculum, staff shortages, and disinterest and outright antipathy from Russians, weakened the TASSR's efforts to universalize the Tatar language.¹²³ To some extent, Russian-language education for Tatars experienced similar issues. The continued influence of religious schools through much of the 1920s, as well as a weakly-developed

¹²¹ Ibid., 35-36.

¹²² Ibid., 42.

¹²³ Ibid., 43-44. Guadagnolo notes that "the average Russian student attending school in Kazan felt no institutional pressure to learn Tatar," suggesting that already early on in the Soviet period there was a widespread, if not explicit, understanding that Russian language – and thereby Russian culture – was to be the country's predominant mode of communication (pg. 46).

curriculum and lack of instructors meant that Tatars, even those attending factory schools, often had a weak grasp of Russian.¹²⁴ Even with the creation of state Tatar schools (eight primary and five secondary in Kazan by 1926), the situation remained lacking.¹²⁵ Some Tatar schools allegedly even tried to remove Russian from the curriculum. Even after Narkompros began issuing new directives with specific guidelines outlining expectations for Russian-language vocabulary for students, outcomes remained low due to lack of textbooks and instructors.¹²⁶

Real change in the realm of language came about later in the 1930s as a result of two major factors. The first was demographic: by the late 1930s many young Tatars (or parents of young Tatars) were choosing Russian-language schools, noting that a better understanding of the Russian language was necessary in many Soviet workplaces as well as in most areas of higher education (as well as in many aspects of ordinary life). The second, however, was the introduction of the Cyrillic alphabet in 1939 which made clear Russian linguistic and cultural primacy.

The struggle over orthographic reform of the Tatar language in the 1920s and 1930s had important implications for Tatar identity throughout the Soviet and into the post-Soviet periods. The conflict began in the 1920s, when Bolshevik authorities began to consider the Latinization of the Arabic script, partially on the belief that such a policy

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 47-48.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 50.

“would facilitate the separation of the population from the foundations of Islam.”¹²⁷ The debate in the TASSR, beginning in 1926, caused deep divisions in the Party, and in May 1927 a group of 82 non-Party members of the Tatar intelligentsia sent a letter to Stalin indicating their opposition to the adoption of the new Latin alphabet, known as the yangalif.¹²⁸ In the letter, the group noted that Latinization was an “expensive and humiliating mass-sacrifice” to make “for a completely unknown objective.”¹²⁹ Latinization coincided with a broader attack on Islam, not only in schools but also in relation to public celebrations of holidays and other related issues.¹³⁰ For those opposed to Latinization, it seemed that Tatar culture writ large was under assault, and for unknown purposes. The Party leadership felt differently, however, and in December 1927 the Tatar Obkom issued a statement declaring that the issue of Latinization “was considered decided” and that the letter constituted evidence of “the activity of bourgeois-nationalist elements” in Tatar society.¹³¹ When the Cyrillic alphabet was adopted in 1939, it was explicitly meant to mark a “new step in the convergence of Tatar culture with the richer Russian socialist culture.”¹³² This suggested a clear hierarchy of cultures

¹²⁷ Sultanbekov, 124.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 124. Sultanbekov notes that, almost as soon as the letter was sent, many signatories tried to retract their participation and that, during the Great Terror, those affiliated with the letter were targeted for political repression (Sultanbekov, 125).

¹²⁹ A. A. Sal'nikova and D. M. Galiullina, *Tatarskaia 'alifba': National'nyi bukvar' v mul'tikul'turnom prostranstve (konets XIX – nachalo XXI vv.)* (Moscow: Rossiiskaia akademiia obrazovaniia nauchnaia pedagogicheskaia biblioteka im. K. D. Ushinskogo Institut teorii i istorii pedagogiki, 2014), 128.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 132. On the issue of holidays, see Gary Guadagnolo's discussion of Sabantui as the rare holiday which was embraced by Soviet authorities.

¹³¹ Sultanbekov, 126.

¹³² “Na novyi alfavit,” *Krasnaia Tatariia*, 6 May, 1939, 1. Cited in Guadagnolo, 55. No letter was sent to Stalin after this orthographic change.

and movement towards adopting Russian “socialist” cultural forms for all Soviet nationalities.

Equally as important for the development of a Sovietized Tatar culture was the realm of the arts. Prior to the 1930s, the most significant art forms practiced by Tatars were theater and poetry. As Madina Goldberg has explored, Tatars enjoyed a long tradition of dramatic and musical theater prior to 1917.¹³³ Moreover, the Bolshevik belief that theater’s accessibility made it an important propagandizing tool for the spread of communist ideology was already incipient in *jadid* playwrights’ minds before the revolution.¹³⁴ Some of the works of pre-revolutionary Tatar playwrights were preserved in the early Soviet period, primarily because their works were critical of Tatar mullahs, merchants, and nagging wives, or were otherwise focused on issues which could be attributed to “class” or “social” conflict.¹³⁵ In 1922, Karim Tinchurin (1887-1938) became leader of the newly-formed First State Model Dramatic Tatar Theater and recruited ethnic Tatars from across the country. In 1926, an additional Theatrical Technical School was established in Kazan, the first such training school primarily

¹³³ Goldberg, “Russian Empire – Tatar Theater,” 143.

¹³⁴ For an excellent exploration of the role of theater in the revolutionary state, see Lynn Mally, *Revolutionary Acts: Amateur Theater and the Soviet State, 1917-1938* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000). For the *jadids*’ use of the theater, see Goldberg, 167.

¹³⁵ Goldberg, 142-145. Notable were the works of Galiaskar Kamal (1878-1933), who in 1938 became the namesake of the Tatar State Theater, and Karim Tinchurin (1887-1938), the namesake of the Tatar State Theater of Drama and Comedy, who was tried for “sultangalievism” and executed in 1938. Both playwrights’ plays were viewed as acceptable by Soviet censors, with Tinchurin’s somewhat more ideological works performed regularly in the 1920s and 1930s.

designed for Soviet eastern nationalities.¹³⁶ In the same year, the Tatar Theater was officially designated an “academic” theater, and received significant support for the rest of the decade, falling only with the purse-string tightening of the 1930s.¹³⁷ It is fair to interpret these developments as evidence that Soviet authorities were interested in exporting “Western” cultural forms to Tatars and other eastern peoples.

The Soviet period ushered in a shift towards new, European-influenced cultural forms in Tatar culture. Although theater remained an important avenue for the Sovietization of Tatar culture, it was quickly eclipsed by music as the predominant form of performing arts. Already from the pre-Revolutionary period, theater was deeply intertwined with music, and most Tatar plays from before and after the Revolution had a musical component. The most prominent Tatar composer of the 1920s, Salikh Saidashev (1900-1954), was even recruited by Tinchurin to compose music at the Tatar State Academic Theater (TGAT) and helped to develop the emerging medium of the “musical drama.”¹³⁸ Although theater experienced great success in the 1920s, many of its leading figures would be purged either at the end of the 1920s or in the 1930s, and Saidashev himself would be brought to Moscow to participate in the Tatar Opera Studio (discussed in chapter 2).¹³⁹ Stalin’s shift of emphasis towards high culture and prestigious performing arts such as the opera, the symphony, and the philharmonic transformed the

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 157-58.

¹³⁸ Guadagnolo, 154-55, 163.

¹³⁹ For more on Saidashev, see Z. N. Saidasheva, “Voprosy izucheniia i sokhraneniia tvorchestva Salikha Saidasheva,” *Vestnik KemGUKI*, 19 (2012): 218-22.

“musical dramas” of the 1920s into second-tier fare in Tatar society. This shift likewise meant that the most talented (and politically reliable) Tatar writers and musicians would be recruited to conservatories and studios for the duration of Stalin’s reign. Theater would receive heightened attention only later in the Soviet period (see chapters 4 and 5).

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, Soviet cultural figures struggled with how to come to terms with figures and symbols from the pre-revolutionary past. The most well-known of such conflicts reflected Bolshevik ideology’s deeply conflicted relationship with Russian cultural heritage, but the process was not limited only to Russian culture. The case of the Soviet canonization of the Tatar poet Gabdulla Tukai provides an excellent example of how debates over the rehabilitation of Russian national symbols were mirrored among the country’s non-Russian populations as well. As Michael Friedrich has argued, Tukai’s canonization was a product of policies by which “exemplary poets were created... [that] were said to be national in form but socialist in content.”¹⁴⁰ Much like what was the case with Russian poet Aleksandr Pushkin, elements of Tukai’s biography were emphasized, while others were played down, in order to mold the poet into both a national and a socialist symbol.¹⁴¹ Although Tukai himself represented the Leninist mantra of “national in form, socialist in content,” the policy by which each Soviet nationality was to have its own bard, implicitly (or explicitly) comparing their role to that of the “standard” bard, Pushkin, illustrates the way in which

¹⁴⁰ Michael Friedrich, *Gabdulla Tukai kak ob’ekt ideologicheskoi bor’by: monografiia*, trans. Iskander Giliiazov (Kazan: Tatarskoe knizhnoe izdatel’stvo, 2011), 17.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

the overall contours of what constituted “culture” were adopted from Russians and applied to other peoples. Tukai’s poems, with the exception of those with religious content, which were expunged, were published through the 1920s, but his own primacy as *the* Tatar literary figure was achieved only in the late 1930s, alongside Pushkin’s 100-year jubilee in 1937. Tukai became a model by which other Tatar poets, including Musa Dzhaliil’ (discussed in chapter 3), measured themselves.¹⁴²

The exact contours of Tatar culture in the 1920s are difficult to identify. Tatar artists, now working in a Soviet milieu, were unsure not only of what elements from the pre-Revolutionary period they *wanted* to preserve, but which elements they were *allowed* to preserve. In certain respects, this mirrored the cultural situation throughout the Soviet Union in the 1920s. It was ultimately the radicalization of Soviet society and Stalin’s “cultural revolution” that created clear (or mostly clear) boundaries around Soviet Tatar culture and which gave new Tatar cultural elites the resources they needed to produce national content through socialist forms.

It is important to note that, just as major cultural developments in the TASSR were somewhat limited in their impact until the 1930s, so too were demographic and economic changes. Whereas the population of the TASSR was 2,594,032 in 1926, by 1939 it had increased less than half a million to 2,915,277, 48.76% of which were Tatar (a 4% increase from 1926). The population declined slightly in the 1959 census, with

¹⁴² Interestingly, Friedrich notes that Dzhaliil’ once condemned Tukai’s works as reactionary, but changed his tune once the poet came into vogue in the 1930s. *Ibid.*, 18.

Tatars dropping to about 47% of the population of 2,850,417.¹⁴³ By 1970, Tatars measured 49% of a total population of 3,131,238 residents of the republic. As noted above, the increasing industrialization of the Soviet economy was a major reason for the eventual success of Russian-language education among Tatars; more broadly urbanization and the resulting linguistic Russification of society are important considerations to take into account throughout this period, far outweighing any substantial demographic changes.¹⁴⁴ This meant that, while nation-building continued as an important process and Tatar cultural figures continued to compose operas, write poems, and agitate for recognition of their heritage, it was done so in a context of an increasing integration of Tatar society into an increasingly Russified milieu.

Conclusion

Developments in the 1920s were important foundations for the coming transformation of Tatar culture that began in earnest in the 1930s. The ideological underpinnings which governed the Soviet state from the 1920s made clear that Soviet culture was to be completely transformed over the coming years and decades, although the exact nature of such transformation had not yet been decided. In the 1930s, however, decisions were made which signaled that Russian (or Western) cultural forms were to be taken as the norm in a developed socialist society, and that non-Russian peoples were to adopt these forms. Although some historians have argued that this change was part of a

¹⁴³ The percentage of Tatars also included Crimean Tatars in the 1959 census.

¹⁴⁴ For the best study of the economic and industrial transformation of the TASSR in the post-war years, see A. G. Galliamova, *Tatarskaia ASSR v period poststalinizma* (Kazan: Tatarskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 2015).

“Great Retreat” and meant that Soviet society was to be increasingly Russified, this conclusion does not necessarily follow.¹⁴⁵ In the following chapters, I argue that Soviet policy, while prioritizing Western art forms, emphasizing the adoption of Soviet narratives, and excising certain parts of any one particular nationality’s heritage, was still dedicated to the development of minority cultures and left a not insignificant amount of discursive room for “the nation” in Soviet citizens’ identities. In contrast to the bulk of existing historiography on the nationalities question, which has tended to consider substantive nationalities policy effectively ended by the onset of the Great Patriotic War, I argue that important aspects of Soviet nation-building continued unabated through the 1960s and beyond.

¹⁴⁵ See, for example, David Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931-1956* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

CHAPTER TWO

The Professionalization of Music in the Tatar Republic

In the summer of 1945, a stream of letters from the director of the recently-opened Kazan State Conservatory arrived at various military posts across the Soviet Union.¹⁴⁶ These letters requested the demobilization of numerous soldiers whom director Nazib Zhiganov felt could positively contribute to the Conservatory as both staff and students. In one of these letters, Zhiganov asserted that the request for demobilization was linked specifically to “the question of the consolidation of Tatar national cadres.”¹⁴⁷ These personnel requests coincided with a similar set of letters in which Zhiganov petitioned material support from various organizations and institutions, including the Leningrad State Conservatory. This flurry of activity culminated in the first day of classes on 10 October 1945, a mere six months after the Council of People’s Commissars had officially ordered the opening of an institution of musical higher education in Kazan.¹⁴⁸ In its first academic year, the Conservatory advanced 65 students, of whom 25 were Tatar, 25 Russian, and 15 of other nationalities, mostly from neighboring autonomous republics.¹⁴⁹ With Moscow’s support, Zhiganov and other Tatar bureaucrats were given control over an important center of musical higher education which would

¹⁴⁶ Natsional’nyi arkhiv respubliki Tatarstan (NART), f. R-6832 (Collection of the Kazan State Conservatory), op. 1, d. 6, ll. 1-11 (letter to from Conservatory director to military posts, 1945).

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., l. 3, letter from Zhiganov to the Commander of the Troops of the South-Ural Military District, 18 September 1945.

¹⁴⁸ Khairutdinov, A. N., et al, *Kazanskaia gosudarstvennaia konservatoriia (1945-1995), second edition* (Kazan: Kazanskaia gosudarstvennaia konservatoriia, 2015), 15.

¹⁴⁹ “Director’s report for 1945/1945 academic year,” 1946 (NART, f. R-6832, op.1, d. 3, l. 2.)

serve both the nationally-oriented goals of the Tatar Republic and the internationally-oriented goals of the Soviet regime.

This chapter explores how the professionalization of Tatar music beginning in the 1930s became an avenue by which Tatar composers sought to build and develop Tatar culture with the internationalist Soviet context. After being brought to Moscow to be taught the accepted forms of Soviet musical culture, numerous Tatar composers returned to Kazan to play leading roles in the Tatar Republic's musical institutions, such as the Tatar State Theater of Opera and Ballet, the Tatar Union of Composers, and, eventually, the Kazan State Conservatory. Moscow's efforts to culturally consolidate and unify Soviet society manifested themselves in substantial nation-building policies in the country's minority republics. The fact that such nation-building occurred even in the Tatar Autonomous Republic, which occupied a lower rung of Soviet republican hierarchy than did the Ukrainian, Kazakh, or Uzbek SSRs, underscores the extent to which socialism and the nation were tied together throughout Soviet society. In the case of the Tatar Republic, it is clear substantive efforts at musical nation-building began only in the 1930s, in marked contrast to the administrative nation-building of *korenizatsiia* in the 1920s. Moreover, although the professionalization of Tatar music was envisioned and initiated by Moscow, it resulted in the empowerment of Tatars who, in turn, made the consolidation of Tatar national culture the central pillar of Soviet cultural policy in the republic.¹⁵⁰ Specifically, Tatar artists, with the support of Moscow, utilized Soviet

¹⁵⁰ For a similar account of musical professionalization which stresses the "agency of the colonized and the ways pre-colonial indigenous agendas may have endured through and shaped" processes of Westernization or modernization, see David Fossum, "Westernizing Reform and Indigenous Precedent in Traditional Music: Insights from Turkmenistan" *Ethno-musicology* 59, 2 (2015): 202-227.

cultural forms to produce national content, and in their minds tied together socialist construction and nation-building as symbiotic processes.

In exploring these complex developments, this chapter will focus primarily on the life and career of Nazib Zhiganov, one of the most well-known and well-regarded (both officially and by his peers) Soviet Tatar composers. Born in 1911, the first Soviet Tatar composer to graduate from the Moscow State Conservatory, and the founding head of the Tatar Composers' Union and the Kazan State Conservatory, Zhiganov was the central figure in the formation of professional Tatar music until his death in 1988. Zhiganov argued for the legitimacy of the adaptation of Tatar folk music to official socialist forms, and his decades-long leadership at the Union and the Conservatory illustrates the extent to which his methods and goals were in line with Moscow's directives. Examining his life and work in the musical world of Soviet Kazan demonstrates the significance of the strategies he and others employed to steer Tatar cultural content into conversation with Soviet cultural forms. At the same time, Zhiganov represents the first of several figures examined in this dissertation who emerged as the inheritors of the pre-revolutionary Tatar intelligentsia. As is clear from Zhiganov's biography, the twin purges of Tatar intellectuals in 1928-32 and 1937-38 created space for new cultural elites to occupy leading political, cultural, and administrative roles in the Tatar ASSR. What is striking, however, is the extent to which Zhiganov and his peers pursued many of the same "national" goals as had those Tatar intellectuals who were eliminated in the first decade of Stalin's rule.

Zhiganov's emergence as a topic of sustained inquiry and interest, beginning in 1996, speaks to the nature of national narratives in contemporary Tatarstan and should be integrated into academic approaches to studying Tatar and Soviet history.¹⁵¹ Much of this literature has tended to avoid concrete discussion of the impact of Soviet ideology on the cultural environment of the TASSR, either implicitly assuming that Soviet nation-building efforts led to the creation of "authentic" Tatar cultural productions or that Soviet ideology simply had little influence on Zhiganov or others. Other literature produced in Tatarstan since the end of the Soviet Union has tended to ignore the Soviet period altogether, as if Tatar culture became frozen in time for the duration of communist rule.¹⁵² Still other voices have specifically denounced what was produced under the auspices of Soviet cultural policy as little more than the fruits of Russification.¹⁵³ In the

¹⁵¹ As of yet, Zhiganov and his role in the development of Soviet Tatar music have failed to receive a thorough scholarly treatment by academic historians. However, both have been the subject of numerous studies by musicologists and local historians within Tatarstan both during and after the Soviet period. Beginning in 1996, the Nazib Zhiganov Heritage Foundation (headed at the time by his son Ivan Zhiganov) published three volumes containing musicological studies, several of Zhiganov's articles, and some of his personal correspondence. In the mid-2000s the Kazan State Conservatory published two further volumes containing numerous articles written about and by Zhiganov during the Soviet period, combining this with some personal correspondence and a great deal of photos gathered from Zhiganov's personal museum and the National Museum of the Republic of Tatarstan. In the 2010s, the Conservatory also began organizing an international conference about Zhiganov and his work, so far held in 2011, 2013, and 2016. Each has resulted in an edited volume, joining a small but growing body of literature about the composer and his impact on Tatar musical culture.

¹⁵² See D. M. Iskhakov, L. V. Sagitova, with I. L. Izmailov, "The Tatar National Movement of the 1980s-90s" *Anthropology & Archeology of Eurasia* 43, 3 (2004-5): 11-44. See also Damir Iskhakov, *Problemy stanovleniia i transformatsii tatarskoi natsii* (Kazan': Institut Istorii AN Tatarstana, 1997). In these works, the authors tend to overlook the development of Tatar national culture during the Soviet period, focusing instead on movements for political sovereignty that emerged at the end of the Soviet period.

¹⁵³ In a piece published in *Literaturnaia Gazeta* in 2000, author Lukman Zakirov argues that "in Stalin's time, [they] sent musical supervisors to the national republics under the guise of helping their 'younger brothers,'" but in actuality the goal of these "supervisors" was to "make possible the loss of people's spiritual connection with their ancestors." Lukman specifically identifies Aleksandr Kliucharev, an ethnic Russian composer active in the TASSR, as one of these "supervisors," but it seems fair to assume that he is

West, as well as in Russia, academic literature which previously focused on “cultural” or “national resilience” has given way to more nuanced approaches to Tatar culture, reflecting general trends in the study of Soviet culture as a whole.¹⁵⁴ Building on this literature, I argue that contextualizing Zhiganov’s life and achievements – which he characterized as national – is an important task that can sharpen our understanding of the nature of Soviet nationalities policies at the sites of their implementation, rather than at the site of their formulation in Moscow.

Although the 1920s saw the development of various state theaters, it was not until the following decade that significant funding was put forward for the establishment of musical institutions in the Tatar Republic. The move towards music as the preferred medium of artistic high culture was an important development in Soviet culture in the 1930s, and reflected important characteristics of the Soviet state’s Russian heritage.¹⁵⁵ In

hesitant to accept the contributions of any Soviet-trained Tatar composers. See Lukman Zakirov, “Pochemu kitaiskie tatarı poiut melodichno?” *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 6 September 2000, 5.

¹⁵⁴ See Azade-Ayşe Rorlich, *The Volga Tatars: A Profile in National Resilience* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1986); A. A. Salnikova and D. M. Galiullina, *Tatarskaiia ‘alifba’: Natsional’nyi bukvar’ v mul’tikul’turnom prostranstve (konets XIX – nachalo XXI vv.)* (Moskva: NPB im. K.D. Ushinskogo, 2014); Gary Guadagnolo, “Creating a Tatar Capital: National, Cultural, and Linguistic Space in Kazan, 1920-1941” (PhD diss., University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 2016).

¹⁵⁵ The best-known study of Russian music is Richard Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically: Historical and Hermeneutical Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997). See also Boris Gasparov, *Five Operas and a Symphony: Word and Music in Russian Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005); Kirill Tomoff, *Creative Union: The Professional Organization of Soviet Composers, 1939-1953* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006); Peter J. Schmelz, *Such Freedom, If Only Musical: Unofficial Soviet Music during the Thaw* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Sergei I. Zhuk, *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City: The West, Identity and Ideology in Soviet Dniepropetrovsk, 1960-1985* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2010). Shamil’ Monasypov, a professor at the Kazan State Conservatory, has recently published a study of various Tatar artistic figures (primarily musicians), *Portrety vydaushchikhsia deiatelei iskusstv Tatarstana (v dukhovno-nauchnom osveshchenii)* (Kazan: Kazanskaia gosudarstvennaia konservatoriia, 2014).

the nineteenth century Russian composers had developed a strong “orientalist” tradition, incorporating folk themes from the empire’s non-Russian peoples, and this weighed heavily on Soviet musical efforts.¹⁵⁶ Musicologist Aleksandr Maklygin has argued that the construction of a “tetrad... of academic [musical] infrastructure” in Kazan was a crucial aspect of Soviet attempts to construct a Tatar nation which was culturally compatible with the Soviet Union as a whole.¹⁵⁷ Compatibility ultimately meant the preservation of certain aspects of indigenous, “oriental” music cultures, and the integration of these aspects into a professionalized music sphere dominated by Western musical forms. In professionalizing Tatar music, the Soviet Union was nation-building and, in nation-building, it was constructing socialism. For the Tatar composers themselves, however, the process of adapting Western or Russian forms of art had peculiar consequences. The result of Soviet cultural policies was to enable Tatar composers to produce what they specifically deemed as national content within the boundaries of Soviet socialist art forms.

In addition to the Kazan State Conservatory, the Tatar Republic was, by 1945, home to the Tatar State Philharmonic (opened in 1937), the Tatar State Opera Theater (opened in 1939), and the Tatar branch of the Union of Soviet Composers (formed in 1939). The purpose of these institutions was the formation of trained musical cadres.

¹⁵⁶ For a short examination of this phenomenon, see Norio Umetsu, “Oriental Elements in Russian Music and the Reception in Western Europe: Nationalism, Orientalism, and Russianness” in *Orient on Orient: Images of Asia in Eurasian Countries*, eds. Tetsuo Mochizuki and Go Koshino (Sapporo: Slavic Research Center, Hokkaido University, 2015), 59-68. For a broader study of Russian Orientalism, see David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Russian Orientalism: Asia in the Russian Mind from Peter the Great to the Emigration* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

¹⁵⁷ A. L. Maklygin, “Nazib Zhiganov: stanovlenie muzykal’nogo lidera Tatarii,” *Vestnik Kazanskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta kul’tury i iskusstv* 2 (2012), 32.

Trained professional musicians, a group which included performers, composers, and musicologists, were meant to be analogous to their counterparts in literature, poetry, acting, and the other arts in their collective responsibility to the creation of the communist society promised by Bolshevik ideology. Nonetheless, significant material and administrative issues hampered the effective operation of these institutions, especially during the 1930s and 1940s. Critically, so-called Tatar State theaters lacked sufficiently-Tatar repertoires, and the cadres to create them, at the time of their founding. The Philharmonic's main objective was to organize concerts both within Kazan and across the republic, showcasing the achievements of Soviet composers and musicians. Numerous reports from the Philharmonic underline the desire that its concerts emphasize the works of Tatar composers, but the reality was that concert repertoires were frequently criticized for failing to achieve this standard. The problem was that, although these institutions existed, there had not yet been enough time for a sufficiently large contingent of Tatar composers to materialize. The fact that these composers would also have to be ideologically vetted was a secondary problem that contributed to the relatively small number of founding members of the Tatar Composers' Union.

Moscow's determination to create these cultural institutions within a few years of initiating training programs for the necessary personnel to operate them led to an important reliance on the first wave of trained Tatar composers and musicians. Ultimately, by prioritizing Soviet cultural forms – not only in terms of actual art forms but also in the replication of Western-style institutions throughout the country – Moscow empowered Tatars to focus their energies on artistic content. Although the number of trained Tatar composers remained proportionately low for several decades, the work they

did produce invoked national themes, not only in its musical traits but also in the narratives the music was meant to convey (chiefly in conjunction with some other form of art, such as operatic theater). The most prominent of the first wave of highly-trained and officially-sanctioned Tatar composers was Nazib Zhiganov, whose first opera, *Kachkyn* – the first Tatar opera – premiered at the Tatar State Opera Theater on 17 June 1939.

At a meeting of the Tatar Composers' Union in February, 1948, Zhiganov explained his understanding of how to create Tatar national music within the boundaries of acceptable Soviet socialist forms. He asked his audience to consider opera as a genre, explaining that it had hitherto been unknown to Tatar musicians. Just as Russians had once adopted opera from Europe, so too should Tatar composers assimilate the genre and produce their own art within its parameters. He continued that, as a composer himself, even while he wrote “with the Tatar listener first in my mind,” the form of art always had to precede the insertion of content.¹⁵⁸ It was Zhiganov's uncanny ability to adopt what was Tatar – melodies and folk themes – to Soviet canonical genres that allowed him to become a rising star, first as a conservatory student in Moscow and, not long after, as one of the TASSR's leading composers.¹⁵⁹ The same year that his “Kachkyn” premiered, and only a year since completing his conservatory education in Moscow and returning to Kazan, Zhiganov was named head of the Tatar branch of the Union of Composers, the

¹⁵⁸ NART, f. R-7057 (Collection of the Tatar Composers' Union), op. 1, d. 23, l. 4 (meeting minutes 2 October 1948).

¹⁵⁹ For a study of the evolution of Tatar music from a musicological perspective, see Zemfira Saidasheva, *Tatarskaia Muzyka: istoriia i sovremennost* (Kazan: Idel-Press, 2008).

third such organization in the RSFSR.¹⁶⁰ As leader of the Tatar musical scene, it became Zhiganov's responsibility to organize the talents of existing musicians and begin the preparatory work of forming new musical cadres in the TASSR.

Zhiganov's Musical World and Upbringing

Prior to Soviet efforts to “develop” national cultures in accordance with Leninist nationality policy, Tatar musical and performative culture revolved around several distinct traditions. In the nineteenth century, lyrical “plangent songs” were a widespread phenomenon of both everyday musical life among Tatars and as an element of holiday celebrations. These songs, known for their use of “*mong*,” a word connoting a deep sense of grief or sadness, are characterized by their monophonic nature and their monotonous lyrical content.¹⁶¹ The use of traditional folk instruments and the singing of short folk songs, especially in urban environments, were also common in this period and into the early twentieth century. Drama was also a popular medium for Tatar artists in urban environments. In drama, Tatar writers and critics became enmeshed in Russian discourses and meanings about the genre, despite the fact that Tatar drama had developed independently of its Russian counterpart up to this point.¹⁶² In the first two decades of

¹⁶⁰ T. A. Almazova, “Rol' Naziba Zhiganova v stanovlenii i razvitii Soiuza kompozitorov Respubliki Tatarstan” in *Tvorcheskoe nasledie Naziba Zhiganova v kontekste sovremennoi muzykal'noi kul'tury: Materialy nauchno-prakticheskoi konferentsii s mezhdunarodnym uchastiem, Kazan, 7 oktiabria 2013 goda, Zhiganovskie chteniia - 2013*, ed. V. R. Dulat-Aleeva (Kazan: Kazan. gos. konservatoriia, 2015), 18. The first two Composers' Unions were the Russian and Karelian Unions.

¹⁶¹ For more on these “plangent songs,” see El'mira Il'gamovna Safiullina, “Revisiting the Collection of Tatar Musical-Ethnographic Materials by the Teachers of the Kazan Ecclesiastical Academy in the Context of Their Missionary-Educative Activity (19th Century)”, *Terra Sebus: Acta Musei Sabesiensis*, Special Issue (2014): 45-53.

¹⁶² The most complete study of Tatar drama is Madina V. Goldberg, “Russian Empire - Tatar theater: The politics of culture in late Imperial Kazan” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2009). See also Goldberg,

the twentieth century Tatar musical culture consisted of both “traditional” styles influenced by rural, folk culture and a more urban variant connected with drama and, eventually, with the country’s revolutionary movement.

Zhiganov’s musical world, and his life more broadly, was partially – but not totally – reflective of this Tatar cultural milieu of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹⁶³ He was, after all, not from Kazan or its environs but from Uralsk, located today in Kazakhstan but at the time part of the Orenburgskaia guberniia. At the turn of the twentieth century, approximately one-third of the population considered Tatar to be their native language, and therefore it is likely that, in his early years, Zhiganov was exposed to Tatar folk music through both his family and his community. After his father’s death in 1912 from typhus and his mother’s death four years later in 1916, the then five-year-old Zhiganov and his two older siblings went to live at orphanages, first in Uralsk, and later, during the famine years of the early 1920s, in Roslavl near Smolensk. Education in Uralsk orphanages was conducted in both Russian and Tatar, so it seems likely that, at least until his evacuation to the orphanage in Roslavl, Tatar was his primary language of communication. Nevertheless, as much as Zhiganov was likely exposed to Tatar language and culture, it is clear that his environment was multicultural. It is plausible that Zhiganov was as exposed to Russian music and folklore as he was to Tatar; he probably had similar exposure to other musical and cultural traditions as well. Clearly

“From Kräshen Past to Tatar Present: Gayaz Iskhakiy’s *Zuleikha* on the Tatar Stage in 1917 and 1992,” *The Russian Review* 75 (October, 2016): 664-682. For another look at Tatar drama, see Angés Nilüfer Kefeli, “The Tale of Joseph and Zulaykha on the Volga Frontier: The Struggle for Gender, Religious, and National Identity in Imperial and Postrevolutionary Russia,” *Slavic Review* 70, 2 (2011): 373-398.

¹⁶³ Information about Zhiganov’s childhood was provided to me via email by Aleksei Egorov, Acting Head of the Zhiganov Museum in Kazan in April, 2018.

the prospect of producing *Tatar* culture became central to his life's work, but that culture always existed, both in Zhiganov's reality and in his thoughts, in a multicultural environment.

Zhiganov's multicultural environment was also a musical one. In his days at the orphanage, Zhiganov became enthralled by the "black box" which had one day appeared in the building. By the time he moved to Kazan in 1928, he had experience "toy[ing] with familiar melodies" but no formal training.¹⁶⁴ His initial attempt to enroll at the Tatar Art Technical School (later the Kazan Academy of Music) in 1928 was rebuffed – he could play only by ear and was musically illiterate. One of the school's teachers, Nina Aleksandrovna Shevalina, told Zhiganov that she would tutor him, provided that he "quit everything else [in his life] besides music."¹⁶⁵ In his limited free time, Zhiganov attended various theater performances and became acquainted with Russian and Western classics. It was at this time he also became aware of the music of Salikh Saidashev, the most prominent Tatar composer of the 1920s and 1930s. In 1931 Zhiganov relocated to Moscow where he began attending the preparatory musical academy attached to the Moscow State Conservatory. Not long after, he entered the Conservatory itself, later to become its first Tatar graduate.

Zhiganov's emergence as the leading figure of official Tatar music for over four decades was a direct consequence of the Soviet experiment. In the forward of the first of

¹⁶⁴ Nazib Zhiganov, "Razmyshleniia o tatarskoi muzyke," interview by S. I. Gurarii in *Nazib Zhiganov: staty, vospominaniia, dokumenty*, vol. 1, 9.

¹⁶⁵ Aleksei Egorov, ed., *Nazib Zhiganov: muzyka i zhizn'* (Kazan: Tatarskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 2013), 38.

three small volumes published through the Nazib Zhiganov Heritage Foundation, Zhiganov's son Ivan Zhiganov argued that his father and "his social and creative position were determined and transformed together with the evolution of the society in which he lived and worked."¹⁶⁶ As the tumultuous first decades of Soviet power pushed and pulled the country's citizens from their homes and into a new socialist society, possibilities and opportunities opened up for those who had lived on the country's geographic and social peripheries. Zhiganov was among those that the Soviet experiment elevated from provincial life to the center of a new artistic world. Critically, however, it also introduced him to what was to become one of the regime's preferred musical art forms: the opera. Zhiganov's first exposure to opera was a performance of Giuseppe Verdi's *Aida* not long after his initial arrival in Kazan. The experience was so stimulating that he later recalled that "that very night the dream of writing my own opera was born."¹⁶⁷

There is a coincidental significance to the fact that *Aida* was Zhiganov's first exposure to opera, the genre which he would later champion as leader of the TASSR's musical cadres. Edward Said has argued that "*Aida*, like the opera form itself, is a hybrid, radically impure work that belongs equally to the history of culture and the historical experience of overseas domination."¹⁶⁸ What strikes Said as of particular importance about *Aida* was "not so much *about* but *of* imperial domination."¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ Ivan Nazibovich Zhiganov, "Obrashchenie k chitateliu" in *Literaturnoe tvorchestvo Naziba Zhiganova*, red. Lena Minnullina (Moscow: I.O. Kompozitor, 1996), 4.

¹⁶⁷ Zhiganov, "Razmyshleniia o tatarskoi muzyke," 9.

¹⁶⁸ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 114.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 114. Italics in original.

Zhiganov's operas, as well as those of his contemporaries, are likewise *of* Soviet power, though they are not always *about* it. The education of musicians, the funding of talented artists, the rewarding of prolific composers, and the promotion of musical pieces through performance were all central features of Soviet artistic life that were designed and controlled by Moscow, whether directly or indirectly. Zhiganov considered his works national achievements, and indeed many pieces composed during the Soviet period are still recognized as important representations of Tatar ethnic culture even after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the fading away of communist ideology. Soviet cultural policy set the terms for musical syncretism, and, within those boundaries, Zhiganov and his colleagues produced music that, in their eyes, was both Soviet and Tatar.

In his discussion of *Aida*, Said argues that “the opera was written for and first produced in an African country with which Verdi had no connection.”¹⁷⁰ He further explains that “the [Cairo] Opera House and *Aida* [are] antinomian symbols of the country's artistic life and its imperialist subjugation.”¹⁷¹ Said's point is that *Aida* and opera were a way by which Europe could monopolize an interpretation of an authentic other – the “true Egypt” was Europe's vision of Egypt in *Aida*. The authors of Tatar culture, however, were by and large Tatars themselves, working within Soviet boundaries and utilizing Europeanized forms. Joining them were Russians, Jews, Bashkirs, and others. It is certainly true that a certain Eurocentrism was key to Soviet cultural policies in the TASSR as in other regions of the country, particularly Central Asia. When it came

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, 115.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 129.

to music, “the eventual development of monophonic Central Asian [or similar Tatar] music into European-style harmonic music was seen as an historical inevitability.”¹⁷² The importation of European musical forms and techniques was a way by which Soviet composers could “build musical bridges between Western musical forms and Eastern musical content.”¹⁷³ But these bridges were built on the belief of the “inevitability” of the more advanced, Western musical forms eventually becoming predominant even among non-Western peoples. As such, Soviet promotion of opera and other European forms rested on the assumption of European cultural superiority, although this superiority was understood in strictly Marxist terms of development. The export of Soviet-approved cultural forms also reflected, at least to some degree, the paternalistic attitude of the Soviet state towards its less-developed populations, itself an aspect of Soviet rule shared with Western European empires in particular.¹⁷⁴

It is impossible, however, to determine to what degree Zhiganov sensed any sort of hidden meaning, orientalist or otherwise, in Verdi’s *Aida*. Clearly, however, his viewing of the opera and his emotional reaction to it was part of Zhiganov’s emerging academic fascination with the genre. Although he was to eventually write not only operas but several ballets, numerous symphonies, and countless piano pieces, Zhiganov

¹⁷² Theodore Levin, *The Hundred Thousand Fools of God: Musical Travels in Central Asia (and Queens, New York)*(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 14.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁷⁴ This “paternalistic” attitude, embodied in the “White Man’s Burden” or the “*mission civilatrice*” is best explored in the Soviet context in Yuri Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).

considered opera the pinnacle of achievement for a “national composer.”¹⁷⁵ In 1965, Zhiganov asserted that an opera is written “for the people” and, “at best,” will be performed “at a single theater in the republic.”¹⁷⁶ An opera’s singularity thereby placed it in a unique space amongst a nation’s achievements. It was this idea of national achievement which lay at the forefront of Zhiganov’s artistic goals and which coincided spectacularly with Soviet efforts to both establish new canonical musical forms and to export these forms to the country’s various nationalities. The merging of Zhiganov’s national dreams with the imperatives of Soviet policy came to a head when the composer moved to Moscow and began participating in the Moscow State Conservatory’s Tatar Opera Studio, a preparatory academy dedicated to the process of “cultural modernization” of Tatar national music which functioned from 1934-1938.¹⁷⁷

The Tatar Opera Studio played a crucial pedagogical role in the formation of professional music in the TASSR. The studio’s overall structure, faculty, courses, and workshops were all dictated by the Conservatory’s leadership, meaning that it was ultimately up to Moscow-based musicians, the bulk of whom were of Russian backgrounds, to determine how Tatar musicians would be educated. The primary objective of the studio was to train a cohort and produce a repertoire capable of

¹⁷⁵ Nazib Zhiganov, “Iz vystupleniia na diskussii o sovremennoi opere” in *Nazib Zhiganov*, vol. 1, 29.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁷⁷ Liliia Izvelevna Salikhova, “Tatarskaia gosudarstvennaia opernaia studiia pri Moskovskoi gosudarstvennoi konservatorii (1934-1938) v kontekste muzykal’noi kul’tury tatarii 30-kh godov XX veka,” (Kandidatskaia diss., Kazan State Conservatory, 2009), 4.

sustaining a local opera theater in Kazan that eventually opened in 1938.¹⁷⁸ Among the participants in the studio were Zhiganov, Farid Iarullin, Mansur Muzafarov, and Dzhaudat Faizi, each of whom played an active role in musical developments in the TASSR. In addition to his participation at the Tatar Opera Studio, Zhiganov was enrolled at the Conservatory itself in the theory and composition department. It was there that Zhiganov came under the tutelage of Genrikh Ilich Litinskii, a Russian Jew and folklorist who was also an active faculty member at the studio. Litinskii, Zhiganov claimed, “played a huge role in my fate” and was responsible for the raising of “a whole galaxy of composers” who would go on to great acclaim in the Soviet Union, particularly in the TASSR.¹⁷⁹

Litinskii would identify Zhiganov in the early 1930s as “one of the most talented students” he instructed at Moscow State Conservatory.¹⁸⁰ So skilled was the young composer that his “intense creative growth... gave [Litinskii] a deep confidence that, in Zhiganov, Soviet Tataria is acquiring a master of an extremely high caliber.”¹⁸¹ Like his fellow Tatar composers, Zhiganov spent much of the mid-to-late 1930s drafting national operas, two of which (“Kachkyn” and “Irek”) entering the Tatar State Theater of Opera

¹⁷⁸ The mission of the Tatar Opera Studio was specifically geared towards preparation for the opening of the Tatar State Theater of Opera and Ballet, but the other national studios has broader and more expansive objectives linked to the more extensive musical development required in their cases. In the Central Asian republics, for example, many of the leading composers in Central Asian composers’ unions and conservatories were often not of the titular nationality even after the closing of the studios in Moscow. See Levin, *The Hundred Thousand Fools of God*.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 10.

¹⁸⁰ G. I. Litinskii, “V predstavitel’stvo Tatarskoi Respubliki pri VTSIK”, in *Zhiganov*, vol. 2, 3.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

and Ballet's repertoire during its first season. With Litinskii's support, Zhiganov also took upon various administrative duties, including organizing concerts and coordinating with his fellow composers and relevant committees. These efforts made Zhiganov a standout graduate of the conservatory, a reality only rendered more significant given the fact that he was also the first Soviet Tatar musician to complete his professional musical education at any conservatory.¹⁸² His colleagues from the Tatar Opera Studio were, arguably, no longer his peers, as none of them achieved the higher level of education which separated graduates of the studio (or any similar musical academy) with those of the Conservatory. Zhiganov's status as the preeminent Tatar composer was consolidated with his appointment as Artistic Director at the Tatar State Theater of Opera and Ballet when it opened in 1939 and, months later, as head of the Tatar branch of the Union of Composers.

How did Zhiganov manage to achieve this top position within the Tatar music scene? First and foremost, Zhiganov had, by 1939, distinguished himself as the most highly-trained of numerous talented Tatar composers. Salikh Saidashev, whose, according to Zhiganov, "selfless activity in the twenties and thirties contributed to the formation of Tatar musical art," lacked a professional education necessary for advancement.¹⁸³ Saidashev ignored the "academic" genres of opera and symphony and was thus locked out of any possible role in the further development of Tatar music,

¹⁸² I. E. Popov, "Nazib Zhiganov" in *Gordost' sovetskoi muzyki: Muzykanty – Gerai Sotsialisticheskogo Truda i laureaty Leninskoi premii* ed. M. Iakovlev (Moscow: Sov. Kompozitor, 1987), 109.

¹⁸³ Nazib Zhiganov, "Glavnyi itog," *Vecherniaia Kazan* (18 July 1980) in *Literaturnoe tvorchestvo Naziba Zhiganova: Doklady, stati, vystupleniia*, ed. Lena Minnullina (Moscow: I.O. Kompozitor, 1996), 113.

already clearly identified with these genres.¹⁸⁴ Although he also enrolled in the preparatory Tatar Opera Studio, he eventually quit and his activity in the music scene declined.¹⁸⁵ Sultan Gabiashi, a well-known composer active in both the Tatar and Bashkir ASSRs, also possessed “many of the necessary qualities for a possible Tatar musical leader.”¹⁸⁶ However, his association with religious themes, in particular, rendered him subject to intense criticism, including a scathing article in *Kyzl Tatarstan* (*Red Tatarstan*, one of the major papers of the TASSR) in November, 1930.¹⁸⁷ Others, including Iarullin, Muzafarov, and Aleksandr Kliucharev, lacked Zhiganov’s educational resume.

Secondly, Zhiganov was at no point considered a political liability. As an orphan, Zhiganov’s fate was not tied to any potential parental transgressions, and, as far as is known, he was not raised in a religious milieu. On the contrary, it is likely that Zhiganov’s pedigree benefited from the fact that he was raised under the “strictest of proletarian requirements... the orphanage.”¹⁸⁸ Zhiganov’s material means as a student, Litinskii later recalled, were minimal, but he credited this with helping to develop his

¹⁸⁴ Maklygin, *Stanovlenie*, 2.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 2. Maklygin argues that it is possible that Saidashev’s declining activity by the end of the 1930s were due to the repression of his close friend and colleague, Karim Tinchurin, who was shot in November 1938.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁸⁷ Gul’nur Gubaidullina, “Dolgoe vozvrashchenie Sultana Gabiashi,” *rt-online.ru*, accessed 18 April, 2018, <http://rt-online.ru/p-rubr-obsh-37151/>.

¹⁸⁸ Maklygin, “Stanovlenie,” 2.

active and hard-working nature.¹⁸⁹ Zhiganov's "proletarian" upbringing and outlook helped to endear him to ideologically-inclined superiors who, by the 1930s, were looking with some suspicion at national intelligentsias.¹⁹⁰ That they did not eye Zhiganov with the same suspicion speaks to the extent to which his particular ways of identifying his work with national discourses was fully acceptable, and even promoted, within the Soviet context. Critically, beyond his educational achievements and his noticeable talent, Zhiganov had the support of Letinskii and others in Moscow. It is difficult to speculate exactly who his supporters were, but Maklygin has identified this support as "phenomenal" and linked it to the "state cultural-administrative organs" operating in Moscow, including the Committee on Artistic Affairs and the Secretary for Ideology in the Tatar Obkom.¹⁹¹ Especially when compared to other prominent Tatar composers, Zhiganov "met all the social and professional criteria" that his superiors were looking for.¹⁹² Whatever its origins, it is clear that Moscow (and Kazan) had confidence in Zhiganov as ideologically and politically sound, as a talented composer, and as an effective administrator. This confidence is showcased in the Committee for Artistic Affairs's decision to enlist Zhiganov in the formation of the Tatar composers' union.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁹ Litinskii, "V predstavitelstvo", *Zhiganov*, vol. 2, 3.

¹⁹⁰ For a general examination of the purges among the Soviet Union's nationalities, see Chapter 5 in Jeremy Smith, *Red Nations: The Nationalities Experience in and after the USSR* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013). See also Amir Weiner, "Nature, Nurture, and Memory in a Socialist Utopia: Delineating the Soviet Socio-Ethnic Body in the Age of Socialism," *The American Historical Review* 104, 4 (1999): 1114-1155.

¹⁹¹ Maklygin, "Stanovlenie," 3.

¹⁹² Author's conversation with Aleksandr Maklygin, 26 April 2018.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 3.

Openly, Zhiganov admitted to not even the slightest hint of potential conflict between his national productions and the socialist state which made them possible. In 1948, the Deputy Chairman for the Committee on Artistic Affairs for the RSFSR, an ethnic Russian, stated in a presentation to the Tatar Composers' Union that it was the "great scale of socialist construction... [that] immeasurably raised the social role of literature and art, which [, in turn,] became the powerful means for the communist uplifting of nations..."¹⁹⁴ Zhiganov repeated the official line at a Party meeting in 1958, arguing that "music [was] a front in a sharp ideological struggle" between the Soviet way of life and its domestic and international opponents.¹⁹⁵ In this sense, to produce a Tatar opera or to contribute to the training of national cadres was to proclaim a victory for the Soviet system. Zhiganov expressed this connection publically as well, reflecting in *Vecherniaia Kazan*, a daily Kazan paper, in 1980 that musicians "every day felt the caring help of the Party and the government" and were responsible to guide their activities towards the good of Party, government, and country.¹⁹⁶ The production of music, specifically music of the professional and academic caliber demanded of Zhiganov at the Moscow State Conservatory (that he would later replicate in Kazan), was a composer's necessary contribution. Work was ideological for artists just as much as it was for shock-workers. Indeed, only two years after completing his studies in Moscow

¹⁹⁴ "Stenograph of meeting," 1948 (NART, f. R-7057, o. 1, d. 18, l. 4).

¹⁹⁵ Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv istoriko-politicheskoi dokumentatsii respubliki Tatarstan (TsGAIPDRT), f. 5250(Collection of Party Organization of Kazan State Conservatory), o. 1, d. 19, l. 35 (minutes of Party meeting, 29 October 1958).

¹⁹⁶ Zhiganov, "Glavnyi itog" in *Literaturnoe tvorchestvo*, ed. Lena Minnullina, 113.

Zhiganov would declare to his fellow Composers' Union members on July 1, 1941 that "we, workers of the cultural front, all as one must give our full strength to the defense of our homeland. We should, with our pens, write songs that will, in their own way, help the defense of our country."¹⁹⁷

It is, however, impossible to determine with any certainty whether Zhiganov was a "true believer." His recollections about his youthful attraction to opera, among the most prestigious and most "Soviet" musical forms, were written many years later, and his association with that genre makes sense given the Soviet state's artistic goals. Still, it must be said that Stalinist efforts to consolidate communist culture through the promotion of Europeanized artistic forms were boons for those minority musicians and composers who chose to embrace them. In embracing opera and other Soviet-approved musical forms, Zhiganov was "speaking Bolshevik." But in emphasizing the linkage between socialist forms and national content, he was able to act as an instrument of Soviet cultural authority in the TASSR while also making sure that that authority prioritized the training of ethnic Tatar musicians and the composition of Tatar national works.

Zhiganov and the Tatar Composers' Union

In a letter to his first wife, Svetlana, dated February 11, 1939, Zhiganov explained that he had been personally asked to organize a concert that month showcasing the works of Tatar, Chuvash, and Korean composers.¹⁹⁸ Noting that Moscow's request, dated

¹⁹⁷ "Protocols of meeting of Composers' Union," 1 July 1941 (NART, f. R-7057, o. 1, d. 4, ll. 29-30).

¹⁹⁸ Zhiganov, "N. G. Zhiganov – S. A. Zhiganovoi 11 Fevralia 1939", *Zhiganov*, vol. 2: 10.

January 23, had arrived only on February 9, Zhiganov despaired “what a nightmare!”, but hoped that “it is not too late to organize the affair.”¹⁹⁹ The same letter, he continued, had informed him that he was being charged with organizing a Tatar branch of the Union of Soviet Composers. Already the previous night he had gathered all of Kazan’s composers, collected information from them, and written up the meeting’s protocols, all of which he forwarded to the Committee for Artistic Affairs in Moscow. This embryonic Composers’ Union included only thirteen members at its founding, and only fifteen over a decade later, but it would soon become the organization through which Zhiganov would begin to realize his ambitions for Soviet Tatar music.²⁰⁰

At the time of his appointment as chair of the Composers’ Union, Zhiganov already had a sense of some of the major issues he would need to address thanks to his position at the Tatar State Opera Theater. The theater’s primary problems were financial, with Zhiganov writing to his wife, on March 2, 1939, that “the theater has no money.”²⁰¹ Two days later he again admitted that “the entire theater is practically without a kopeck.”²⁰² As Artistic Director, and even soon as Composers’ Union head, Zhiganov had no authority to alleviate the chronic underfunding of the performance arts, an issue which would continue in the TASSR in one form or another for decades. More pressing

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁰⁰ “Organization Bureau report indicating formation of the Tatar Union of Composers,” 1939 (NART, f. R-7057, o. 1, d. 1, l. 1); “List of Composers’ Union members,” 20 October 1952 (NART, f. R-7057, o. 1, d. 80, l. 1).

²⁰¹ Nazib Zhiganov, *Pis'ma N. G. Zhiganova k S. A. Zhiganovoi (1935-1946)* (Moscow: I. D. Kompozitor, 2001), 65.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 67.

for Zhiganov was that a major consequence of underfunding was the compounding of existing repertoire-related problems. Records at the Tatar State Philharmonic and the Tatar State Academic Theater indicate that specifically Tatar performances tended to be advertised less heavily and thus suffered attendance problems, which also may have had detrimental effects on inspiring young audience members (or their parents) to seek musical or artistic training.²⁰³

Zhiganov did not have the authority to improve overall financial conditions at Kazan's various artistic venues, but as head of the Tatar Composers' Union, he did have the ability to address repertoire- and cadre-based issues at these institutions. As Kiril Tomoff has shown in his landmark study of the Soviet Union of Composers, the Union was bestowed significant monetary resources for a variety of purposes related to the training of musicians and composers across the country.²⁰⁴ In 1951, with membership in the Tatar Union still at fifteen, the organization was allocated 23,808 rubles, about half of which was designated for salaries. Given that Union members typically held academic or administrative posts in local education or cultural institutions, this additional monetary supplement was intended to defray cost of living expenses and to allow for business trips (*komandirovki*) or field research designed to increase musical productivity. Composers were also financially compensated for their work, with varying rates designed to reward particular productions (accordingly, more "prestigious" works such as operas received

²⁰³ Here also we may consider Terry Martin's argument that nationalities policies such as *korenizatsiia* were always "soft-line," capable of being compromised if necessary for economic, political, or ideological reasons.

²⁰⁴ See Kiril Tomoff, *Creative Union: The Professional Organization of Soviet Composers, 1939-1953* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).

the largest monetary grants). As head of the Union, Zhiganov exercised oversight over these monetary distributions and oversaw debates over new pieces before they were officially approved, giving him an effective veto over any piece written by a Union member.

First and foremost, Zhiganov's reality was limited by the very nature of the Soviet system. Beyond chronic underfunding, Tatar musicians had to contend with the state's utilitarian view of art and artists. Institutions such as the Tatar Opera Studio sought the mass production of art – in bringing a certain number of musicians together, they sought to produce a certain number of musical products. Much as Zhiganov connected the musical labor of Tatar composers to the war effort, so too did Soviet institutions liken artists to factory workers in terms of their expected musical output. This mentality was internalized by many of the “first generation” Tatar composers who later complained that their successors were “passive” or unproductive.²⁰⁵ Clearly, there was a great deal of pressure on composers to write music quickly and frequently, not least because of the financial awards for completed pieces. The factory-like atmosphere for composers may well have indirectly policed their output by rewarding quantity over quality, thus discouraging complex and innovative pieces.²⁰⁶ Still, there is little indication that composers were punished if they were not prolific; the emphasis on more complex and prestigious genres may have helped to insulate these artists from such critiques.

²⁰⁵ “Minutes of meeting of Artistic Committee of Opera and Ballet Theater,” 21 January 1963 (NART, f. R-7057, o. 2, d. 38, l. 17).

²⁰⁶ See Schmelz, *Such Freedom*.

These challenges aside, Zhiganov used his position at the Composers' Union to surround himself with numerous talented and devoted musicians, each of whom was similarly dedicated not just to making Soviet music but to making Soviet Tatar music specifically. Of the initial Union members, Mansur Muzafarov (1902-1966), Dzhaudat Faizi (1910-1973), and Aleksandr Kliucharev (1906-1972) became especially prominent contributors to Tatar musical culture during the Soviet period.²⁰⁷ Muzafarov, like Zhiganov, was an advocate of the more prestigious forms of musical culture, himself writing two operas and chastising his fellow Tatar composers for their low ambitions and failure to become more technically sophisticated.²⁰⁸ Faizi was among the most vocal and active of the Tatar composers, working as Musical Director for the Kazan Radiokomitet and the Tatar State Academic Theater, and later as the Director of the Tatar State Philharmonic. In the 1950s, Faizi would defend the "high arts" and condemn jazz music as influenced by Western cosmopolitanism and bourgeois nationalism, advocating that young Tatars listen to what was performed at the Philharmonic and at Kazan's various theaters.²⁰⁹ Perhaps the most intriguing of Zhiganov's longtime colleagues, however, was the ethnic Russian Aleksandr Kliucharev.

²⁰⁷ More tragic was the story of Farid Iarullin (1914-1943), composer of the famous Tatar ballet *Shurale*. In her study of Tatar music, musicologist Zemfira Saidasheva alleges that the negative treatment he received in the months leading up to the premiere of his play alienated him from his colleagues. When the Great Patriotic War began, Iarullin was sent to the front and was later killed. This was despite protections for composers that typically allowed them to avoid military service.

²⁰⁸ "Minutes of General Meeting of Composers' Union," 10 February 1948 (NART, f. R-7057, o. 1, d. 23, l. 8).

²⁰⁹ "Report to Tatar Composers' Union," November 1957 (NART, f. R-7057, o. 1, d. 134, l. 1).

Kliucharev's dedication to Tatar musical culture and his expertise as a trained-folklorist made him an invaluable member of the Tatar Composers' Union. Born in 1906 in Kazan to Russian parents, Kliucharev was educated first in Kazan before moving to Moscow to enroll in the Moscow State Conservatory, where he specialized in the musical folklore of the Middle Volga peoples, primarily Tatars and Bashkirs. Like famous nineteenth-century Russian composers such as Borodin, Kliucharev had an ethnographic mindset which guided his approach. The Composers' Union guidelines for this sort of work mandated *komandirovki* to rural areas and outlined how best to record performances of folk songs and dances.²¹⁰ The purpose was to capture "authentic" folk culture, cull it of any potentially anti-Soviet characteristics (explicitly mentioned is vulgarity), and to then transform it into forms more in line with academic, official music.²¹¹ The type of work that Kliucharev pursued, which can be fairly described as interpretations of Tatar folk songs and dances rather than as fully original compositions, was distinct from the more academic genres which Zhiganov and others worked in. Most significantly, it proposed to adapt "authentic" Tatar folk culture upwards into the Soviet milieu through a regulated process mandated by state organs, whereas opera and symphony began with the Soviet form before inserting Tatar musical content. The two approaches were connected, however, in that the music that they attempted to create was meant to be both Tatar and Soviet, national and socialist, and not one or the other.

²¹⁰ "Report to Tatar Composers' Union by N. Bachikskaiia," 1958 (NART, f. R-7057, o. 1, d. 157, l. 1).

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, l. 8.

Zhiganov felt that Kliucharev's extensive training as a folklorist had rendered his musical productions as nearly "indistinguishable from [Tatar] national culture," and welcomed his contributions as much as those of any ethnic Tatar.²¹² This feeling was shared by others as well. Alfiia Afzalova (tat. Älfiyä Afzalova), a Tatar singer with no professional training was thoroughly impressed with Kliucharev when she auditioned for the Tatar Song and Dance Ensemble. She noted that he spoke Tatar "well and beautifully" and that her career could not have been possible without his support.²¹³ Kliucharev and other musicians working both in the TASSR and elsewhere who were not of the titular nationality may never have doubted that they could legitimately and authentically contribute to other cultures.²¹⁴ After all, they were trained to do exactly that by an ideologically-charged state that constructed itself as simultaneously supranational and multinational.

Kliucharev's status as a non-Tatar contributor to Tatar culture illustrates important realities about the nature of the Soviet Union's nation-building policies amongst its non-Russian population. Despite efforts to train local elites and functionaries for the country's minority republics, especially in the 1920s, scholars have noted that ethnic Russians maintained a significant presence in state and Party organs across the

²¹² Gosudarstvennyi ob"edinënniy muzei Respubliki Tatarstan (GOMRT), f. A. S. Kliucharev (Collection of Aleksandr S. Kliucharev), 125279-796, 40-41 (report by N. G. Zhiganov, 7 February 1958).

²¹³ Älfiyä Avzalova, *Üzem turında (Jir, säkhnä – minem tormışım, yamışım)* (Kazan: Tatarstan kitap nāshriyatı, 1995), 37.

²¹⁴ Zemfira Saidasheva, "Problema 'natsional'nogo'" *Zvezda povolzh'ia*, accessed 7 May, 2018, <http://zvezdapovolzhya.ru/kultura-i-iskusstvo/problema-natsionalnogo-23-07-2015.html>.

country.²¹⁵ In the cultural sphere this situation was even more pronounced, with the field of music particularly maintaining a more Russian appearance given the smaller number of ethnic musicians to have received academic or professional training. More important, however, was the fact that Soviet nation-building policies were never intended to be exclusively national – it was not up to Tatars alone to bring the TASSR into the bright, communist future. The “uplifting” project of Soviet nationalities and cultural policies was internationalist in its outlook, meaning that it was a collective project to be pursued by all Soviet citizens. In a report addressed to the Tatar Composers’ Union in 1948, musicologist Nadezhda Briusova went further, stating that “a not insignificant responsibility lies with the composers who, though not of a particular nationality, work within that particular nationality’s republic.”²¹⁶ It was part of Kliucharev’s responsibilities to contribute to Tatar musical culture not only for the sake of Tatars themselves, but to underline the fact that any national minority culture was something to be celebrated and contributed to by any Soviet citizen, regardless of nationality. Whereas Russian musical forms may have had a leading role, however, musicians working with Kliucharev saw him on the same level as other Tatar composers, as a collaborator but not as an unquestionable expert.²¹⁷

²¹⁵ Francine Hirsch notes that this situation was particularly prominent in the Central Asian republics but much less pronounced in the western Union republics such as Ukraine or the Baltic republics. Alfiya Galliamova argues that, in the TASSR, leadership of important bodies such as the Part Obkom (Reskom) tended to include a balance of both Tatars, the titular nationality, and Russians, who compromised a significant minority in the republic.

²¹⁶ “Report delivered to Tatar Composers’ Union,” 1948 (GOMRT, f. A. S. Kliucharev, 125279-769, l. 3).

²¹⁷ Avzalova, *Üzem turında*, 37.

However, not all of Kliucharev's colleagues and peers were in agreement about the fundamentally internationalist character of Soviet nation-building policies. Indeed, questions concerning Kliucharev's contributions as a Russian to a non-Russian culture were reflective of a long-standing debate within musical circles in the TASSR. At a closed Party meeting concerning the work of the Kazan State Conservatory in 1957, a Comrade Khairutdinov commented that it seemed to him that "Tatar culture can and should be truly progressed by Tatars themselves."²¹⁸ He continued, saying that "to our shame, the recently published book about [Salikh] Saidashev was written, not by a Tatar, but by Comrade Ia. M. Girshman."²¹⁹ To this, Zhiganov replied that "Comrade Khairutdinov must take into account that Tatar culture will be developed with the help of Russians."²²⁰ The Secretary of the Tatar Obkom, the highest ranking Party official in the republic, closed the issue by stating that "Tatar culture must be progressed and this will be done with the help of qualified cadres not only of the titular nationality," Tatars, but by others as well.²²¹ Ultimately, the official line stated by Zhiganov and his superiors was that Tatar culture did not only belong to Tatars, but was rather part of the cultural inheritance of all Soviet people. Soviet musical policy stipulated that Tatar national culture was a distinct entity, but that it operated within a broader international Soviet culture and that, therefore, its boundaries had to be porous and open to non-Tatar contributions.

²¹⁸ "Minutes of closed Party meeting," 26 April 1957 (TsGAIPDRT, f. 5250, o. 1, d. 17, l. 11-12).

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, l. 12.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, l. 12.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, l. 14.

Zhiganov at the Conservatory

Nowhere was the complex relationship between the national and international aspects of Tatar musical culture more clear than at the Kazan State Conservatory. At the Conservatory, Zhiganov embraced the twin goals of musical and ideological education in order to raise new generations of Soviet musicians ready to contribute to Soviet musical culture. The founding of the Conservatory was intended to bring to fruition the dreams of Soviet art that Zhiganov articulated at a 1948 meeting of the Tatar Composers' Union. At the meeting, Zhiganov presented on "Opera, ballet, and chamber-symphonic music," stating that the thirty years of professional musical development since the October Revolution were more than sufficient to allow for the production of substantial numbers of operas, ballets, and symphonies.²²² Although Zhiganov had gathered at the Composers' Union a small core of dedicated and prolific composers, the fact was that, especially among new and emerging talent, a great numbers of pieces were being rejected for ideological reasons.²²³ It was not simply a matter of utilizing the Conservatory's resources to train competent musicians, but of placing these musicians within a context in which their works would reflect the realities of Soviet life and would fit within prescribed ideological forms.

Post-Soviet musicologists and local historians working on the history of the Kazan State Conservatory and the life and work of Zhiganov have tended to remove both

²²² NART, f. 7057, o. 1, d. 18, l. 32 (presentation to the Composers' Union, 22 February 1948).

²²³ *Ibid.*, l. 35.

of these issues from their historical and ideological context. Albert Leman, a professor at the Kazan State Conservatory from its inception through 1970 and at the Moscow State Conservatory from 1972 through his death in 1998, argued in 1996 that “the idea of establishing this important center of musical education was wholly Nazib Zhiganov’s.”²²⁴ These interpretations have ignored the fact that the Conservatory was a Soviet institution first and foremost, and, much like the Composers’ Union, “was an organ for control [and] administrative intervention in the creative process.”²²⁵ Although Zhiganov held an extensive amount of control over the development of new musical cadres in the TASSR through his leadership at both the Union and the Conservatory, this power had to be utilized within the boundaries of Soviet acceptability. This does not necessarily have to lead us to the position of believing that Soviet Tatar cultural figures were “ideological hacks” driven to conformity within the Soviet system.²²⁶ It should instead allow us to suppose that figures like Zhiganov were “nationalists” in the same way the Soviet Union’s leaders had become “nationalists” in their support of ethnicities as a “sacred principle of marxism-leninism.”²²⁷

In the initial organization of the Kazan State Conservatory, the nature of the institution as both republican (i.e. associated with the TASSR specifically) and regional were made clear. In June, 1945, the Committee on Artistic Affairs of the RSFSR, the

²²⁴ Leman, “Nazib Gaiazovich Zhiganov,” *Zhiganov*, vol. 1, 89.

²²⁵ Almazova, “Rol’ Naziba Zhiganova” in *Tvorcheskoe nasledie*, 20.

²²⁶ See A. G. Galliamova, *Istoriia Tatarstana: modernizatsiia po-sovetski (vtoraia polovina 1940-kh- pervaiia polovina 1980-kh gg.)* (Kazan: Izdatel’stvo “Magarif,” 2010).

²²⁷ Slezkine, “Communal Apartment,” 414.

main organ for Party oversight over music, tapped Zhiganov as head of the Conservatory, a position soon confirmed by the Tatar Obkom. Ostensibly operating under republican leadership, the Conservatory was nevertheless designed not simply to address the needs of the TASSR, but instead to serve as a musical base for the entire Middle Volga region.²²⁸ This follows from its status as the first conservatory in the RSFSR to be located in a majority non-Russian area. Given the institution's larger purview, Zhiganov recruited both students and staff from around the country. As head of the Tatar Composers' Union, it was a relatively straightforward process to bring composers and musicologists from the Tatar Republic on board at the Conservatory, but Kazan's wartime status as refugee center and, later, growing economic center, also afforded new possibilities. Zhiganov successfully poached musicians from Leningrad and Moscow, some of whom, such as M. A. Iudin, former professor at the Leningrad Conservatory, had been evacuated to directly to Kazan early in the war.²²⁹ Although turnover was not uncommon, the Kazan Conservatory maintained a high-level staff on par with the country's other conservatories and consistently employed musicologists and professors of both Russian and non-Russian backgrounds.

As Conservatory director, Zhiganov wielded major influence over the day-to-day activities and the overall goals of the institution. In an article published in *Sovetskaia Muzyka* celebrating the fortieth anniversary of the founding of Conservatory, Zhiganov

²²⁸ See A. L. Maklygin, "Kazanskaia Konservatoriia: Ot Gummerta k Zhiganovu: vosploshchenie mechty," *Kazanskaia Konservatoriia: 65 let tvorcheskogo puti*, ed. L. A. Fedotova (Kazan: Kazanskaia Konservatoriia, 2011).

²²⁹ Khaurutdinov, *Kazanskaia gosudarstvennaia konservatoriia*, 17.

reflected that “the organization and leadership of the conservatory were entrusted to me,” tasks which were made possible thanks to “the attention and daily assistance of Party and Soviet organs.”²³⁰ As far as the Party was concerned, the Conservatory’s major goal was the training of ideologically-sound professional musicians who could serve at any number of cultural or educational institutions across the Soviet Union. To this end, the Party exercised significant oversight through an attached Primary Party Organization, in which Zhiganov served as secretary. Through the early 1950s, the Party Organization was concerned primarily with issues relating to sub-standard performance by students and graduates, particularly in their ideological training. In a Party meeting in April 1953, Zhiganov argued that students’ academic or moral shortcomings (missing classes, inappropriate talk in Conservatory corridors) could be attributed to their small stipends and the fact that many students were working when they should have been studying or attending classes.²³¹ In order to address this issue, Zhiganov proposed that additional funding be made available to the Conservatory in order to provide higher stipends for students. A Party meeting in June 1958 also saw the need to address the situation relating to students’ living standards, with one member claiming that “political education is more difficult for us [at the Conservatory] than for other higher education institutions,” specifically due to the fact that the Conservatory had, as of yet, no student dormitories.²³²

²³⁰ N. G. Zhiganov, “Zhivoe voploshchenie printsipov sotsialoisticheskogo internatsionalizma,” *Sovetskaia muzyka* (1989, no. 1, s. 81) cited in *Zhiganov*, vol. 1, 58.

²³¹ TsGAIPDRT, f. 5250, o. 1, d. 10, l. 31 (minutes of Party Bureau meeting, 2 April 1953).

²³² TsGAIPDRT, f. 5250, o. 1, d. 19, l. 23 (minutes of General Party meeting, 11 June 1958).

If the ideological goals of the Conservatory encouraged Zhiganov to address the material conditions of his students' lives outside of the classroom, it also impacted their musical education inside of it. Although it is difficult to determine what, if any, role Zhiganov had in the development of any particular curriculum, aspects of student education reflected some of the major musical debates that he was engaged in in his role as chair of the Tatar Composers' Union. One aspect of these debates entered into the curriculum of first-year Conservatory students in their history of foreign music course in 1953. In the course, Professor Kh. Bulatov, an ethnic Tatar, connected the successful musical culture of nineteenth and twentieth century Vienna with the multi-national character of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. It was because of the fact that the Empire's musicians could draw from a rich variety of musical heritages that their music was able to achieve its international status as being among the best and most modern in the world.²³³ The professor argued that Soviet composers could likewise excel because the Soviet Union promoted its non-Russian cultures and enshrined them as part of a shared musical heritage of all Soviet citizens. In this sense, both Tatar composers like Zhiganov or Faizi and ethnic Russians immersed in Tatar culture like Kliucharev were fulfilling the musical potential of the country.

The Conservatory was dedicated not only to nation-building in the TASSR, but to connecting Tatar musical development with the broader academic goals of Soviet music and with the musical cultures of the other Volga peoples. Zhiganov, through his twin leadership of the Tatar Composers' Union and the Conservatory, managed to assert a

²³³ NART, f. 6832, o. 1, d. 214, ll. 4-5 (stenograph of lecture, 14 April 1953).

leading musical role for Tatars in the region. This was partially a product of the TASSR's economic status; as the most populous of the autonomous republics, the TASSR generated and received resources (both material and personal) on a level that neighboring republics could not match. Zhiganov's contemporaries would also assert the composers' singularity, suggesting that none of the other republics boasted such a competent administrator and talented musician wrapped up in a single person. In a report addressing a number of issues facing the Union in November, 1957, Faizi argued that the upcoming conference for republican composers in Kazan "speaks to the fact that our professional organization enjoys great fame and occupies a leading role in the Russian Federation."²³⁴ The TASSR's "leading role" in the region, perhaps more of a happy boast in the 1940s and 1950s, was crystallized in later years, with the opening of a Special Musical High School attached to the Conservatory in 1960 and the organization of the annual Music Festival of the Composers of the Middle Volga and Urals, first held in Kazan in 1982.²³⁵

Conclusion

Whereas Russians, Jews, and other non-Tatars were deemed fully able to contribute to Tatar culture, the formation of an indigenous population of composers and musicians was still the central feature of the development of professional music in the TASSR through the 1950s. Over ten years after the Tatar Opera Studio had trained the first wave of academically-proficient Tatar composers, the membership numbers of the

²³⁴ NART, f. 7057, o. 1, d. 134, l. 4 (report delivered November, 1957).

²³⁵ Khaurutdinov, *Kazanskaia gosudarstvennaia konservatoriia*, 31-32.

Tatar Composers' Union remained quite low. In 1958, Kliucharev reasoned that this fact was due to the continuing failure to train “national [Tatar] cadres.”²³⁶ Despite the opening of the Kazan State Conservatory in 1945, over a decade later leading Union members were still concerned with the relatively small numbers of emerging Tatar composers. This trend was not unique only to the Tatar Republic, as other autonomous republics within the RSFSR faced similar problems in terms of what we might term “youth development.”²³⁷ Still, in 1951, Zhiganov noted the accomplishments of composer E. Bakirov, an ethnic Tatar and one of the first graduates from the Kazan State Conservatory who, already by 1951, had made significant contributions to Tatar musical culture.²³⁸ The volume *Muzyka Sovetskoi Tatarii*, published in 1952, was intended to spotlight the achievements of the TASSR's composers and, hopefully, encourage interest in the profession amongst potential students.²³⁹ Although the number of trained Tatar composers remained relatively low, the art produced was deemed “significant” and was beginning, by 1953, to come in a steady, constant stream from the composers.²⁴⁰

²³⁶ (Minutes of general meeting of TASSR composers,” 19 June 1958 (NART, f. R-7057, o. 1, d. 140, l. 61).

²³⁷ At a conference of composers from the autonomous republics organized in Kazan in January, 1948, for example, the Tatar ASSR boasted the second-highest number of attendees after the Bashkir ASSR. “List of attendees,” January 1948 (NART, f. R-7057, o. 1, d. 18, l. 5).

²³⁸ “Report delivered to general meeting of TASSR composers,” 31 October 1951 (NART, f. R-7057, o. 1, d. 63, l. 21).

²³⁹ “Prospectus for book volume,” 1952 (NART, f. R-7057, o. 1, d. 71, l. 1). Efforts to publicize through publications were not always effective; in 1955-56 Zhiganov received a directive from the Ministry of Culture complaining that insufficient advertisements had led to many books remaining unbought.

²⁴⁰ “List of written works by Tatar composers, 1941-53,” 1953 (NART, f. R-7057, o. 1, d. 7, l. 1).

Beginning in the 1930s, the professionalization of Tatar musical culture along Europeanized lines became a central feature of Soviet nationalities policy in the TASSR. This process came after the heyday of *korenizatsiia* and in the midst of Stalinist repression of “bourgeois nationalists,” and was part of a country-wide emphasis on economic, technological, societal, and cultural modernization. As such, the period in which Russian culture became ascendant and Western cultural forms became standardized parts of socialist art was also the period in which the development of Tatar national culture was an important ideological goal of the regime. Although Moscow required that all minority republics adhere to specific models of political, economic, intellectual, and cultural development, the actual process of this development was frequently guided by the minorities themselves. In the TASSR, it was primarily Tatars who adapted their national music into operatic, symphonic, and polyphonic forms, albeit with the assistance and participation of Russians and other Soviet peoples. It was with the full financial and ideological support of the Soviet artistic administration that Tatar composers wrote what they considered to be “national achievements.”

CHAPTER THREE

Creating a Narrative of Tatar Wartime Heroism: The Case of Poet Musa Dzhaliil'

The Great Patriotic War has been regarded as the central event in Soviet history, with the victory over Nazi Germany in 1945 eventually coming to eclipse even the 1917 Revolution as the key legitimizing tool used by Soviet leadership in postwar decades. Although Brezhnev and other late-Soviet leaders relied on the war cult as a sort of crutch to encourage continued ideological loyalty to the regime, the populace's shared experience of wartime hardship and triumph also provided alternative centers of narrative-making.²⁴¹ At least in some regards, the war years were characterized by a comparative liberalization of Soviet society. Although hopes that victory would bring a loosening of the state's repressive policies were dashed during the years of High Stalinism, veterans of the war often retained significant, if limited, agency in agitating for their collective status as the war's victors.²⁴² The war also saw shifting dynamics in the Soviet Union's nationalities policies, with the ramped-up of Russocentric imagery and the rapprochement with the Russian Orthodox Church capping off what many historians have described as a return to Russian primacy within the Soviet Union under Stalin.²⁴³

²⁴¹ Nina Tumarkin, *The Living & The Dead: The Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).

²⁴² Miriam Dobson, "POWs and Purge Victims: Attitudes Towards Party Rehabilitation in Vladimir and Moscow, 1956-7" *Slavonic and East European Review* vol. 86, no. 2 (2008): 328-45.

²⁴³ David Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931-1956* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002). Of course, Russian Orthodoxy was not the only religion revived during the war – attacks on Islam were reversed after 1941. See Shoshana Keller, *To Moscow, Not Mecca: The Soviet Campaign Against Islam in Central Asia, 1917-1941* (Westport: Praeger, 2001).

However, the war was fought not only by Russians but by all of the diverse peoples of the country, nearly all of which would eventually come to celebrate their own distinct ethnic heroes and narratives within a broader understanding of Soviet victory.²⁴⁴ For Tatars, Kazakhs, and others, the war became, in many respects, the crucible in which these Soviet-built nations completed their forging, at once becoming unique and singular while also part of a broader Soviet mosaic.²⁴⁵

The war did not invite possibilities only for the progressive integration of the non-Russian nationalities into the Soviet Union. Even before its beginnings, the shadow of war encouraged a move among Stalin and his lieutenants to identify potential “enemy nations” lurking within Soviet borders.²⁴⁶ Mass deportations of Koreans, Volga Germans, Crimean Tatars, and Chechens before and during the war reflected not only the Soviet leadership’s intolerance of collaboration but also their fear of nationalism and ethnic separatism.²⁴⁷ Nationalist ideologies of various kinds were among the motivating factors in Soviet citizen’s collaboration with the Nazis, taking the form not only of entire

²⁴⁴ Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of War: The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Roberto J. Carmack, “‘A Fortress of the Soviet Home Front’: Mobilization and Ethnicity in Kazakhstan during World War II,” (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2015); Jonathan Brunstedt, “The Soviet myth of the Great Fatherland War and the limits of inclusionary politics under Brezhnev: the case of Chalmavist literature,” *Nationalities Papers* vol. 41, no. 1 (Jan., 2013): 146-165.

²⁴⁵ Jonathan Brunstedt, “Building a Pan-Soviet Past: The Soviet War Cult and the Turn Away from Ethnic Particularism,” *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* vol. 38, no. 2 (2011): 149-171.

²⁴⁶ Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*, 311-343.

²⁴⁷ Robert Conquest, *The Nation-Killers: The Soviet Deportation of Nationalities* (New York: Macmillan, 1970); Michael Gelb, “An Early Soviet Ethnic Deportation: The Far-Eastern Koreans,” *Russian Review* vol. 54, no. 3 (July, 1995): 389-412; Michael Herceg Westren, “Nations in Exile: ‘The Punished Peoples’ in Soviet Kazakhstan, 1941-1961,” (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 2012); Greta Lynn Uehling, “The Crimean Tatars in Uzbekistan: Speaking with the dead and living homeland,” *Central Asian Survey* vol. 20, no. 3 (2001): 391-404.

armies such as General Andrei Vlasov's Russian Liberation Army but also units directly within the German military hierarchy, such as the Ukrainian Fourteenth Grenadier Division of the Waffen SS or the Idel'-Ural Legion made up primarily of captured ethnic Tatars.²⁴⁸ Soviet citizens saw defection and collaboration as a way of escaping or fighting against Stalinist rule, which some condemned as imperialistic or Russifying, and potentially taking part in the liberation of their homelands. The war thereby allowed some Soviet citizens, primarily through capture, defection, and collaboration, to participate in violent struggle against the Soviet Union on the basis of political, economic, or nationally-oriented dissatisfaction with the regime. Even before the guns fell silent on 9 May 1945, Soviet leadership sought a way of repressing or erasing this complex consequence of the war.

This chapter addresses the symbolic significance of the Great Patriotic War and its participants in Tatar culture during and after the conflict. I argue that the war validated a particular vision of Tatars' wartime contributions by enshrining them in a pan-Soviet narrative of wartime heroism while also highlighting their distinctly nationalized identity. I explore this process through an examination of the life, death, and afterlife of the Tatar poet Musa Dzhaliil'. Dzhaliil', who before the war had been one of the most celebrated Tatar literary figures in the Soviet Union, joined the war effort as a political commissar and correspondent for the journal *Otvaga* in 1941. In July of 1942,

²⁴⁸ Catherine Andreyev, *Vlasov and the Russian Liberation Movement: Soviet Reality and Émigré Theories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Per Anders Rudling, "'They Defended Ukraine': The 14. Waffen-Grenadier-Division der SS (Galizische Nr. 1) Revisited," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* vol. 25, no. 3 (July 2012): 329-368; Iskander Giliyazov, *Legion Idel'-Ural* (Moscow: Veche, 2009).

he was captured by the German Army in an operation near Leningrad and was eventually executed in a German prison in Berlin in 1944.

The details of Dzhaliil's fate were not known in the Soviet Union for several years, but rumors of his participation in the German anti-Soviet Idel'-Ural Legion led to the poet's official designation as a "traitor" in 1949. It was only several years later, after copies of Dzhaliil's wartime poetry, collectively entitled the *Moabit Notebooks*, made their way back to Kazan from abroad that authorities in the TASSR were able to convince Moscow that Dzhaliil had not, in fact, been a traitor, but a hero. After Stalin's death in 1953, his poetry was once again allowed to be published, and three years later Dzhaliil was recognized for his "exceptional fortitude and courage shown in the battle with the German-Fascist invaders in the Great Patriotic War" as a Hero of the Soviet Union.²⁴⁹ In 1957, Dzhaliil's *Moabit Notebooks* was awarded the prestigious Lenin Prize for literature and an opera, composed by Nazib Zhiganov and with a libretto based on Dzhaliil's own poetry, premiered in Kazan. In 1966, a monument of Dzhaliil in chains was erected in front of the Kazan Kremlin, replacing an earlier statue of Stalin, and in 1968 a film about the poet produced by *Leninfilm* was released to Soviet audiences. This stunning turn of events, from Dzhaliil's designation as a traitor to his emergence as the singular Tatar hero of the war, reflects the relative power of the Tatar cultural elite in Kazan, as it was Dzhaliil's former colleagues in the Tatar Writers' Union who spearheaded the rehabilitation process. I argue that Dzhaliil's rehabilitation and celebration beginning in 1953 marked a significant step in the process by which Tatars were integrated into pan-

²⁴⁹ TsGAIPDRT, f. 15, op. 37, d. 48, l. 10.

Soviet narratives of heroism and patriotism without the loss of specifically Tatar characteristics.

This chapter is divided into three sections. In the first, I explore Dzhaliil's life up until 1941. His early experience speak clearly both to his devotion to the Soviet cause and also to his deep reverence for his own ethnic heritage, and suggest that for Dzhaliil' and other "national" figures, socialism and nation were deeply intertwined categories. The second section addresses the complex realities of capture, captivity, and collaboration, and compares what is known about Dzhaliil's experience with that of other Soviet citizens (including Tatars and non-Tatars) who lived through, or perished, under similar circumstances. This section grapples with the motivations for captured Soviet citizens, non-Russians in particular, to collaborate with the Germans, and explores the environment in which Dzhaliil' and other Tatar POWs experienced captivity. Finally, the last section turns to the complex questions of Dzhaliil's rehabilitation. The way in which the *Moabit Notebooks*, despite its murky origins, created the foundation for a heroic narrative of Tatar participation in the war forms the basis of the discussion in this section. I utilize the numerous works published after 1953 that celebrated Dzhaliil's life and his wartime activities as evidence of authorities' mythologization of the poet along formal Soviet lines, and address how the poet came to symbolize a specifically Tatar symbol of Soviet heroism.

Musa Dzhaliil' and Tatar Culture Before the War

Musa Dzhaliil' was born on 2 February 1906 in the village of Mustafino in the province of Orenburg, home to a sizable Tatar population. Like many of his future peers

in the Soviet Tatar literary and musical scene, he was part of the Tatar diaspora that covered much of the former Russian Empire but would, during the Soviet period, find a permanent political and cultural capital in Kazan. The village itself was first populated in the eighteenth century as a result of Empress Catherine II's resettlement of some Tatars living along the Volga, Kama, and White rivers, and by the time of Dzhaliil's birth its population was about eight hundred.²⁵⁰ Life in Mustafino was difficult for Dzhaliil's family, and of the five children born to his parents, Mustafa and Rakhima, before Musa, four had died. When Dzhaliil' was five years old, a famine struck the Orenburg region and Mustafa's small trading business failed, leading to his imprisonment in a debtor's prison for three months. Eventually, the family, including Musa's older brother, Ibragim, and several younger siblings, relocated to Orenburg. The family's first residence in Orenburg was in the basement of the Khusainiia madrasa, originally opened in 1891 with a curriculum that championed jadid educational methodologies. The eight-year-old Dzhaliil' began to receive his education at the madrasa in 1914, and along with the school's emphasis on theology Dzhaliil' also became enamored with literature and poetry. Dzhaliil's older brother Ibragim Zalilov²⁵¹ later recalled that, during their first years in Orenburg, Musa was "constantly studying and writing and spending hours at the library."²⁵²

²⁵⁰ Rafael' Mustafin, *Musa Dzhaliil': Zhizn' i tvorchestvo dovoennyi period* (Kazan': Tatarskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1986), 6.

²⁵¹ Musa Dzhaliil's surname was legally recorded as "Zalilov" due to the difficulty in accurately representing the phonetic character of the Tatar letter Ж.

²⁵² Ibragim Zalilov, "Moi mladshii brat," *Vospominaniia o Muse Dzhaliile*, eds. Gazi Kashshaf and Rafael' Mustafin (Kazan': Tatarskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1966), 17.

With the outbreak of the Civil War in 1918, Dzhaliil's circumstances began to be shaped by both the exigencies of war and the rise of Bolshevik ideology. In January 1918, Bolshevik forces took control of Orenburg and began the publication of several new publications, including the Tatar-language *Izvestiia musul'manskogo komissariata Orenburgskoi gubernii*, where Ibragim Zalilov became an editor.²⁵³ In the chaos of the war, Orenburg and its surroundings changed hands several times, with various atrocities committed by both sides. Dzhaliil' recorded one such incident of brutality by the White forces of Aleksandr Dutov in April 1918 in the madrasa's student paper, where he had frequently contributed poetry.²⁵⁴ When the family was forced to flee back to Mustafino in the following year, Dzhaliil' joined his older brother in distributing pro-Bolshevik pamphlets among the villagers. In 1919, Dzhaliil' was able to return to Orenburg and resumed his studies at the madrasa, now converted under Bolshevik auspices into the Tatar Institute for Public Education (TINO).²⁵⁵ That fall, Dzhaliil's first officially-published poem appeared in the local Tatar paper *Kizil yoldiz* (*Red Star*). The poem, "Bäkhettle" ("Happiness"), establishes Dzhaliil's commitment to the Bolshevik cause: "If a bullet lodged in my heart / If death did not let me rise from the ground/ ... I would consider as happiness this death in battle."²⁵⁶

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

²⁵⁵ *Tatarskaia entsiklopediia*, vol. 2 (Kazan: Institut tatarskoi entsiklopedii, 2005), 270.

²⁵⁶ Robert Bikmukhametov, *Musa Dzhaliil': Lichnost', tvorchestvo, zhizn'* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literature, 1989), 36.

Dzhalil's activities in the first few years after 1917 illustrate the extent to which Bolshevik authorities began to shape local cultural activities and organizations in the Volga-Ural region. During the Civil War, Dzhalil' took part in the organization of concerts and other events in Mustafino, inviting individuals from nearby regions to give reports and lectures. Soon, Mustafino had its own Proletarian Children's Club-Theater, named after a similar organization which Dzhalil' had attended during his time in Orenburg.²⁵⁷ Provincial authorities in Orenburg became interested in the youthful energy which had sparked so much activity in the countryside, and in 1920 a gathering of the region's teachers was held in Mustafino. One of the presenters was a fourteen-year-old Musa Dzhalil', who gave a report based on his experience organizing local activities. Dzhalil's participation likely indicates that many of those attending the gathering were ethnic Tatars, and that the Tatar language was one of the main mediums of communication along with Russian in the area during this time. On 17 February of that year, the first Komsomol cell was established in the Mustafino, with Dzhalil' as one of its founding members.²⁵⁸ The famine which struck much of the Volga-Ural region in 1921-1922 had a detrimental effect on rural activities, and in 1921 Dzhalil' himself was hospital-ridden with typhus.²⁵⁹ After recovering, Dzhalil' attempted to return to TINO to restart his haphazard education, but the school's director instead suggested that Dzhalil' go to Kazan, citing the low level of education at TINO and the possibility of better

²⁵⁷ Mustafin, *Dzhalil'*, 36.

²⁵⁸ Bismukhametov, 43. Although ethnic Tatar Party membership was quite low in 1920, Soviet "affirmative action" policies in the 1920s did prioritize the recruitment of titular nationalities to the Komsomol and Communist Party.

²⁵⁹ Mustafin, 49.

resources in Kazan. Other officials, however, wanted to keep Dzhaliġ in Orenburg, where he could be useful as a teacher himself, having received a sufficient Tatar-language education to be employed by Orenburg's Tatar-language schools. It was not until the fall of 1922 that Dzhaliġ was finally able to relocate to Kazan.

Higher educational opportunities in Kazan allowed Dzhaliġ to expand his literary and editorial talents and to establish himself as an important leader of the Tatar literary scene. In the fall of 1923 he entered the Tatar Workers' Department of Kazan Pedagogical Institute as a second-year student, graduating two years later in 1925. Although the availability of Tatar-language textbooks and qualified teachers was relatively low in the republic's schools and higher education institutions (VUZy), the Rabfak actually boasted the best opportunities for native Tatar speakers.²⁶⁰ While at the Rabfak, Dzhaliġ led a small *kruzhok* of literature students who regularly submitted their work to the journal *Yash' irek* (Young Freedom), for which Dzhaliġ served as editor. In addition to his work at *Yash' irek*, Dzhaliġ also worked in and with the editorial offices of several other local newspapers and journals, spending much of his remaining time reading the works of Marx, Engels, and Lenin.²⁶¹ After completing his coursework at the Kazan Rabfak he returned to Orenburg where he served as an instructor for the local Komsomol, advancing to candidate membership in the Party in 1925. Throughout this period, Dzhaliġ's poetry underlined his belief that it was the victory of Soviet socialism that allowed for the celebration of Tatar national heritage. In a 1923 poem dedicated to

²⁶⁰ Guadagnolo, 78.

²⁶¹ Mustafin, 77.

the famous pre-Revolutionary Tatar poet Gabdulla Tukai, Dzhaliġ wrote, “In our homeland, free forever/ the spring wind blows, proclaiming/ the national holiday of friendship and labor/ over the eternal spring of human happiness... Yes, the bright crimson flowers/ full of freshness and light/ will tell about the radiant beauty/ of the reborn homeland of the poet.”²⁶²

In 1927, Dzhaliġ was elected to the Tatar-Bashkir section of the Central Committee of the Komsomol and relocated to Moscow. In addition to serving on various journal editorial boards, Dzhaliġ was accepted into the ethnology department at Moscow University. His studies brought him into contact with other major Soviet literary figures, including Varlam Shalamov. In 1974, Shalamov recalled that, “Musa’s virtues were many. He was a komsomolets, a Tatar, a student at a Russian university, a writer, and a poet!” Dzhaliġ had been a “poet-Tatar, muttering his verses in his native language, entralling the hearts of Moscow’s students.” For Shalamov and others, there seemed to be something exotic about Dzhaliġ, and “like all non-Russians (*natsmen*), [he] was received very warmly in Moscow” by his Russian classmates.²⁶³ The political environment of the late 1920s, however, overrode personal attachments. In 1928, Dzhaliġ signed his name on a student denunciation of Shalamov that was used as justification for the latter’s arrest that year. Russian historian Valerii Esipov has argued that Dzhaliġ, as a komsomol member who had, up until this point, enjoyed a seemingly-

²⁶² M. M. Dzhaliġ, *Saylanma äsärlär: shigir’lär*, ed. L. Shäyekh (Kazan: Tatarstan kitap näshriyatı, 2014), 10.

²⁶³ Varlam Shalamov, “Student Musa Zaliġov,” *Iunost’* no. 2, 1974. Cited on the Varlam Shalamov online archive, accessed 9 June, 2019, <http://shalamov.ru/library/26/8.html>.

friendly relationship with Shalmov, was likely pressured into this action.²⁶⁴ Nevertheless, the incident underscores the politicization of everyday life, of the workplace, and of friendships, all of which was scrubbed out of official narratives constructed later. It is important to note that Dzhaliġ, later depicted as either a loyal Stalinist or as a loyal Soviet patriot (after de-Stalinization), arguably “spoke Bolshevik” as both a matter of faith and as a matter of practicality and necessity.²⁶⁵

After his graduation in 1931, Dzhaliġ became head of the literature and art department of the journal *Kommunist* and served as a secretary for the Moscow Association of Proletarian Writers.²⁶⁶ From the mid to late 1930s, Dzhaliġ began steady collaboration with other leading members of the Soviet Tatar cultural scene. In 1935, the poet was selected as the head of the Literary Section at the Tatar Opera Studio at Moscow State Conservatory, where he worked with Nazib Zhiganov and others to write librettos and other materials. After the Tatar Opera Studio was discontinued in 1938, Dzhaliġ again returned to Kazan, where he took over as the head of the Literary Section of the Tatar State Theater of Opera and Ballet. There he authored the libretto for Nazib Zhiganov’s first opera, *Altynchech* (tat. *Altınchäch*), and supervised the activities of other writers at the theater.²⁶⁷ Simultaneously, he was an executive secretary on the board of the Tatar Writers’ Union, the membership of which grew from 25 to 45 during his tenure.

²⁶⁴ Valerii Esipov, *Shalamov* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 2012), 82.

²⁶⁵ See Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 198-237.

²⁶⁶ “15 fevralia 1906 goda rodilsia Musa Dzhaliġ”, *Orenburgskii krai: Liudi, Daty, Sobytiia, Pamiatniki bylogo*, accessed 15 February, 2019, <https://orenlib.ru/kray/calendar/a-1629.html>.

²⁶⁷ Shaginur Mostafin and Akhat Mushinskii, eds., *Tatarstannıng frontovik yazuchıları* (Kazan: Tatarstan kitap nāshriyatı, 2016), 17.

In this capacity Dzhaliil' petitioned for increasing the staff at the TASSR's main literary journal, "Sovet Adabiyati" and for allocating housing to Kazan-based writers. In 1940, Dzhaliil' also played a major role in the organization of the "Small Decade" of Tatar Literature and Art, held in Moscow in preparation of a much larger festival, originally scheduled for 1941 but postponed until 1957. By this time, Dzhaliil' split his duties between a number of state and party organizations, while also continuing to pursue writing his own poetry.

Dzhaliil's rise to cultural prominence from Mustafino to Kazan and Moscow is indicative of the way in which the new Soviet state provided opportunities for upward social mobility. The combination of a massive increase in state-funded cultural and educational institutions across the country and the newfound ideological impetus behind widespread cultural change were instrumental in the lives of Dzhaliil' and many of his compatriots. At the same time, the destruction of the pre-existing Tatar cultural elite in the 1920s and 1930s necessitated the rise of a new Tatar intelligentsia, of which Dzhaliil' became an important leader. It thus seems fair to assert that Dzhaliil's life possibilities, like that of his colleague Nazib Zhiganov, were a direct consequence of the goals and practices of the Soviet government, both constructive and destructive. Dzhaliil's prominence not only in Kazan but in Moscow as well suggests that the promotion of "national cadres" was not limited to the republics but was part of a widespread phenomenon in which members of the new Soviet elite shifted between the center and periphery at various stages of their careers. This new Tatar cultural elite which Dzhaliil' embodied seemingly embraced Soviet authority while also retaining a specifically "national" outlook on their activities and goals. As we will see, however, the war

eventually complicated this straightforward understanding of the new Soviet Tatar intelligentsia.

One of the areas in which Dzhaliil's work lent itself directly to explicitly-defined national development was in the field of music. In an article written in 1975, composer Nazib Zhiganov recalled that, "in Dzhaliil', I saw a person who was personally invested in the birth of Tatar opera," and whose dedication went beyond poetry but also to "literature and art in general."²⁶⁸ According to Zhiganov, the two first met in Moscow when Dzhaliil' was soliciting a composer to write an opera based on his then-poem, *Altynchech*. As Zhiganov notes, "in the 1930s the national republics still did not have their own composers who were capable of mastering the most difficult of theatrical genres, the opera."²⁶⁹ Instead, the first attempt at composing this opera was made by the ethnic Russian B. V. Asaf'ev, who had recently composed the music for the balet *Bakhchisaraiskii fontan*, based on Pushkin's poem of the same name. But Dzhaliil' was not completely happy with Asaf'ev's music, and the opera was rejected from the Tatar State Theater of Opera and Ballet's repertoire. Instead, Dzhaliil' turned to Zhiganov in 1938 and, after putting aside various creative differences, the two began collaborating on a new version of *Altynchech*.²⁷⁰

Altynchech is broadly reflective of the way in which Soviet Tatar cultural figures attempted to identify and utilize a usable past. The opera focuses on the figure of Dzhik,

²⁶⁸ Nazib Zhiganov, "Sviashchennye uzy druzhby (vospominania o Muse Dzhaliile)", *Nazib Zhiganov: stat'i, vospominaniia, dokumenty* vol. 1, 23.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 24-25.

a Tatar child who survives the murder by the Mongol Khans of all his male relatives. Twenty years later, Dzhik saves the beautiful Altynchech (a golden-haired girl) from the Khan's soldiers, and after learning of his past, he challenges the Khan to a duel. Through the use of a magical feather, Altynchech is able to assist Dzhik and the combined forces of Dzhik and his warriors defeat and capture the Khan. Like that of other major cultural productions from the late 1930s and into the 1940s, the central theme of *Altynchech* is that of patriotism. Dzhilil' himself argued, in an article entitled "V bor'be za vysokoe kachestvo" in the Tatar literary journal *Sovet äbäbiyäti* in 1941, "when we, Soviet writers, write on historical topics... we must try to take a historical perspective and find the threads which connected the past with the present."²⁷¹ In the case of *Altynchech*, the connection between past and present lay with, in the words of one of Dzhilil's biographers, "the struggle of the people for happiness in different epochs," from that of the resistance of the ancient Tatars against the Mongol Khans to the struggle of Soviet peoples against the tyranny of the Russian tsar during the 1917 Revolution.²⁷²

The opera, which focuses on popular resistance in the Volga-Ural region to the recently-arrived Golden Horde in the 13th-14th centuries, identifies Tatar heritage with the survivors of the Volga Bulgar civilization, but combines a vaguely-defined history with folk elements. Dzhilil' himself argued the opera "binds together the folk tale and history, real events and fantasy" because "real life is always interacting with fantastical

²⁷¹ Quoted in Bikmukhametov, *Musa Dzhilil'*, 136.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 137.

elements.”²⁷³ Ultimately, the purpose of the opera was not an attempt to accurately reflect Tatar historical heritage, but rather to create a political and ideological object which envisions a Tatar history defined by resistance to oppression. *Altynchech* thereby presents a narrative which is both linked to the specificities of Tatar history and is generally representative of themes prevalent in other, non-Tatar historical epics of the period. In this sense, *Altynchech* is both a Tatar and an all-Soviet narrative in which the specific heroism of the opera’s primary character, Dzhik, is combined with the collective pride of the community, and even the inherent power of the motherland through the magic feather, to create an unstoppable historical force. As Robert Bikmukhametov argues, the opera presents a narrative of “national development” which has a single, logical outcome – “unity and friendship” among all peoples.²⁷⁴

The national is thus contextualized within a broader understanding of an international Soviet mosaic. Through their long collaboration, Zhiganov saw Dzhilil’ as someone who “understood that Tatar music should be built up from its own foundations, utilizing all the best [features] created by world musical culture.”²⁷⁵ If Tatar culture could benefit from the institutionalization of a Soviet Writers’ Union, or the introduction of Western musical notation, or the adoption of socialist realist literary parameters, then such tools should be adopted. Like Zhiganov himself, Dzhilil’ believed that strict segregation between national cultures “could long suspend the development of

²⁷³ M. Dzhilil’, “Tvorcheskaia druzhba,” *Kizil Tatarstan* 20 June, 1941, cited in Bikmukhametov, 138.

²⁷⁴ Bikmukhametov, 141.

²⁷⁵ Zhiganov, “Sviashchennye”, 25.

professional Tatar music” by restricting the adoption of new forms and features from other musical heritages.²⁷⁶ Dzhaliil’s work seemed to reflect these values. One of Dzhaliil’s major tasks as a Soviet literary functionary was the translation of major Russian, Soviet, and foreign works into the Tatar language. Among those figures translated by Dzhaliil’ were the “national bards” Shota Rustaveli, Aleksandr Pushkin, and Taras Shevchenko.²⁷⁷ In the 9 March 1939 edition of the newspaper *Krasnaia Tataria*, Dzhaliil’ wrote that “we, contemporary Soviet Tatar writers, can learn much from Shevchenko. If T. Shevchenko could write genius works about peoples’ martyrs, then we should, learning from his national character and skill, be able to write just as gifted works about the victorious *narod* and their great leader-creators.”²⁷⁸ Dzhaliil’ thus placed his work, and that of his peers, within a broader internationalist mosaic of all Soviet peoples which at once reified ethnic particularities and used distinctiveness as a pathway towards collective achievement. Of course, it is important to keep in mind that neither Dzhaliil’ or Zhiganov had the freedom to *not* pursue these activities; the introduction of Soviet forms to Tatar culture was not optional, but mandated.

Throughout the 1930s and early 1940s, Soviet nationalities policy prioritized both the resurrection of ethnic cultural figures and the search for ideologically-acceptable national narratives. Both of these trends, in which Dzhaliil’s work as both editor and writer made him an important figure, necessitated a backwards-looking approach which

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Sh. Kh. Khammatov, *Musa Dzhaliil’: Soldat partii* (Kazan’: Tatarskoe knizhnoe izdatel’stvo, 1984), 67.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 68.

focused on the past as a foundation or model for the socialist future.²⁷⁹ And yet Tatar cultural figures, reliant as they were on traditions and narratives from the pre-Revolutionary past, sought desperately to further develop their national culture within Soviet confines. Discussions in Party committees questioned why more creative work did not accurately reflect the lives of factory workers, kolkhoz farmers, and other laborers.

Although the outbreak of the Great Patriotic War allowed Dzhaliil' to compose new poems directly related to the wartime plight of Soviet citizens, he hoped to commemorate the war in a more comprehensive way. In 1942, in one of the last letters he wrote before his capture by the Germans, Dzhaliil' reached out to his colleague Nazib Zhiganov, telling the composer that he had "begun to write a libretto for a single-act opera... about the Patriotic War."²⁸⁰ Dzhaliil' was never able to complete this project. Ultimately, the opera that he had hoped to write in commemoration of his fellow soldiers would appear in a different form. Significantly, Dzhaliil's own words, in the form of the clandestinely-written *Moabit Notebooks*, would even serve as the basis for the opera's libretto. It was through these poems and through the details of his wartime survival that Dzhaliil' himself would become immortalized as the singular Tatar symbol of the war. Dzhaliil's mythologization, however, rested on a clear interpretation of the hazy facts of his wartime imprisonment.

²⁷⁹ The literary prominence of Pushkin, Rustaveli, and Shevchenko may suggest this was the case for other Soviet ethnicities as well.

²⁸⁰ Musa Dzhaliil', "Letter to N. G. Zhiganov, 9 March 1942," *Nazib Zhiganov*, vol. 2, 26.

The Great Patriotic War and the Question of Tatar Collaboration

The outbreak of the Great Patriotic War had an immediate effect on the Tatar cultural scene and on Dzhaliil' himself. In the months leading up to the German invasion, Tatar cultural figures had been hard at work organizing the Decade of Tatar Art and Literature which was to take place later that year.²⁸¹ The invasion of 22 June led that festival to be postponed for 16 years, but other local events, such as the premiere of *Altinchäch* in Kazan, were performed as scheduled or with only limited delays. The day after the invasion, Dzhaliil' volunteered for service in the Red Army, but due to his age he was told to wait for mobilization orders.²⁸² On 13 July, Dzhaliil' was mobilized and sent to an eight-month course for the training of political officials, in line with his request that he would be most useful serving in such a role.²⁸³ Some of Dzhaliil's fellow service members were surprised at Dzhaliil's presence in the course, and even circulated a petition to demobilize him due to his "role in Tatar literature."²⁸⁴ Dzhaliil' was opposed to the petition and maintained that his place was with the army. Joining Dzhaliil' were approximately one-fourth of all Soviet writers, as well as nearly three-fourths of members of the Tatar Writers organization. Because Kazan's newspapers did not have their own war correspondents, nearly all Tatar writers who served in the war did so as privates or

²⁸¹ Bikmukhametov, *Musa Dzhaliil'*, 149. The festival eventually took place in 1957.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 150-51.

²⁸³ Musa Dzhaliil', *Krasnaia romashka*, 438. Cited in Khammatov, *Soldat partii*, 89.

²⁸⁴ *Sotialistik Tatarstan*, 13 February 1966. Cited in Khammatov, *Soldat partii*, 90.

non-commissioned officers, with only a small number working as journalists for official military newspapers.²⁸⁵

The war soon became the defining feature of Soviet life, and its prominence was immediately reflected in Dzhaliil's work. A few weeks before his mobilization in late June 1941, Dzhaliil' worked with several colleagues to publish a short collection of various poems and other works entitled *Watan öchen (For the Homeland)*, which included the poem "Against the Enemy," written on 23 June. The poem described the enemy in terms which would become ingrained in the minds of all Soviet citizens: "Evil Hitler, the blood-thirsty beast, drags his dirty paws now towards us. He wants our land to wither, to make our free people into slaves, He wants to the riches of our country pilfered by a gang of fascist dogs."²⁸⁶ In August, Dzhaliil' wrote "The Oath of the Artilleryman," lamenting that "you have been long silent, steel guns, staring at the border, on guard quietly." Now, however, "the order has been given and the time has come for my angry soul to voice all its hate," for Hitler to be answered "with one language – that of the gun."²⁸⁷ The opening up of artillery fire and the freedom to express hatred identified in Dzhaliil's poems metaphorically mirrored the changes which would occur in Soviet society, especially in the field of culture, during the period of the war.²⁸⁸ For Dzhaliil',

²⁸⁵ Bikmukhametov, 151.

²⁸⁶ Musa Dzhaliil', *Moabitskaia tetrad': Stikhotvoreniia* translated from Tatar (Moscow, Russia: Komsomol'skaia Pravda, 2015), 95.

²⁸⁷ M. M. Dzhaliil', *Saylanma äsäsär*, 144.

²⁸⁸ Richard Stites, ed., *Culture and Entertainment in Wartime Russia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 5.

the battle against Nazi Germany became the great challenge of his life, one which he would face both through his poetry and with arms. On 17 September he wrote to his colleague Gazi Kashshaf that “despite the fact that I was never in the army and have no experience, I have tried to master and cope with military tasks... [I have] tempered myself for upcoming battles.”²⁸⁹

In articulating war support, Dzhaliil’ consciously incorporated his background and allowed himself to speak as the representative of ethnic Tatars in the multinational Soviet war effort. In February 1942, Dzhaliil’ penned poem in support of Soviet Ukraine, telling Ukrainians “how could you not believe that your brothers could come to help? They have come to their sister, languishing of her wounds, with a single will. And among them, Ukraine, is your reliable brother Tatarstan.”²⁹⁰ In this poem, entitled “Brotherhood,” Dzhaliil’'s plea to Ukrainians seems to suggest something of disappointment, perhaps reflecting an awareness of defeatism among Soviet citizens and Ukrainians in particular.²⁹¹ Whereas Soviet newspapers used euphemisms to describe the disastrous events on 1941 and 1942, it appears that Dzhaliil’'s poetry offered a more visceral and emotional window on the war.²⁹² Moreover, the poem reflect’s Dzhaliil’'s tendency to speak on behalf of his fellow Tatars as well as for Tatarstan itself.

²⁸⁹ Musa Dzhaliil’, *Krasnaia romashka*, 438. Cited in Khammatov, *Soldat partii*, 89. These letters, which appear in Russian in Khammatov’s text, were presumably originally written in Tatar.

²⁹⁰ Dzhaliil’, *Krasnaia romashka*, 224. Cited in Khammatov, *Soldat partii*, 138.

²⁹¹ Mark Edele, “‘What Are We Fighting for?’ Loyalty in the Soviet War Effort, 1941-1945”, *International Labor and Working Class History*, no. 84 (Fall 2013), 249.

²⁹² Katharine Hodgson argues that the war allowed poets “to stray into previously forbidden territory for the sake of writing effective poetry,” and, as such, wartime poetry was more able to express anguish,

After being sent to the front near Leningrad in early 1942, Dzhaliil' requested that he be assigned to the Tatar-Bashkir section of the Red Army's Political Department (*GlavPUR*) in the area, arguing that being stationed with fellow Tatars would be the best use of his abilities.²⁹³ He wrote to his colleague Gazi Kashshaf in Kazan on 25 March 1942 that "today I discovered that a Tatar-Bashkir section is fighting on our front... and I keep hoping to end up there."²⁹⁴ He hoped that support from his colleagues in Kazan might allow him to be transferred and serve as a war correspondent for *Kizil Tatarstan* in that unit. He wrote to Kashshaf that "it's insulting that my countrymen (*zemliaki*) are here so close, working miracles, destroying these fascist bastards, and I, a native poet, as well as a journalist, am not with them and must be silent about their courageous victories."²⁹⁵ A letter ordering Dzhaliil's transfer to the Tatar-Bashkir unit came too late. By April, Dzhaliil's unit and numerous others had now become almost completely surrounded by German forces. Devoted as he was to service in defense of his Soviet motherland, Dzhaliil' nevertheless sought to fight alongside his "own" people. The question was whether or not this desire found a new outlet through wartime collaboration after his capture.

pain, defeat, and other issues typically hidden from socialist realist art both before and after the war. See Katharine Hodgson, *Written with the Bayonet: Soviet Russian Poetry of World War Two* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1996).

²⁹³ Bikmukhametov, 159.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 160.

²⁹⁵ Dzhaliil', *Krasnaia romashka*, 224. Cited in Bikmukhametov, *Musa Dzhaliil'*, 161.

Over the course of the war, more than five million Soviet soldiers and officers became German prisoners. The speed of the German advance, as well as the limited knowledge of how the Germans would treat both prisoners and civilians in occupied territories, were significant factors in the relatively large number of surrendering Soviet troops in the first year of the war. Many Soviet soldiers, most of whom had been drafted, were simply disinterested in continuing the fighting and decided to wait out the end of the war in internment. In light of this, Soviet propaganda painted POWs as treasonous and implored Soviet troops to die rather than to surrender. In the aftermath of the war, almost a third of all repatriated Soviet POWs were arrested and sent to the gulag.²⁹⁶ POWs, however, quickly found out that in surrendering they had traded one group of hardships for another. Conditions for Soviet POWs in German captivity were exceedingly harsh.²⁹⁷ From July 1941 to Spring 1942 between 1.5-2 million captured Soviet soldiers died of starvation, disease, or were executed.²⁹⁸ The conditions which Soviet POWs faced in German camps were deliberate and a clear expression of Nazi's racialized attitude towards the Soviet Union. In contrast, captured soldiers from the Western Allies were interned in relative comfort, with treatment in line with the standards of the Geneva Conventions, which Stalin had refused to sign. As Soviet soldiers became aware of

²⁹⁶ See Pavel Polian, "The Internment of Returning Soviet Prisoners of War after 1945," in *Prisoners of War, Prisoners of Peace: Captivity, Homecoming, and Memory in World War II*, eds. Bob Moore and Barbara Hatley-Broad (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 123-140. See also Mark R. Elliot, *Pawns of Yalta: Soviet Refugees and America's Role in Their Repatriation* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 190-216.

²⁹⁷ For an excellent example of a first-hand account of German POW camps, see S. Golubkov, *V fashistskom lagere smerti: vospominaniia byvshevo voennoplennogo* (Smolensk: Smolenskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1963).

²⁹⁸ Aron Shneer, *Plen, vol. 1* (Jerusalem: Noi, 2003), 6.

German atrocities committed against both civilians and soldiers, the overall level of mass surrenders lessened, and many Soviet soldiers who became isolated from the rest of the Red Army joined partisan groups rather than lay down their arms.

However, Germans' harsh treatment of Soviet POWs also fed a second phenomenon: collaboration. By the war's end, almost 800,000 Soviet POWs collaborated in some way with the Nazi military, for reasons as diverse as ideological sympathy for the Nazi effort to a simple desire to survive the almost certain death by starvation or exhaustion that awaited them in German POW camps.²⁹⁹ A small but significant number of defectors, primarily professionals born before the Revolution, expressed more overtly-political reasons for their actions.³⁰⁰ Others may have simply assumed that their status as prisoners would be "considered a failure" and that they would be treated as traitors if they ever returned to the Soviet Union, rendering the distinction between active collaboration and passive captivity irrelevant.³⁰¹ Prominent, high-ranking collaborators such as Andrei Vlasov tended to couch their activities in nationalistic language, and the perception that anti-Soviet collaborationist forces were something of a force for national-liberation was especially popular among émigré communities and historians both during and after the war.

Nazi attitudes towards captured Soviet citizens varied widely. Those military and SS officers who were more inclined to view Soviets as *untermensch* tended to forbid or

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁰⁰ Mark Edele, *Stalin's Defectors: How Red Army Soldiers became Hitler's Collaborators, 1941-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 113-14.

³⁰¹ Andreyev, 37.

criticize efforts to either integrate POWs into the existing German military structure or to arm them as auxiliary forces. Hitler himself was the biggest opponent of enlisting Soviet prisoners, whereas Baltic German Nazis were most in favor of doing so. As the German military situation grew worse, there was increased pressure to incorporate these POWs into some sort of collaborationist force. From a purely pragmatic point of view, assisting the ROA and other anti-Soviet forces made sense, but the Nazis found it difficult to give significant material or ideological support to primarily-Slavic forces. On the other hand, Hitler and the Wehrmacht believed that Soviet Muslims, motivated by their religion, were likely to be valuable allies on the Eastern Front.³⁰² This allowed for a situation in which German POW camps became valuable sites for recruiting potential collaborators. By late 1942, the Nazis organized several so-called Eastern or National Legions made up of the various non-Slavic populations of the Soviet Union. These units became sites in which the nurturing and amplification of anti-Soviet ideologies, principally through the use of native-language propaganda, became a vital weapon of war.

Gaian Akhmatshin (tat. Gayan Äkhmätshin), a Tatar veteran whose memoir was published in Kazan in 2005, provides a unique perspective into the experience of captivity and collaboration among Tatar POWs.³⁰³ Akhmatshin was born in 1923 to a peasant family in the village of Chulla in the Kukmara region of the Tatar Republic. His father was a rural laborer, and enlisted his young sons in some of his jobs, such as felling trees. Akhmatshin's mother was a teacher at the local mekteb, as well as a devout

³⁰² David Motadel, *Islam and Nazi Germany's War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 222.

³⁰³ Gayan Äkhmätshin, *Gomerem mizgelläre* (Kazan: Idel-Press, 2005).

Muslim who sewed Islamic prayers into her son's uniform when he went off to the front. By the age of 15, Akhmatshin had also left his home village for a factory school in Zelenodol'sk (tat. Yashel Üzän) before ending up at a factory in the village of Ianil' (tat. Yanil').³⁰⁴ Akhmatshin continued to work at the factory after the outbreak of the war until early 1942, when he was mobilized and sent to a war college near Kostroma. On the way he noted, like Dzhaliil' had, that "there were none of my countrymen with me," although two Tatars did greet him at the college, warning him of the school's harsh discipline and suggesting he would do better to drop out.³⁰⁵ Akhmatshin did, in fact, fail the college's exam, which included math, geography, and a Russian language dictation. However, instead of being released, Akhmatshin was simply sent to a different boot camp, this one near Astrakhan. Soon, Akhmatshin was sent to the Stalingrad front, where he noted that soldiers' conditions were quite harsh, including a lack of food and weapons. In mid-1942, he was captured as part of an attempted advance near Voronezh.

Akhmatshin's memoir emphasizes the distinct experiences of capture and captivity for different ethnic groups due to both divergent German policy and the attitudes of prisoners themselves. In the first major POW camp Akhmatshin was interned in, located near the town of Millerovo not far from Rostov, Akhmetshin notes that "in the camp I met up with other people from my own region," all of which were Tatars.³⁰⁶ Very

³⁰⁴ Ibid., 23-26

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 28. Akhmatshin says literally "those near me there are none (tat. yaktashlar yuk)," using a term that generally refers to those from the same area where one is from. Noting the similarity in the sentiment between Akhmatshin's statement and that of Dzhaliil' reported by Bikmukhametov, I have elected to translate both with "countrymen," noting a specifically ethnic connotation of the term in these cases.

³⁰⁶ Ibid., 37.

soon, however, the group was divided by German guards, who grouped up prisoners not only by ethnicity but also by rank and occupation, sending one of Akhmatshin's Tatar comrades to join a group of peasants while sending Akhmatshin himself and another Tatar to a factory worker unit. Already at Millerovo, Akhmatshin heard rumors that minorities were being reintegrated into the German military. The segregation of Soviet ethnicities caused some tensions among the prisoners. Akhmatshin recalled an incident in which, during a conversation with a fellow Tatar, a nearby Russian alerted the guards, claiming 'there are some Tatars here that are trying to escape!'"³⁰⁷ Indeed, throughout his discussion of the war, Akhmatshin expresses a general suspicion and distrust of Russians and frequently associates them with complicating his own hopes of escape. Not all Russians received this treatment, however. In Millerovo Akhmatshin befriended a Russian from Kuibyshev, Vladimir Shubanov, who he refers to as his "countryman."³⁰⁸ The rationale for the relative warmth of Akhmatshin's relationship with this particular Russian, was that Shubanov, being from a nearby region, had encountered Tatars previously and likely regarded them with more respect than did other Russians.

Other Tatars held distinctly more pointed attitudes towards Russians and, by extension, the Soviet Union as a whole. Ismail Akhmedov, an ethnic Tatar born in Orsk in 1904, had grown up a supporter of the Bolsheviks and joined the Komsomol after the Revolution. Relocating to Soviet Central Asia in his teenage years, Akhmedov cited "Lenin's promises... of national minorities for self-determination" as the main reason for

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 40.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 41.

interest in communist ideology, although by the time he was admitted as a full-member of the Party in 1921 he “did not understand even the ABC’s of communism.”³⁰⁹

Akhmedov traces his own radicalization against the Soviet system to meetings with various Turkish instructors and students at education institutions in the Uzbek SSR.

Whether or not, however, Akhmedov actually felt that the Turks were his “own people” at the time, and not just when he was composing his memoirs after emigrating abroad, is questionable.³¹⁰ What seems more likely was that Akhmedov began to have serious doubts about the regime after he had become a member of Soviet military intelligence and become aware of the liquidation of Central Asian and Caucasian peasants that had “resisted Sovietization and collectivization.” Akhmedov noted with particular anger that repression in the Azerbaijani SSR had been carried out in part by a “so-called Azerbaidzhan Rifle Division, actually made up not of local people, but of such non-Turkic elements as Ukrainians, [and] Russian draftees from Siberia.”³¹¹ For Akhmedov, who eventually used an intelligence assignment in Istanbul to successfully defect to the United States, the repressive features of the Soviet state took on a decidedly-Slavic hue.

Other eventual POWs harbored eventually more virulent, racist attitudes towards the Soviet state and used collaboration as means to acting on these beliefs.

Anthropologist Irina Levin has explored the case of a self-described Turk of Azerbaijani

³⁰⁹ Ismail Akhmedov, *In and out of Stalin’s GRU: A Tatar’s Escape from Red Army Intelligence* (Frederick, Maryland: University Publications of America, Inc., 1984), 34-35.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 36.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, 80.

heritage who collaborated with the German military.³¹² Like Akhmedov, Teymur Ateşli, born in 1922 in Baku, held a strong sense of himself as a Turk first and a Soviet citizen only much later. Drafted soon after the Nazi invasion, Ateşli was eventually captured and then volunteered to join the Nazi military, later becoming an SS officer. At the end of the war, Ateşli defected to Turkey, and beginning in 1956 his life story began appearing in the Turkish newspaper *Hürriyet*. Over the 45-day series, Ateşli characterized himself as a traitor-hero, portraying his treason against the Soviet state as a heroic act on behalf of the Turkish people. Ateşli further suggested that he had believed that the Nazis were going to free the Turkic peoples of the Soviet Union from Russian oppression. Such an opinion as also shared by Emrulla Agi, an ethnic Tatar whose family had fled the Russian Empire during the Revolution and settled in Harbin, China. In his memoir, published in Kazan in 2003, Agi associates himself with those members of the Tatar diaspora who believed that Nazi victory would come “without any particular difficulty” because the Nazis promised national self-determination for the captive Soviet nationalities.³¹³ For members of the diaspora like Agi, the dream of a truly independent Tatar nation, or a larger conglomeration of all of the Soviet Union’s Turkic-Muslim peoples, always stood in opposition to existing Soviet power.

Rather than suggesting that collaboration was a deliberate action taken against the Soviet Union, Akhmatshin’s memoir illuminates how Soviet rhetoric betrayed the

³¹² Irina Levin, “Teymur Atesli: A Traitor-Hero for the Cold-War Era,” *All the Russias Blog, NYU Jordan Center*, last updated 13 March, 2018, http://jordanrussiacycenter.org/news/teymur-atesli-traitor-hero-cold-war-era/#.W_SKp2ZIDIV.

³¹³ Emrulla Agi, *Zhizn’ odnogo cheloveka* (Kazan: Magarif, 2003), 95.

country's POWs from the moment of their capture or surrender. Describing the column of POWs of which he was a part not long after his initial capture, he recalled that "we had already sold our soldiers and ended up on the side of the enemy... 'Our father' Stalin rejected us as 'traitors' and 'sell-outs' and sold out death warrants."³¹⁴ After having been relocated to a POW camp in Germany that also housed Western POWs, a Frenchman asked Akhmatshin, "'Why hasn't Stalin helped you?'" Recalling this incident, Akhmatshin remarks that "we were among the more than seven million prisoners who had [supposedly] sold out their country... how many times were we punished after returning, and told 'you served the Germans.'"³¹⁵ Under such circumstances, it becomes an open question whether or not some Soviet POWs, later if not at the time, felt that they had no country to betray. While serving in the Idel-Ural Legion, Akhmatshin noted that several other Tatar collaborators had chosen pseudonyms to disguise their identities. The reason for these double-names, as explained by Akhmatshin's fellow legionnaires, was that the families of known prisoners and collaborators were being rounded up by the NKVD and being sent to Siberia. In such a situation, where the political consequences of captivity were little or no different than the (perceived) consequences of collaboration, the decision to collaborate and receive potential benefits from German captors should not always be viewed as a clear political or ideological choice.

Indeed, in Akhmatshin's account, there seems to be little choice at all. In January 1943, Akhmatshin was relocated to a camp at Demblin, Poland, where again the prisoners

³¹⁴ Äkhmätshin, 36.

³¹⁵ Ibid., 44.

were separated according to various occupational and ethnic categories. It was in Demblin where Akhmatshin was first placed in a barracks for the Idel-Ural Legion, although he does not indicate any choice in the assignment on his part. He did, however, “feel stronger” after a few days with the Legion, citing its much-improved rations over that of ordinary POWs. Akhmatshin recalled being told by the German commander of the Legion, a man he identifies as Von Zekendorf, that the legionnaires will no longer be treated as ordinary prisoners, but that, if they attempted to flee, they “would be sent to a camp with a much stricter regime.” Akhmatshin decided to stay in the Legion, although he suggests that his heart was not in it. Despite the fact that the legionnaires were fed the same as German soldiers, clothed in official uniforms, and treated rather well, Akhmatshin described himself and his colleagues as “sheep in wolves’ clothing,” playing the part of collaborators and nothing more.³¹⁶ Thus, while Akhmatshin does not recall making any sort of decision to join the Legion, his memoir does indicate that there was a choice to remain in it – a choice that Akhmatshin seems to have made primarily on the basis of self-preservation.

The Legion became a site for the political indoctrination of Soviet POWs. According to Akhmatshin, German commanders told the legionnaires that their task was to “build an Idel-Ural State” like the one that had been envisioned by Tatar nationalists during and after the 1917 Revolution. But the dream of future state-building was accompanied, in the present, with the celebration of Tatar culture. Legionnaires performed Tatar songs on the radio, writers were tasked with developing the Legion’s

³¹⁶ Ibid., 45-46.

own newspapers and pamphlets, and artists painted portraits of important Tatar cultural and political leaders. Several of those Tatar leaders included anti-Soviet Tatar nationalists or national communists, such as Tatar émigrés Gaiaz Iskhaki and Shafi Almas (tat. Shäfi Almaz, also known as Gabdrakhman Shäfiyev), Tatar religious leader Shikhabetdin Mardzhani, and Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev.³¹⁷ It is unclear whether or not the desire to celebrate these Tatar figures came from Soviet POWs or from Tatar émigrés in German who made up a significant portion of the Legion's political and military leadership. What does seem clear from Akhmatshin's memoir, however, is that émigré leaders did try and galvanize legionnaires on nationalist grounds. After the defection of a group of legionnaires to the partisans near Smolensk, Akhmatshin recalled a fiery speech by one of the major leaders of the Legion, Shafi Almas. Almas said that the defectors "committed crimes against their nation," and had "become Russians." He further implored the legionnaires to recall that he had "saved [them] from the camps" and from starvation, a claim which Akhmatshin admits is true.³¹⁸ The Legion was a complicated vessel for the preservation and radicalization of Tatar culture in the face of apocalyptic war and the threat of Russification, but whether or not the majority of legionnaires saw it that way remains an open question.³¹⁹

³¹⁷ Ibid., 46-47.

³¹⁸ Ibid., 49.

³¹⁹ For another account of the Idel-Ural Legion, see Valerii Aleksin, "'Idel'-Ural'. Chuvashi i tatory v logove natsistov," *Gorod.tomsk.ru: gorodskaiia sotsialnaia set'*, last updated 30 November, 2008, <http://gorod.tomsk.ru/index-1228044196.php>. David Motadel in fact argues that Volga Tatars were among the least loyal of Soviet Muslim groups recruited by the Nazis, in part because of the relatively higher proportion of Tatar soldiers who were unbelievers. See Motadel, 304-305.

The Case for Dzhaliil' as Collaborator and the Rationale for his Rehabilitation

As the Second Shock Army was surrounded and destroyed in Spring 1942, Dzhaliil's wartime poetry continued to appear in publications in Kazan. His poems "Bridge," "Spring," and "Victory (Etude)," appeared in the Kazan newspaper *Kyzyl Tatarstan* on 9 April, 6 May, and 4 June, respectively.³²⁰ Both "Bridge" and "Victory (Etude)" were recent compositions, the first concerning Soviet partisans and the second imagining a woman hugging a soldier as Soviet tanks and planes rush forward in triumph.³²¹ In a letter dated 3 June 1942, Dzhaliil' wrote to his friend Gazi Kashshaf that "the Patriotic War really changed things and helped elevate my work, don't you think? (This is even considering the fact that, on the front, work conditions are even worse!)"³²² In early 1943, a volume which included much of Dzhaliil's wartime poetry, entitled *The Oath of the Artilleryman* (and including the eponymous poem) was released in the TASSR, with a Russian translation appearing the following year.³²³ Gazi Kashshaf, in a review of the volume that appeared in the main Tatar literary journal *Sovet ababiiaty* in January 1943, wrote that "[Dzhaliil's] patriotism, along with his feeling of pride in his native people, his native country, resounds in a powerful and terrible hatred of the

³²⁰ Khammatov, 132.

³²¹ "Musa Dzhaliil', Most", *Leningrad, Blokada, Podvig*, accessed 28 March, 2019, <http://blokada.otrok.ru/poetry/dzhaliil5.htm> ; "Victory (Etude)" – Dzhaliil', *Moabitskaia tetrad'* (Moscow: Komsomol'skaia Pravda, 2015), 113.

³²² Dzhaliil', *Krasnaia romashka*, 465. Cited in Khammatov, 132.

³²³ Rafael' Mustafin, "Biografiia M. Dzhaliilia", *Natsional'naia biblioteka respubliki Tatarstan*, accessed 19 March, 2019, http://kitaphane.tatarstan.ru/jal_1.htm.

enemy.”³²⁴ The reception among Dzhaliil’s peers to *The Oath of the Artilleryman* underscores the deep respect and appreciation he commanded during the remainder of the war.

The exact circumstances by which the Soviet government came to the decision to blacklist Dzhaliil’ are unclear. Through at least mid-1947, Dzhaliil’s poetry remained in print in both the original Tatar and in translation throughout the Soviet Union. Around this time, however, the NKVD opened an official investigation into Dzhaliil’s status, likely due to a combination of testimony from other Soviet POWs who had seen or interacted with the Dzhaliil’ and a fuller understanding, through the acquisition of German records in Berlin, that the Nazis had specifically recruited ethnic Tatars in the Idel’-Ural Legion. Although the entire episode is absent from Soviet-era accounts of Dzhaliil’s life, post-Soviet sources suggest that Dzhaliil’s wife, Amina, was herself interrogated in the Lubyanka sometime in 1947. According, from mid-1947 on, publication of Dzhaliil’s poems was forbidden, and when songs featuring lyrics he had authored were played on the radio or in concert, the words were labeled “folk” lyrics.³²⁵ One of Dzhaliil’s Soviet-era biographers, Shamsi Khammatov, suggests that the fact that, after the war, “no one was able to say anything about [Dzhaliil’] with any certainty” was probably a major factor in the NKVD’s investigation. Moreover, in the absence of any concrete knowledge, “gossip and lies managed to spread” that “Dzhaliil’ betrayed the Motherland.”³²⁶

³²⁴ *Sovet äbäbiyätii*, no 1 (1943), 83-84. Cited in Khammatov, 134.

³²⁵ “Kaznen v plenu Germanii – predatel’ sovetsoi Rodiny. Musa Dzhaliil’”, *Bessmertnyi Barak*, accessed 15 March, 2019, https://bessmertnybarak.ru/article/kaznen_v_plenu_musa_dzhaliil/.

³²⁶ Khammatov, 141.

There is little hard evidence for historians to utilize when determining the facts of Dzhaliil's wartime activities. A recent study of the Idel'-Ural Legion by the Tatar historian Iskander Giliiazov uncovered nothing new about Dzhaliil', with the author simply repeating the established Soviet narrative of the poet's participation in an underground anti-fascist organization during his feigned service in the Idel'-Ural Legion.³²⁷ But existing sources from the war years suggest, at best, a murky picture. In Akhmatshin's memoir, for example, the author mentions seeing Dzhaliil' at the Legion's camp. Akhmatshin recalls that Dzhaliil' was visiting the camp from Berlin, where he was serving higher up in the Legion's administration as a writer and journalist.³²⁸ A respondent interviewed by the Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System who identified as a Volga Tatar active in the Idel'-Ural movement claimed that Dzhaliil' *did* distribute anti-fascist literature among the legionnaires, but that this literature was also "anti-Soviet, [and] nationalist" in nature.³²⁹ Several other testimonies collected by the Harvard Project from both highly-educated and average Tatars indicate either antipathy towards or little identification with the Soviet system as a whole.³³⁰ Although these interviewees may have played up their anti-communist politics for the benefit of Western interviewers, to ensure themselves refuge in the United States, this does not overshadow the fact that there were Tatars opposed to the Soviet system who did take up arms or

³²⁷ Giliiazov, 257.

³²⁸ Äkhmatshin, 48.

³²⁹ Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System, Schedule B, vol. 10, case 122.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, Schedule A, vol. 16, case 319; Schedule B, vol. 8, case 228; Schedule B, vol. 11, case 533.

otherwise act against the Soviet Union. Although the NKVD did not have access to these specific testimonies (or to Akhmatshin's memoir), it can be presumed that they received similar accounts from repatriated POWs.

Individual testimonies that cast doubt onto Dzhilil's loyalty are further supported by German documents from the Plötzensee Prison in Berlin where Dzhilil' was executed in August 1944. A court verdict from February 1944 contains a list of eleven Tatars, included a writer identified as Gumerov, sentenced to death for various crimes including "wartime treason" (*kriegsverrat*).³³¹ The group was executed six months later by guillotine. Various aspects of this situation invite speculation – Moabit was a prison, not a POW camp, and primarily housed members of the German antifascist resistance, i.e. German citizens. The fact that these Tatars received what appears to be a regular trial, even during wartime, seems to indicate they went beyond simple partisan activity. At the very least, this confirms that this group, though they may have eventually turned their arms against the Germans, had been actively involved in a collaborationist unit prior to their executions. Combined with certain testimonies, the evidence from Moabit may have been enough for the NKVD to plausibly consider Dzhilil', who until this point would have certainly been considered a loyal Soviet citizen, a traitor. Given the lengths to which the Stalinist regime had gone to incriminate and condemn millions of Soviet citizens as internal enemies in the 1930s, as well its persecution of repatriated Soviet POWs after the war, it is little surprise that this evidence, circumstantial at best, was

³³¹ Excerpt from the register of the Reich Military Court listing the verdict of February 12, 1944, against the Tatar resistance fighters. Plötzensee Memorial Center, "Tatar Resistance Fighters Around Musa Dzhilil", accessed 15 June, 2019, http://www.gedenkstaette-ploetzensee.de/zoom/06_2_e.html.

enough on which to begin erasing Dzhaliil's central role in the development of Tatar culture since the mid-1920s.

The labeling of Dzhaliil' as a traitor was, however, complicated by the arrival in Kazan of the *Moabit Notebooks*, allegedly written by the poet while in German captivity. Although the first poems which would eventually become part of the *Moabit Notebooks* arrived in Kazan before Dzhaliil's initial repression, the unknown circumstances of their authorship forestalled their publication for several years. In total, four separate notebooks of poetry purporting to be Dzhaliil's were handed over to Soviet authorities. The first two notebooks, delivered to Tatar Union of Writers in 1946, were handed over by former Tatar POWs Nigmat Teregulov and Gabbas Sharipov. Both Teregulov and Sharipov were then arrested and sent to prison, with the former dying in captivity and the latter serving a 10-year sentence before his release.³³² A third notebook was delivered to the Soviet consulate in Brussels, Belgium in 1947 by Andre Timmermans, a Belgian citizen who claimed he was imprisoned with Dzhaliil' and other members of an underground Tatar resistance group in Berlin.³³³ The final notebook was delivered to the Soviet consulate in Rome in January 1946 by a Turkish citizen of Tatar heritage, Kazim Mirshan. This final notebook was sent to Moscow where it was eventually lost in Soviet

³³² It is also worth noting that Gaian Akhmatshin was also arrested and sent to the gulag upon his repatriation to the Soviet Union after the war. It seems likely that Dzhaliil' himself would have suffered the same fate, were he to have survived until Soviet victory. See Äkhmatshin, 83-104.

³³³ A short description of these events is recounted in the Foreword to an English language edition of Dzhaliil's poems. Raphael Mustafin, ed., *Mussa Jalil: Selected Poems* (Moscow: Progress Press, 1981).

archives. The exact details whereby each of these individuals received their copies of the *Moabit Notebooks* is unclear and undiscussed in Dzhaliil's Soviet-era biographies.

The overall nature and structure of the *Moabit Notebooks* indicates that Dzhaliil' was conscious of the fact that his authorship would be questioned. Like the rest of his poetry, and indeed much of his public and private writing in general, the *Moabit Notebooks* is written in the Tatar language. However, the distinct notebooks are written in two scripts, the Arabic script and the Latin script. During his lifetime, both of these scripts were used for written Tatar, with the Arabic script being replaced with the Latin script by Soviet authorities in the 1920s before the eventual shift to the Cyrillic script by the end of the 1930s. Although the choice to not use the Cyrillic script was deliberate, it seems at least as likely that it was based a desire for secrecy (the Germans may have been more curious about a text composed in Cyrillic) than as a critique of what some among the non-Russian populations deemed as cultural Russification.³³⁴ Use of both the Arabic and Latin scripts may have also been a way by which Dzhaliil' secured an honest assessment of the poems' authorship if he was unable to deliver them himself: only an individual of about the same age and educational history would have been able to produce these particular poems.

The structure and general themes of the poems may have also been intended to give further credibility to Dzhaliil's authorship. Each notebook included a short note in

³³⁴ Comfort was probably not a consideration, as Dzhaliil' did write personal letters to colleagues utilizing the Tatar Cyrillic script after its introduction. See his letter to G. Dinmukhametov, 2 June 1942. Cited in Khammatov, *Soldat partii*, 133.

which Dzhilil' assumed authorship for the assorted poems and explained the general situation in which they were written. Each poem was also dated, usually with the month and year. As Robert Bikmukhametov, one of Dzhilil's biographers, notes, the content of the earliest poems is more reminiscent of Dzhilil's earlier poetry than it is to the rest of the *Moabit Notebooks*. Bikmukhametov argues that "not a single one of [the poems written from August-October 1942] speaks directly about the difficult journey between [POW] camps, and not one speaks about the heat of the days, the hunger, the cold of the evenings, [or] the mass deaths of his comrades."³³⁵ Instead, each of these early poems focuses on the *rodina*, or homeland, for which Dzhilil' uses one of two Tatar words. The first, *ilem*, means literally "my country," while the second, *watan*, often, but not always, carries a deeper, emotional, even spiritual connection to a place. Dzhilil' may have chosen to focus these first poems on familiar themes as a way of mentally escaping from his captivity. But the emphasis on home and family also reflects Dzhilil's continued devotion to both of those ideals. Interesting, it also reflects a major trend in wartime literature and poetry, as Soviet authorities implored writers to emphasize themes of patriotism over specific references to the Party or to communism.³³⁶

At times, the poems presaged the rumors of Dzhilil's treason that circulated in Kazan after the war. In the poem "Do Not Believe" (rus. "Ne ver'," tat. "Ishanma"), Dzhilil' writes "If they bring you news of me, // Saying, "He is a traitor! He betrayed the

³³⁵ Bikmukhametov, 173.

³³⁶ For the various ways in which themes of Party and politics faded in favor of discourse of individual struggle, of general patriotism, and of heroism, see Richard M. Stites, ed., *Culture and Entertainment in Wartime Russia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

Motherland!” // Do not believe it, by dear! Such a thing // My friends wouldn’t say, if they loved me.”³³⁷ In one of the most famous poems of the *Moabit Notebooks*, “Forgive me, Motherland” (rus. “Prosti, Rodina,” tat. “Kicher, ilem!”), Dzhilil’ begs for forgiveness for his own capture. “Forgive me, motherland, whose name // Was on my lips in bitter strife, // Forgive me – to your sacred glory // I failed to sacrifice my life.”³³⁸ The content of these poems seems too calculated to be authentic – they almost read as if they could have been inserted later by NKVD agents. However, given the fact that Akhmatshin and other POWs were aware, in German captivity, that they had already been labeled as traitors, it makes sense that Dzhilil’ would have addressed this reality directly. Thus, while the poems seem manufactured for the purpose of rehabilitation, it is not impossible to conclude that Dzhilil’ himself authored them for this purpose, and that they need to not have been commissioned by the Tatar Writers’ Unio or by NKVD agents after the war.

The *Moabit Notebooks*, despite the questions of authenticity and authorship, was received with a tentative relief. Although Dzhilil’ was officially forgotten from mid-1947 through Stalin’s death in 1953, rumors of his potential treason were met with skepticism and disbelief by many of his compatriots in leadership positions in Tatar cultural institutions. Writing much later in 1982, one of Dzhilil’s former colleagues, Nazirzian Gabitov wrote a letter to the editorial staff of one of the TASSR’s major journals that, “I often wondered about the fate of my poet-friend. But it was only a few

³³⁷ Dzhilil’, *Moabitskaia tetrad’*, 209.

³³⁸ Mustafin, *Mussa Jalil*, 139.

years before I learned the truth. I never believed those who tried to apply the label of ‘traitor’ to Musa. I rejoiced with a deep happiness knowing that the truth about him eventually reached his Motherland, reached us.”³³⁹ Dzhaliil’ was more than just a topic of hushed conversation, however, as an opera composed by Nazib Zhiganov titled simply *Shagyir, (Poet)* premiered in Kazan at the end of 1947. Although the opera did not mention Dzhaliil’ by name, its plot was based on the poet’s life and much of it was later recycled for the later 1957 opera which was openly dedicated to him. Dzhaliil’’s former colleagues in the Tatar Party Organization utilized the *Moabit Notebooks* to begin an “open investigation” into the question of Dzhaliil’’s wartime activities geared at the poet’s eventual rehabilitation.³⁴⁰ When this process began is unclear; however, the first poems from the *Moabit Notebooks* were published in April 1953, a little over a month after Stalin’s death.

The investigation into what had happened to Dzhaliil’ beginning in June 1942 was led by the highest echelons of the Tatar Writers’ Union.³⁴¹ Ultimately, they decided that Dzhaliil’’s own claim, which he had written in one of the notebooks, that he had “been charged in Berlin with the organization of a secret underground movement against fascism” within the Idel’-Ural Legion, was accurate.³⁴² According to Z. I. Muratov, the First Secretary of the Tatar Obkom from 1944-1957, “the investigation which was carried

³³⁹ Kazan utlari, 1982, no. 5, 156. Cited in Khammatov, 141-42.

³⁴⁰ Khammatov, 143.

³⁴¹ Ibid.

³⁴² Khammatov, 143.

out showed that Musa Dzhaliġ remained a true patriot, son of the Party and his people, and loyal citizen.”³⁴³ Based on Muratov’s statement, it seems that the initiative for Dzhaliġ’s rehabilitation was centered in Kazan, and that the main investigative work which contradicted earlier NKVD reports originated with Tatar Party members. When, after the ban on publishing Dzhaliġ was lifted, Muratov traveled to Moscow to coordinate translation into Russian of the *Moabit Notebooks*. It was after requesting permission to hold a “solemn meeting” (“*torzhestvennoe sobranie*”) in honor of Dzhaliġ that Muratov broached the topic of naming Dzhaliġ a Hero of the Soviet Union with members of the Central Committee.³⁴⁴ This honor was eventually bestowed in February 1956.

Even after Stalin’s death, the rehabilitation of alleged collaborators remained a contentious task. As historian Mark R. Elliot has noted, the slow reassessment of the issue of collaboration was one aspect of a larger silence many of the more “awkward and embarrassing issues” related to the war.³⁴⁵ According to Elliot, Stalin feared that discussion of POWs, collaborators, and repatriated Soviet soldiers would necessarily induce Soviet citizens into questioning both the handling of the war and the legitimacy of the Soviet regime from which so many of its supposed defenders defected. Nevertheless, there was some precedent for Dzhaliġ’s rehabilitation. The most notable is the case of the collaborationist Georgian Legion. On 5 April 1945, troops of the 822 battalion stationed

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, 150-52.

³⁴⁴ TsGAIPDRT, f. 15 (Tatar Obkom), o. 35, d. 318, l. 18. Request from Z. Muratov to TsK KPSS, 19/11/1955.

³⁴⁵ Elliot, 218.

on the Dutch island of Texel attacked nearby German forces, hoping that this might prevent the Western Allies handing them over to the Soviets after the Nazi defeat. As historian Michael Jones argues, a combination of Canadian Lieutenant General Charles Foulkes' praise of the Georgian troops and Stalin's desire for a propaganda victory protected the Georgians' execution or imprisonment after the war. Instead, "most were held briefly in camps, undertook additional service in the Red Army, and were then allowed to return to their homes – on the strict condition that they did not speak about their wartime role."³⁴⁶ Incredibly, film about the episode, *Raspiatyi ostrov*, was released in 1968 in which the Georgians on Texel were simply prisoners in a POW camp, rather than members of the Georgian Legion. The narrative had been completely purified of any potentially questionable elements.

How then was Dzhalil's narrative to be cleansed of the stain of collaboration? The first publication of Dzhalil's poems in six years in 1953 soon led to a torrent of material, both new and old, appearing in the TASSR and across the Soviet Union. In an article in the newspaper *Kizil Tatarstan*, Tatar writer Fatikh Khusin gushed that "Musa Dzhalil' – poet, communist, soldier, and hero – is finally back in line with us! Death is powerless before such heroes! Death cannot beat such people!"³⁴⁷ On 30 April 1953 the newspaper *Sovet Tatarstani* published a huge spread on Dzhalil', including several of his poems from the *Moabit Notebooks*.³⁴⁸ In June, *Pravda* published an article written by

³⁴⁶ Michael Jones, *After Hitler: The Last Days of the Second World War in Europe* (Ebook: John Murrar Publishers, 2015), 224-25.

³⁴⁷ Khammatov, 144.

³⁴⁸ *Sovet Tatarstani*, 1953, 30 April. Cited in Khammatov, 145.

Gumer Bashirov, the president of the Tatar Writers' Union. Presenting Dzhaliil' as an example of Soviet patriotism and loyalty, Bashirov wrote that "the Soviet poet Musa Dzhaliil... under torture, in the face of inevitable execution, courageously fought with honor and for freedom, with dignity he weathered it all, and became, in the end, a victor."³⁴⁹ Soon, biographies were filled with new details of Dzhaliil's wartime experiences, biographer Robert Bikmukhametov reporting, based on supposed eyewitness testimonies, that Dzhaliil' had been captured after having been so grievously wounded that he was no longer able to wield a weapon.³⁵⁰ Of course, such over-the-top glorification of the poet was occasionally taken with some salt; in a review of Bikmukhametov's biography, Petr Skosyrev wrote that the author had incorrectly presented Dzhaliil' as "the only... central figure of literary developments in Tataria in the 1920s and 1930s" rather than as one of several such figures.³⁵¹

Although Musa Dzhaliil's rehabilitation was made possible due to the fact that he could be identified not just as a Tatar symbol but as a Soviet one more generally, it does seem that it was within the Tatar Republic that his glorification reached its zenith. As Skosyrev's review of Bikmukhametov's biography seems to suggest, Tatar writers had perhaps gone further than Moscow had envisioned in identifying Dzhaliil' as a singular figure for Tatar culture. Until the release of a 1968 film entitled *The Moabit Notebooks*,

³⁴⁹ Gumer Bashirov, "Sil'nee smerti," *Pravda* 6 June 1953. This article also appeared in Tatar translation in the TASSR. Cited in Khammatov, 147.

³⁵⁰ Bikmukhametov, 170.

³⁵¹ Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i iskusstva (RGALI), f. 1234 (Bikmukhametov R. G. "Musa Dzhaliil'. Kritiko-biograficheskii ocherk. Retsenzenty: Skosyrev P. G., Grinberg I. L. 1956-1958), o. 18, d. 2570, l. 4. Review by P. G. Skosyrev, 17 June 1956.

most celebrations of Dzhaliil' remained firmly within a Tatar context. These included not only numerous publications, but also Nazib Zhiganov's 1957 opera, *Dzhaliil'*, and the erection of a monument to Dzhaliil' in front of the Kazan kremlin in 1966. Based on archival records related to these cultural objects, it seems that the initiative for celebrating Dzhaliil' rested firmly in Kazan, with Moscow doing little more than approving the actions of local administrative organs.³⁵² In this way, although Dzhaliil's heroism was identified primarily with his wartime loyalty to the Soviet regime, he remained a distinctly Tatar hero whose origins and legacy were to be cultivated by "his own" people first and foremost.

Conclusion

In 1974, Soviet writer Varlam Shalamov published a short piece about his youthful friendship with Musa Dzhaliil', seemingly unaware that Dzhaliil' had signed a denunciation of Shalamov during their time in Moscow. As historian Valerii Esipov notes, however, the process by which Shalamov had succeeded in getting the piece published had been arduous.³⁵³ First and foremost, publishers were hesitant to print anything from Shalamov, whose *Kolyma Tales* had recently appeared in the West. But Shalamov's depiction of Dzhaliil' was also controversial. Whereas Soviet literary standards had emphasized that heroic figures should be written about in clearly articulated, conventional ways, Shalamov's text was written in an altogether unique style.

³⁵² RGALI, f. 3151 (Dzhaliil' Musa. Delo pamiatnika. Skul'ptor: Tsigal' V. E. Arkhitektor: Golubkovskii L. G. g. 29 ianvaria 1958 – 11 noiabria 1964), o. 1, d. 444, 445.

³⁵³ Valerii Esipov, "Shalamov i Dzhaliil'," *Shalamov Library*, accessed 15 May, 2019, <https://shalamov.ru/library/26/8.html>.

Much of the short text described Moscow University's dormitories; elsewhere, Shalamov invoked a metaphorical elephant, and described Dzhaliil' as a leopard. Perhaps the most questionable aspect of the piece was Shalamov's characterization of Dzhaliil's relationship to poetry. Shalamov described the intensity of Dzhaliil's recitation of Tatar-language poetry and his love of the Russian classics, but also hinted that there was something untranslatable between the two languages, and that somehow the poetic truth of Dzhaliil's Tatar poems could not be fully comprehensible to non-Tatars (and vice-versa). As such, the story sat in the *Iunost'* offices for almost two years before it was published, despite the fact that, as Esipov argues, "any new information about his life should have been published without delay and treated as a truly valuable find."

The life, death, and afterlife of the Soviet Tatar poet Musa Dzhaliil' illustrates the way in which Tatar cultural activities became enmeshed in the larger world of Soviet life. Dzhaliil', like Zhiganov, was among the first generation of Soviet Tatar cultural elites who adopted a program of national development within the confines of Soviet ideology. Through the time of his capture in mid-1942, Dzhaliil' conceptualized his devotion to the Soviet cause as indistinguishable from his relationship to "his own" people, and thought he could best serve Soviet interests by working to develop Tatar literature and art. After the war, the poet became a victim of the Stalinist's regime to silence the uncomfortable realities of the war, which included not only the mass surrender of Soviet troops, but also widespread collaboration and the articulation of nationalist and anti-Soviet ideologies among Soviet citizens. The discovery of the *Moabit Notebooks* became proof that capture did not have to mean defeat, that Soviet values could remain steadfast even in the face of death, and that the nationalities could truly subsume their identities into the sort of

pan-Soviet solidarity that Moscow had envisioned. As such, Moscow acquiesced to Tatar efforts to rehabilitate Dzhaliġ, allowing the poet to become a convenient symbol for the nearly 200,000 ethnic Tatars who had died during the war. However, as much as Dzhaliġ's life became reshaped after his rehabilitation in order to fit established Soviet narratives, in the Tatar Republic Dzhaliġ remained a specifically Tatar example of heroism.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conflict and Confrontation: Defining the Boundaries of Soviet Tatar Culture

Tatar ethnic culture existed long before the Revolution of 1917 and subsequent Soviet nationalities policies such as *korenizatsiia*. Unlike in Central Asia, the prospect of nation-building in the TASSR began with a solid foundation of a native intelligentsia and an established literary and performance arts culture. However, Soviet political goals meant that the Tatar intelligentsia was subject to widespread repression through the 1920s and 1930s. Moscow's cultural and ideological objectives also precipitated an effort to bring Tatar art forms into line with Soviet artistic and ideological standards. Official nationalities policy stipulated that all of the Soviet Union's minority peoples' cultures were to "flower" under Communist rule, developing their own literary canon, their own theatrical works and operas, their own symphonies and concertos. Of course, the purpose of such policies was not just to create nations, but to create "decidedly *Soviet* nations."³⁵⁴ But what did it mean to create a Soviet Tatarstan? What elements of the pre-Soviet Tatar culture could fit into a Soviet Tatar culture? What would happen when Tatar culture found itself at odds with elements of Soviet culture?

This chapter explores several major conflicts that showcase the complexities of constructing Tatar culture within the Soviet ideological framework. Moscow tasked Tatar artists, whether they be composers, poets, or dramatists, with developing Tatar culture in a way which respected Lenin's maxim of "national in form, socialist in

³⁵⁴ Stephen Kotkin, "Mongol Commonwealth?: Exchange and Governance across the Post-Mongol Space," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, vol. 8, 3 (Summer, 2007), 525.

content.” However, the specificities of what exactly that entailed were left almost completely up to the artists themselves. How then should Tatar artists conceptualize the role of Islam as a social and cultural part of the Tatar past, and should this differ from Russians’ engagement with the legacy of Orthodoxy? Did Tatar culture include the legacy of the Golden Horde and the subsequent Tatar-Mongol yoke? To what degree could Tatar artists point out anti-Tatar elements of Russian and Soviet culture that had persisted through the revolution? In addressing these questions, this chapter underlines the major challenges that Soviet Tatar cultural elites faced in attempting reconcile their dual identity as both “national” and “international” actors. My analysis builds on recent works that have explored how cultural figures from the more developed cultures of the Soviet West and the Caucasus integrated their history and heritage into the Soviet canon.³⁵⁵

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section of this chapter analyzes criticism of Nākīy Isānbāt’s 1939 play “Khuja Nasretdin.” The play, based on the popular Muslim folk hero of the same name, was performed sporadically throughout the 1940s and 1950s but received sustained criticism throughout its run for its use of religious and other “anti-Soviet” themes. The search for a usable Tatar past rooted in the Mongol conquest of Russia is the subject of the second section. Specifically, it addresses the works of the Tatar poet Salikh Battalov, who, in the early 1960s, utilized the metaphor of the Tatar-Mongol yoke as a site for exploring the place of Tatars within a Soviet society that, he argued, maintained distinctly anti-Tatar prejudices. The third

³⁵⁵ William Jay Risch, *The Ukrainian West: Culture and the Fate of Empire in Soviet Lviv* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

section builds on Battalov's critique of Aleksandr Pushkin and the resulting backlash from ethnic Russians active in the Tatar Writers' Union. This section questions the nebulous definition of the Soviet canon and the extent to which Soviet culture really meant Russian culture. The final section addresses Tatars' increasing anxieties, by the mid-1950s and early 1960s, about their role within "their" republican cultural institutions. The question of what exactly Soviet culture *was*, as well as what it *was not*, is the recurring issue of the chapter, and one which plagued Tatar artists hoping to articulate a distinctly *Tatar* Soviet culture.

Islam in Soviet Tatar Drama

The nature of what would become Soviet culture emerged as a topic of profound uncertainty and debate in the immediate aftermath of 1917. At least among some factions of the revolutionary movement, the belief existed that not only the entire political structure of the tsarist regime had to be eliminated, but so too did the old culture. Some of the more radical proponents of the new "proletarian" culture were heavily influenced by iconoclasm, futurism, and constructivism, dubbing their movement "Proletkult" and agitating for official support throughout the 1920s.³⁵⁶ Others resisted the formation of a uniform, socialist culture, advocating a continued existence for separate cultural institutions dedicated to highbrow and popular audiences.³⁵⁷ For most of the decade, the Party maintained a neutral position towards the cultural debate, and only in 1928 did

³⁵⁶ For an overview of the Proletkult movement, see Lynn Mally, *Culture of the Future: The Proletkult Movement in Revolutionary Russia* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990).

³⁵⁷ Katerina Clark, *Petersburg: Crucible of Cultural Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 261.

Stalin officially side with those in favor of a unified, “proletarian” culture. By the 1930s Soviet culture began to be oriented around familiar artistic mediums – the novel, the ballet, the opera. What unified these media was a dedication to what Stalin dubbed in 1932 “socialist realism,” the officially-promoted idea that art should reflect and promote Soviet socialist values. Nevertheless, the content of officially-sanctioned artistic forms varied, with the championing of modern elements of Soviet life in socialist realism existing alongside of performances of Mussorgsky’s *Boris Godunov* and, eventually, Sergei Eisenstein’s *Ivan the Terrible*. It was into this complex milieu that Tatar composers, poets, and others began the task of elaborating upon the nature of Soviet Tatar culture.

Exactly how Tatar art should reflect the Soviet present and the pre-Soviet past was a question which occupied creative minds from the 1930s through 1960s. The canonization of socialist realism in 1932 meant that it was paramount that Tatar artists create works that would be understood by audiences made up of average Soviet citizens (Tatars and others). Most Soviet artists, however, even if they were of humble origins, were now part of the Soviet cultural elite.³⁵⁸ Their prestigious role in Soviet society, meant to nurture their creative contributions to Soviet culture, also distanced them from certain aspects of life for average citizens, most importantly manual labor either in the countryside or in factories.

³⁵⁸ For proletarian writers, see Mark D. Steinberg, *Proletarian Imagination: Self, Modernity, and the Sacred in Russia, 1910-1925* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002).

In June of 1968, a gathering of composers and poets of the TASSR met to discuss their continued difficulties, as members of the intelligentsia, in relating to the experiences of their fellow Soviet citizens. The meeting was held partially in response to an article published that month in the journal *Agitator*, “About the Workers’ Song.” In the article, the composer Vasilii Solovev-Sedoi bemoaned the failure of Soviet music to sufficiently “speak to the people” in a language that they could understand. Some members of the Tatar Composers’ Union took issue with Solovev-Sedoi’s position that songs must refer specifically to the experience of the working class, with poet Nabi Dauvli arguing that “I think that such a narrow focus... limits our actions.”³⁵⁹ He continued that, “our Soviet society is united and... people living in the countryside completely understand Soviet society, as they are part of it,” rejecting the specific need to make art that directly referenced any particular kind of lived experience.³⁶⁰ In his concluding remarks composer and Composers’ Union head Nazib Zhiganov went further, asking, “did Tolstoy need to participate in 1812 to write *War and Peace*?”³⁶¹ Soviet art would inevitably reflect Soviet life because, as Tatar composers and poets argued, Soviet life was diverse, made up not only of factory workers, but peasants and intelligentsia as well.

But the problem of creating socialist art which reflected the values and experiences of Soviet citizens was further complicated by Tatar artists’ need to speak to and for a distinct nationality. On the one hand, the aspects of everyday life that socialist

³⁵⁹ NART, f. 7057, o. 2, d. 103, l. 4 (Meeting of composers of Tataria with poets) (19 June 1968).

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, l. 5.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*, l. 14.

realism meant to champion were generally shared between all Soviet peoples regardless of their ethnic background. That meant that socialist life was ideologically and experientially identical for both Russians, and Tatars. On the other, however, there were real social and economic differences between the nationalities, as expressed through different educational opportunities, occupational prevalence in certain industries, and even Party membership. This situation complicated the ability with which Tatar artists could use art to articulate specifically Tatar cultural themes. And indeed this was the goal of non-Russian art, not only to appeal to non-Russian audiences as Soviet citizens but to reach them through their own diverse cultural inheritances. One way in which Tatar artists effectively merged international socialist themes with particular national ones was through the medium of the Great Patriotic War, which, as Amir Weiner argues, was celebrated as both a victory for Soviet socialism and as one in which each of the country's distinct ethnic groups could participate on their own terms (as described in chapter 3). Other Tatar artists, such as poet Salikh Battalov, centered their work on the history of the Tatar village throughout the Soviet period, emphasizing the peculiarities of the Tatar experience while also producing works that shared many characteristics with the village literature that emerged in the postwar years.

However, Stalin's "folklorization" of cultures in the 1930s also opened up a broad avenue of artistic expression that had a profound impact on Tatars' expression of their own national culture and identity. The use of pre-Revolutionary folklore as a source for contemporary art likely impacted Tatar artists' desire to excavate other parts of the past. Throughout the Stalin and post-Stalin period, Tatar artists displayed a continued propensity for setting their art in the pre-Revolutionary past, not only in the mythological

way popularized by Gabdulla Tukai but also in the more concretely historical approach characterized by Gaiaz Iskhaki's works before the Revolution. The relationship of Soviet artists to the pre-Soviet past was highly complex, and even more so for the country's ethnic minorities, who had to contend not only with their own past but also had to deal with their historical relationship to Russians. The tendency to set narratives in the pre-Revolutionary past elicited near-constant criticism from certain writers, not only in the Tatar Republic, but in Moscow as well. At issue was the question of positive portrayal of the past; officially, to portray the past in anything but a critical light risked being labeled anti-Soviet. Significantly, national heroes who had fought against the Tsars or who had otherwise resisted Muscovite imperialism were, under Stalin, no longer to be portrayed in a positive light.³⁶² In order to avoid this criticism, Tatar references to the pre-Soviet past had to be mythologized, existing outside of time or, at the very least, had to display clear and consistent critiques of the past.

For Tatar writers in particular, the search for Tatar cultural identity in the pre-Revolutionary past inevitably led to an engagement with Islam. The official Soviet stance on religion, and the precepts of socialist realism, did not preclude the inclusion of religion in Soviet literature but demanded that art employ religion/religious individuals as strawmen, as ideological opponents of the Soviet regime whose backwardness or corruption should be made evident in the text. Unfortunately, it was not always made clear to writers how explicit their ideological aims had to be. In a letter to the Secretary of the Tatar Obkom on 10 November 1954, writer Akhmed Faizi challenged the decision

³⁶² Brandenburger, 118-120.

by the Tatar publishing house, Tatknigoizdat, to label the writers' play "Safa" and his poem "Fleity" as "ideologically harmful."³⁶³ In the case of "Safa," the controversy seems to emerge from Faizi's characterization of the story's mullah. In the play, the mullah is a straightforward character who acts as a communal elder and represents the hold of tradition on the story's protagonist. Faizi claims the play "show[s] the educational (*vospitatel'nuiu*) strength of our revolution" by exploring how the protagonist's ideological conversion helps to liberate him from the mullah's influence.³⁶⁴ Citing other works, such as Maxim Gorky's "Vassa Zheleznova" and "Egor Bulychev," Faizi argues that "in order to challenge a thesis one must first establish it," defending his decision to portray the mullah not as a caricature but as a legitimate symbol of the power of tradition.³⁶⁵ Tatknigoizdat's hesitancy to publish Faizi's work indicates the extent to which depictions of Islam were subject to particular scrutiny and the difficulties faced by Tatar artists who attempted to paint a nuanced portrait of their religious heritage. At the same time, Faizi's defense illustrates that Tatar authors felt that they could and should excavate and draw meaning from the past, provided that they interpret the past in a way in line with Marxist-Leninist historical analysis.

Occasionally, it seems that works with Islamic themes or roots made it past censors, only later to arouse concern among both the artists themselves and among Party and state oversight organs. In September 1958, for example, discussions concerning the

³⁶³ TsGAIPDRT, f. 15 (Tatar Obkom), o. 6, d. 4003 (20 November 1954).

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, ll. 3-6.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

performance of the play “Iusuf and Zuleikha,” reflected an uncertainty about both the nature of the play and how it had come to be staged in the first place. The play, based on a popular Islamic folk tale, was authored in 1918 by Karim Tinchurin, one of the TASSR’s most prominent playwrights before his arrest in 1937 and execution the following year on charges of participation in “nationalist” organizations. In the intervening years, none of Tinchurin’s plays had been staged in Kazan or elsewhere.³⁶⁶ Tinchurin’s posthumous rehabilitation in 1955 had apparently made the staging of “Iusuf and Zuleikha” possible at the Tatar State Academic Theater during the 1957-1958 season. Fuad Khalitov, a member of the theater’s Party organization, suggested that, in staging the play, the theater had “allowed very serious political mistakes” to infect the institution’s mission of creating Soviet Tatar art.³⁶⁷ Khalitov went on further to ask “what did we want to give to our audience with this play?” potentially indicating that decisions about the theaters’ repertoire were not necessarily known to Party members who were supposed to maintain a role in political oversight in Kazan’s cultural institutions. Conversely, Khalitov may simply have been playing dumb and attempting feign ignorance when it came to his and his colleagues’ role in producing a play which, for whatever reason, was now under attack for perceived non-compliance with Soviet political acceptability.

The staging of “Iusuf and Zuleikha” reveals several disconnects which characterized the Soviet cultural world. The first, discussed above, was between artistic

³⁶⁶ Guadagnolo, 175.

³⁶⁷ TsGAIPDRT, f. 441 (Primary Part Organization of the Tatar State Academic Theater), o. 1, d. 54, l. 92 (Minutes of open Party meeting), 25-27 September 1958.

organizations and their associated Party committees, which were supposed to provide oversight but were potentially left in the dark about certain decisions. The second, which may also have been played up by participants for political purposes, was between various levels of administration in individual cultural institutions. One of the Tatar State Academic Theater's directors, Marsel' Salimzhanov, seemed surprised that the higher-ups had decided to stage the play, saying "even the author's wife thought [the play] was a weak thing, that it shouldn't be included in the repertoire. But the leadership included it."³⁶⁸ The last disconnect was between the cultural elite who wrote and staged the plays and average Soviet citizens who formed their audiences. Salimzhanov noted with surprise that the play was financially successful, suggesting that whereas there was uncertainty about the message of the play (and about how it had come to be staged in the first place) among officials, audiences had patronized it heavily. It is impossible to know whether audiences' consumption of the play was related at all to its Islamic themes; nor do records indicate whether audiences had a positive or negative reaction to it (although ticket sales likely indicate the former). What is clear is that officials' attitudes towards the play were directly linked to its "political problems," which almost certainly stemmed from its roots in Islamic narratives, again showing that no clear set of guidelines or standards existed either for authors or for censors when it came to how to deal with depictions of potentially controversial topics, such as religion.

Most, though not all, critiques of Islamic themes or narratives seemed to conflate the articulation of Islam through art with the articulation of nationalism. For example, on

³⁶⁸ Ibid., 95.

12 January 1954 at a closed Party session meeting Tazi Gizzatov criticized the “nationalist position” of dramatist Naki Isanbet’s play “Khuzha Nasretdin.” The play, which Isanbet completed in 1940 and which had been staged numerous times in the interim fourteen years, is based upon the Turkic/Islamic folk figure of the same name. Although Nasretdin himself was a historical figure, his folk tale counterpart represents the “holy fool” who, traditionally, was as much a comical figure as he was one who imparted wisdom to others (both in the context of the stories and to the reader or viewer). Nasretdin was often depicted as oppositional towards political authority, typically represented in stories by Tamerlane – indeed this relationship is what drives the overarching narrative of Isanbet’s play. As Charles Sabatos argues, however, Nasretdin existed primarily as a folk or mythic character divorced from particular historical or social contexts - although both Nasretdin and Tamerlane were real historical figures, they were not alive at the same time. Also significant was the relative opacity of Nasretdin’s own actions; sometimes he seems oppositional to Tamerlane, but at other times he sides with the ruler against commoners. These characteristics made the figure an effective vehicle for artistic expression which may have been deemed unacceptable were its message delivered more clearly.³⁶⁹

The figure of Khodja Nasretdin was not unknown to Soviet audiences even outside of predominantly Muslim or Turkic areas. The first and likely most famous Soviet-era exploration of the character, Leonid Solov’ev’s *The Tale of Hodja Nasreddin*,

³⁶⁹ Charles Sabatos, “Nasreddin Hodja’s foolish wisdom: Slavic literary adaptations of a Turkish folk hero,” *World Literature Studies* 4, vol. 8 (2016), 36.

the first half of which was published in 1935, led directly to the author's arrest.³⁷⁰ Solov'ev's Nasretdin shared much in common with similar Soviet folk hero Ostap Bender, making Nasretdin into a much younger, daring adventurer rather than his typical portrayal as an old, somewhat cantankerous man. In the climate of suspicion which permeated the 1930s, Solov'ev's *Hodja Nasreddin* was interpreted as a veiled critique of Stalin, and the author was forced to write the second half of the novel in prison. Later interpretations of the character after Stalin's death, many inspired by Solov'ev, enjoyed warmer political climates and did not automatically place their authors under suspicion. The somewhat loosened restrictions on artistic expression that accompanied the Great Patriotic War may help to explain why Isanbet's play did not have a detrimental effect on the author's life, but Isanbet may also have been saved by his sticking to the more morally ambiguous version of the character that Solov'ev had abandoned.

Ultimately what made Isanbet's Nasretdin problematic was not the figure's characterization, but rather changes to his background. In fact, Gizzatov's primary critique of Isanbet's play was that the author had "transformed Khodja into a[n ethnic] Tatar, when in fact he comes from Central Asia."³⁷¹ Nasretdin's actual origins aside, by making the figure Tatar, Gizzatov argued that the figure's actions and words could no longer be understood as part of a myth or folk tale divorced from concrete historical contexts. Instead, he argued, since Nasretdin was a Tatar, his eccentricities and anti-

³⁷⁰ Solov'ev, who was born in Tripoli in the Ottoman Empire but spent most of his youth in Samara province, was likely familiar with Nasretdin through the area's Muslim populace.

³⁷¹ TsGAIPDRT, f. 1211 (Party Organization for the Union of Tatar Writers), o. 1, d. 28, l. 37 (Minutes of closed Party meeting) (12 January 1954).

authoritarian attitude (Isanbet had maintained Nasretdin's conflict with Tamerlane) were now veiled metaphors for very real Tatar nationalist positions. If Nasretdin was a figure outside of history, his comical disrespect of authority and tradition was similarly outside of history, closer to a fable than to pointed political critique. Now that he was historicized (and nationalized), so too were his attitudes. Implied in Gizzatov's critique is that the idea that Isanbet used Nasretdin's national identity as a Tatar to signal audiences to understand the play as an allegory for the position of Tatars within contemporary Soviet society.

By the 1950s when the play was staged, the social status of Tatars was precarious: having survived two waves of political violence in the 1920s and 1930s and suffering the loss of notable cultural figures in the war, Tatars in the TASSR had, on average, lesser economic opportunities than Russians, with urban Tatars also enjoying significantly less educational resources in their native language (to be discussed below). The situation for the titular people of the republic was, in many ways, less than had been promised by Soviet authorities. To address this through cultural production, however, was not permissible. Myth was acceptable; myth as basis for nationalism was not.

The conflict at the heart of the disagreements over "Khodja Nasretdin" was about how to effectively and acceptably reclaim parts of the past as a legitimate part of an ethnic group's history. There was a clear uncertainty about how to construct nations without nationalism, especially with respect to the resuscitation of past heroes. The rehabilitation of the past and the glorification of individuals in a society with a collectivist ethos were extremely complex and controversial issues, but by the 1930s and

1940s it was clear that, through the celebration of historical figures such as Aleksandr Nevskii and Ivan IV and Soviet individuals such as Aleksei Stakhanov, it was possible to broach these topics in art and literature. But doing so was more complicated for non-Russians than for Russians, who for all intents and purposes had already been cleared of any potentially hazardous nationalist/chauvinist elements (see discussion of Pushkin below). Whereas Solov'ev's depiction of Nasretdin had been condemned for the perceived clarity of his political positions, Isanbet's was similarly critiqued because it was *nationality* that was obvious, making any of his potential political missteps automatically linked with Tatar nationalism.

The Tatar-Mongol Yoke and “A Letter to Batyi Khan”

The process of “imagining” the Tatar cultural community involved the search for a usable past, for historical myths and legends which could both provide a foundation for Tatar art and fit within a broader Soviet culture. Naturally, one of the major sites of this historical remembering was the last point of Tatar political sovereignty, the time of the Kazan Khanate, as well as the period of the so-called Tatar-Mongol yoke. Although Tatars themselves were divided on the question of their ethnic ties to the Mongols, the Golden Horde's cultural impact on the Middle Volga was not overlooked.³⁷² Most importantly, the Tatar-Mongol yoke incorporated Tatars into a broader Turkic and Islamic world which remained even after the Golden Horde collapsed and its successor

³⁷² For a brief exploration of these consequences, see Azade-Ayşe Rorlich, *The Volga Tatars: A Profile in National Resilience* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1989), chapter 2.

states, including the Kazan Khanate, emerged in the fifteenth century. The khans were powerful symbols to evoke a Turkic, Islamic past.

The prevailing attitude towards the Tatar-Mongol yoke in Stalinist Moscow, however, emphasized not the connections it made possible but its destructiveness.³⁷³ Prior to the Revolution, the Mongols were among the most hated of Russia's enemies, denoted as "barbarians," with their leader, Batyi Khan (known as Batu in the West) labeled "godless and malicious" in Russian sources.³⁷⁴ In the 1930s, the collapse of the Golden Horde and the end of Mongol rule was also metaphorically and historically tied to the process of the "gathering" of the lands of Rus', tying together the defeat of the enemy with Russia's uniquely moral and imperial mission.³⁷⁵ The Soviet national anthem invoked "Great Rus'" as the uniter of diverse peoples while Soviet historians emphasized the progressive nature of Muscovy's conquest of Kazan as the triumph of feudalism over and underdeveloped and backwards Kazan Khanate.³⁷⁶ Thus, Muscovy's victory over the Kazan Khanate signaled the advancement of Russian society into a new phase of Marxist historical development.

³⁷³ For an excellent summary of the Russian and Soviet positions on the Mongol impact on Russia, see Marlies Bilz-Leonhardt, "Deconstructing the myth of the Tatar Yoke," *Central Asian Survey* 27, no. 1 (March 2008): 33-43.

³⁷⁴ Anthony Cross, "'Them': Russians on foreigners," *National Identity in Russian Culture: An Introduction*, eds. Simon Franklin and Emma Widdis (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 75.

³⁷⁵ Emma Widdis, "Russia as Space," *National Identity*, 35.

³⁷⁶ Simon Franklin, "Identity and religion," *National Identity*, 104.

It was dramatist Naki Isanbet who first, and perhaps most controversially, connected the Mongol past with the articulation of Tatar culture. In 1940, Isanbet completed *Idegei*, a play based on a military leader of the Golden Horde in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In line with Soviet thinking on the Tatar-Mongol yoke, *Idegei* was represented in Soviet historiography as a reactionary military leader who contributed nothing but destruction to those peoples under his control. Isanbet's play, however, recasts *Idegei* as a national hero who was ahead of his time and who sought to overthrow the feudal rule of the khans and to establish a more egalitarian and meritocratic ruling system.³⁷⁷ From this perspective, the play represented a “struggle of two classes” in which “the people put forth from among them a hero-leader [*Idegei*] who is able to unite the forces of liberation against centuries of slavery.”³⁷⁸ These narrative elements were important aspects of Soviet mythmaking which, in most respects, were fully in line with how Soviet cultural authorities successfully rehabilitated heroic epics. The initial performance of the play was scheduled for the summer of 1941, but due to the German invasion was delayed until October of that year. The play was staged intermittently until August 1944, when the Central Committee issued a resolution entitled “On the state and measures for improvement of mass-political and ideological work in the Tatar Party Organization” in which the play was heavily criticized.³⁷⁹

³⁷⁷ Mekhametgali Arslanov, “Fol’klornyi teatr Naki Isanbeta: ‘*Idegei*’ i ‘*Khodja Nasretdin*’”, *Ekho vekov: nauchno-dokumental’nyi zhurnal* 1, vol. 2 (2012), accessed 12 July, 2018, http://www.archive.gov.tatarstan.ru/magazine/go/anonymous/main/?path=mg:/numbers/2012_1_2/09/07/.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

As with *Khodja Nasretidin*, the problem with *Idegei* was again with respect to the issue of applying the Tatar ethnicity to a historical figure to which that identity did not necessarily fit. The official critique leveled by the Central Committee stood on the established Soviet historiography of the Golden Horde and denied any ethnic/cultural connection between Tatars and the Mongol hordes. By identifying Idegei as a Tatar national hero, Isanbet had suggested a connection between Tatars and the Mongols, an assertion which was completely contradictory to the official Soviet position. This position, as clarified in Moscow's August decree and embraced in a similar October decree by the Tatar Party organization, condemned scholarship put forth by the Tatar Research Institute of Language, Literature, and History on the topic of Tatars' ethnogenesis.³⁸⁰ Scholars at the institute, which was founded in Kazan in 1939, had argued that modern Tatars were the descendants of the Golden Horde, rather than of the Volga Bulgars who had lived in the Middle Volga prior to the Mongol invasion. Moscow interpreted such interpretations as "reactionary" and conflated the academic goals of the institute with those of Isanbet. The Central Committee argued that "by making Idegei a hero of the Tatars, the epic was 'written in the spirit of anti-Russian patriotism.'"³⁸¹ That Isanbet's attempt to reconfigure the story of Idegei into a Tatar epic could inspire such a clear and direct response shows the extent to which the past remained a battleground for the expression of both Soviet and Tatar identities.³⁸²

³⁸⁰ Victor A. Shnirelman, *Who Gets the Past?: Competition for Ancestors among Non-Russian Intellectuals in Russia* (Washington, D.C.: The Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1996), 22.

³⁸¹ Bilz-Leonhardt, "Deconstructing," 36.

³⁸² For more on this issue, see Al'fiia Galliamova, *Tatarskaia ASSR v period poststalinizma (1945-1985 gg.)* (Kazan: Tatarskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 2015), 326-30.

In the 1950s, a group of Tatar historians at a newly-established unit within the Tatar Academy of Sciences began a long-lasting effort to reexamine the Mongol past and to offer correctives to what was then the prevailing historical opinion on the period of Tatar history from the thirteenth through fifteenth centuries. Although study of the Golden Horde era was drastically limited from the mid-1940s onwards, Stalin's death and the subsequent de-Stalinization campaign reopened the period to historical inquiry. Even after scholarly work on the period was allowed to continue, however, historical interpretations were slow to change. Beginning in the late 1950s but culminating only in the 1960s and 1970s was a new, revisionist approach to the topic.³⁸³ Tatar historians of the Thaw reassessed established claims about the "progressive" nature of the Russian conquest and concluded that, while progressive in the long run, the old historiography failed to take into account Tatarstan's political, social, and economic development. On the basis of Marxist theories of historical development these historians asserted that Tatar society was developing along similar lines and at the same pace as that of Muscovy, thereby calling into question the legitimacy of the Kazan Khanate's subjugation. The major consequence of these reinterpretations was a sense, voiced by historian Ia. G. Abdullin that "each people of Russia, on the strength of a whole series of historical circumstances, acquired Marxism in its own way; attained an understanding of the proletarian ideology by its own path."³⁸⁴ By refusing to acknowledge this, Abdullin and

³⁸³ Edward J. Lazzerini, "Tatarovedenie and the 'New Historiography' in the Soviet Union: Revising the Interpretation of the Tatar-Russian Relationship," *Slavic Review*, vol. 40, 4 (Winter 1981): 625-635.

³⁸⁴ Ia. G. Abdullin, *Tatarskaia prosvetitel'skaia mysl' (Sotsial'naiia priroda i osnovnye problemy)* (Kazan', 1976) pp. 14-15, cited in Lazzerini, 631.

his colleagues suggested, Moscow was in essence justifying Russian imperialism while denying historical agency to non-Russian peoples.

Even before a shift appeared in the historiography, however, Tatar writers embraced the comparative liberalism of the Thaw and began to look to the past as a site for artistic expression. Among those who turned to the period of the Mongol-Tatar yoke for inspiration was the poet Salikh Battalov. Already in the 1950s Battalov was an established writer who had published several collections of poetry. Born to a peasant family in the village of Bol'shie Tigany in Kazan province in 1905, Battalov's early years were not altogether dissimilar from those of Nazib Zhiganov or Musa Dzhaliġ'. Educated first in a mekteb in Bol'shie Tigany and then a medrese in the neighboring city of Chistopol', Battalov left for Moscow in 1921, where he began working in factory. Battalov published his first poems in the Moscow Tatar journal *Eshche* (*Worker*) before entering a military college in Leningrad in 1927. Through the 1930s he was trained as a pilot and served in Briiansk and Kazan, but he also continued his literary activities and joined the Soviet Union of Writers in 1934. During the Great Patriotic War, Battalov served in the Pacific Fleet and, after the war's conclusion, penned a number of poems and novels about his experiences. Despite his relatively lengthy service in the multinational Soviet military, as well as his time in Moscow, Battalov was not comfortable operating in Russian – like Dzhaliġ', he expressed doubts about his Russian language abilities and penned his work almost solely in Tatar.

By 1950, Battalov was living in Kazan and working on his next major work, a novel in verse entitled *On the Highway* (rus. *Po stolbovoi doroge*; tat. *Oli yul buylap*).

The Tatar Writers' Union had initially refused local publication, citing the piece's harsh critique of various aspects of Soviet village life, such as drunkenness and other vices.³⁸⁵ Hesitation on the part of Tatar authorities likely sprang from a continuing fear among the republic's intelligentsia of drawing Moscow's ire.³⁸⁶ Refusing to back down, in 1953 Battalov forwarded a line-translation of the piece to Moscow, where Aleksandr Tvardovskii, editor at the progressive journal *Novyi Mir*, read the piece and called it "magnificent." Citing its critiques as "spicy" and "biting," Tvardkovskii published *On the Highway*, with a local publication in Kazan appearing shortly thereafter, the threat of retribution now removed.³⁸⁷ In part due to the piece's publication, Battalov was awarded the Order of the Red Banner of Labour in 1957. This success, however, could not insulate Battalov from the controversy he would cause in 1963.

The issue of one of Battalov's recent poems came up at a meeting of the Party Bureau for the Tatar Writers' Union on 5 January 1963. The poem, aptly titled "A Letter to Batyi Khan," was a product of Battalov's effort to draw metaphorical and political connections between the Mongols, Tatars, and Russians. In the poem, Battalov suggests that Batyi represented a model of despotic, personalistic rule which long outlasted the Mongol-Tatar yoke. Specifically, Battalov writes that Batyi's "baton" was passed to his heirs, and that every leader who succeeded him wields it, along with a propensity for

³⁸⁵ Liudmila Kartashova, "Doroga iz proshlogo v budushchee prokhodit cherez muzei" *Respublika Tatarstan: obshchestvenno-politicheskaia gazeta* 7 February 2008 (<http://rt-online.ru/p-rubr-obsh-38203/>), accessed 5/16/2019

³⁸⁶ Al'fiia Galliamova, *Tatarskaia ASSR v period poststalinizma (1945-1985 gg.)* (Kazan': Tatarskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 2015), 354.

³⁸⁷ Interview with Rafael' Mustafin, 24 June 2006 on the program "Aura liubvi," channel *Novyi vek*, accessed 16 May, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=elfUaUNSaJ4&t=1146s>.

despotism and a “cult of personality.”³⁸⁸ The baton had been passed on through the ages “to different hands,” and now rested firmly within those of the Soviet Union’s communist leadership. For Battalov, the “cult of personality,” directly criticized in Nikita Khrushchev’s “Secret Speech” and subsequently addressed at all levels of the Party apparatus, had not died but simply moved on. Battalov writes that those who had once said “Long live brilliant Stal...” would soon end it with “Khrushchev.” Not surprisingly, when Battalov sent the poem for publication to *Soviet Ädäbiatı* (*Soviet Literature*, the primary Tatar literary journal), it was rejected. Against the advice of his peers, Battalov read the poem at the Tukai Club in Kazan and forwarded it to one of the republic’s major newspapers, *Sotsialistik Tatarstan* (*Socialist Tatarstan*). Reportedly, the version recited at the Tukai Club and sent to the newspaper included a continuation in which Battalov thanked Batyi for bringing Tatars to Moscow. Whether he meant that Tatars were brought to Moscow as soldiers against the Russians or that an indirect consequence of the Mongol invasion had been the forging of a unique historical connection between the two peoples is unclear (the latter argument would have, in fact, been completely in line with accepted Soviet interpretations of the Tatar-Mongol yoke).³⁸⁹

“A Letter to Batyi Khan” and Battalov’s recitation of it against the advice of his peers precipitated a minor crisis at the Writers’ Union. At the January Party Bureau meeting, Battalov was roundly criticized for his “anti-Russian” position, although what

³⁸⁸ TsGAIPDRT, f. 1211, o. 1, d. 39, l. 3 (Party Bureau meeting) 5 January 1963.

³⁸⁹ Bilz-Leonhardt, “Deconstructing,” 36.

exactly his critics meant by “anti-Russian” was unclear. Battalov countered that his poem was not an attack on Russians but instead was meant to “bite... [at] chauvinists” that, he argued, existed within Soviet society. These chauvinists, he claimed, had failed “to reach internationalism,” despite the promises of Soviet ideology. To support his claim, Battalov pointed to a recent film in which the protagonist “insultingly” says, “we survived the Tatars” to suggest that latent anti-Tatar sentiment was still a major part of Soviet society. The bureau’s pushback against Battalov was nothing new, but this time local Tatar authorities decided to act on the issue before Battalov could appeal to colleagues in Moscow. Bureau member Mirsai Amir, meeting Battalov halfway, asked whether it was necessary to counter perceived chauvinism with poems which clearly demonstrated nationalist sentiments. Another, Gumer Bashirov, simply asked whether Battalov truly felt that his poem was in line with the Party. If the poet was allowed to respond, however, is unclear; the meeting’s minutes move directly from the interrogation to Battalov’s punishment.

During the ordeal, Battalov identified his critique of chauvinism with a nascent political movement among the Tatar intelligentsia to rectify perceived problems with Tatarstan’s status as an autonomous republic. The main thrust behind this effort was linked with concerns about the future of the Tatar language and culture within the TASSR. In May 1956, for example, the Tatar Writers’ Union had debated the future of the Tatar publishing house Tatknigoizdat, which was increasingly publishing in Russian and which hardly ever produced Tatar texts in the numbers which the Union republics’

publishing houses did.³⁹⁰ This was an even bigger problem considering the lack of Tatar-language educational opportunities in the republic. About 70% of Tatar children at the beginning of the 1950s studied in Russian-language schools; in 1958, Kazan had only two Tatar-language schools and 17 mixed-language schools for a population of about 213,000 Tatars.³⁹¹ Tatar historian Al'fiia Galliamova suggests that only one of these schools enjoyed the sorts of conditions and resources that made its mission feasible.³⁹² The question of the publication of a Russian-language variant of the republic's Tatar newspapers in the mid-1950s was so controversial that writer and satirist Sharaf Mudarris characterized it as "showing a deep distrust" of Tatars and argued that "even English colonizers had not gone so far."³⁹³ How was it that the titular population of the republic could have their language downgraded to such a level that it had to always be accompanied by Russian? These and other issues convinced a segment of the Tatar intelligentsia that the republic's problems could only be solved by the heightening of their political status to that of a Union republic equal to the Russian SFSR.

The Tatar Writers' Union Party Secretary, A. Gumerov, dismissed Battalov's politics, simply wondering how he, "as a poet," could have any authority with which to

³⁹⁰ Galliamova, *Tatarskaia ASSR*, 354.

³⁹¹ "Vsesoiuznaia perepis' naseleniia 1959 goda. Gorodskoe i sel'skoe naselenie oblastei i kraev RSFSR po polu i natsional'nosti," accessed 14 May, 2019, http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/rus_nac_59_gs.php?reg=82. This estimate is based assuming that the overall percentage of Tatar urban residents throughout the TASSR (33%) holding true for Kazan.

³⁹² Galliamova, *Tatarskaia ASSR*, 164.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*, 355.

speak about the complex issue of the political status of the Tatar republic.³⁹⁴ Gumerov's comments make it clear that, even within the ranks of the Tatar cultural leadership, there was significant disagreement over the roles of artists and writers in Soviet society. It is also likely that, with such an obvious case of bad faith actions on Battalov's part, the Party leadership of the Writers' Union wanted to nip the issue in the bud, lest they suffer interference or discipline from Moscow. Conversely, the immediate rebuttal of Battalov's poem and its critique as "anti-Russian" may reveal the lengths to which Party leadership would go to avoid the appearance of promoting ethnic conflict. And yet, was ethnic conflict defined by "anti-Russian" behavior only? "I am outraged by S. Battalov's attack on Russian culture," stated Union member Tikhon Zhuravlev, who seemed unfazed at what Battalov claimed was anti-Tatar sentiment in Soviet film.³⁹⁵ How could Battalov attack Russian culture when it was Russia as "first among equals" that led the Soviet peoples into a progressive socialist future? In the field of literature specifically, the official Party position, as stated on a report by writer Abdurakhman Absaliyev delivered at a Party meeting of the Tatar Writers' Union on 17 January 1953, was that Tatar literary culture was developing by following "the best traditions of Great Russian literature."³⁹⁶

What literary and thematic traditions that Tatars were meant to follow was unclear, but the Battalov incident revealed several elements of artistic expression that

³⁹⁴ TsGAIPDRT, f. 1211, o. 1, d. 39, l. 3 (Party Bureau meeting) 5 January 1963.

³⁹⁵ Ibid.

³⁹⁶ TsGAIPDRT, f. 1211, d. 27, ll. 64-65 (Minutes of Closed Party Meeting), 17 January 1953.

were to be avoided. The first and most obvious was that “A Letter to Batyi Khan” was a transparent critique of Soviet authority which questioned the Khrushchev regime by denying that de-Stalinization had actually changed anything substantial about the county’s leadership. A second problem with Battalov’s poem was that he defended it by arguing that the true target of his critique was a latent anti-Tatar sentiment in Soviet society that he identified with “chauvinism.” These two factors together underline the fact that the Thaw, for all the acclaim it has received in terms of being a period of relative openness, was inaugurated by and allowed for a critique only of past, rather than ongoing, injustices. The Thaw prompted (limited) de-Stalinization, not de-Sovietization; dissent concerning ongoing societal problems was still, mostly, out of the question. A more significant issue was Battalov’s behavior through the entire affair. That Soviet artists of all stripes were subject to censorship is a well-known fact. Reports from Party meetings not only at the Writers’ Union, but the Composers’ Union and the Ministry of Culture and a whole host of other institutions indicate that officials frequently refused to allow certain pieces to be published or performed from the late 1930s through the 1940s and into the 1950s. Artists who had pieces censored generally did not suffer any lasting stigma. By refusing to accept that the poem would not be published and instead choosing to recite the poem against the advice of his peers, Battalov clearly transgressed established Party norms.

Lastly was the “nationalist” and “anti-Russian” character of the poem. The Tatar-Mongol yoke and the Kazan Khanate were fixed firmly in the minds of Party officials as sites of nationalist sympathy. Even to bring them up was to invite criticism; Battalov later recalled that he had been told that “[writing] to Batyi Khan was no different than to

write to Hitler.”³⁹⁷ That Tatar writers consistently set their narratives in the pre-Soviet past was a major problem for authorities who wanted art to reflect the realities of Soviet life. Part of the writers’ defense was that, even five years later, they knew very little of the interests of workers, engineers, and scientists, perhaps due to the fact that these professions, and urban life in general were dominated by ethnic Russians.³⁹⁸ This goes a long ways in explaining the fondness of many Tatars for village literature; Battalov himself penned works about the Tatar village both before and after “A Letter to Batyi Khan.” The distant past was more accessible than the Soviet present, but use of the past remained controversial and problematic.³⁹⁹ The poem was, however, not only nationalist but specifically anti-Russian. The justification for this claim was Battalov’s critique of Pushkin (to be discussed below) as anti-Tatar. Although critique of an exceptional Russian like Pushkin was clearly unacceptable to Battalov’s peers, the episode eventually gave way to a larger discussion of the poet’s alleged anti-Russian sentiments.

In 1964, Battalov was stripped of his Party membership as punishment for his activities related to his poem. Expulsion from the Party did not end his artistic life. In 1970 he completed his novel, *On the Chereshman* (rus. *Na chereshmane*; tat. *Chiremshän iaklarında*). Around the same time, he was readmitted the Party and an edited translation of “A Letter to Batyi Khan” appeared in the journal *Baikal*. It is difficult to ascertain on

³⁹⁷ Rafael’ Mustafin, “Kak kazanskii telenok bodalsia s partiinom dubom,” *Tatarstan* (November 2004), 48-53.

³⁹⁸ TsGAIPDRT, f. 1211, o. 1, d. 48 (Minutes of Otchetno-perevybornogo Party meeting), 10 October 1968.

³⁹⁹ Nancy Whittier Heer argues that even among historians there was no clear official line on how to approach sensitive subjects through at least the 1970s. See *Politics and History in the Soviet Union* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1971), 77.

what grounds Battalov was readmitted, save that he sent appeals to Moscow immediately following his expulsion and that his readmittance was approved at all levels up to the Central Committee. Nevertheless, Battalov continued to use his work as a medium with which to critique Soviet society. In May 1970, Battalov shared a “caustic” pamphlet with his colleague Rafael’ Mustafin in which he critiqued Soviet nationalities policy as “deceitful, duplicitous, and, at its core, russification.”⁴⁰⁰ The pamphlet allegedly circulated as *samizdat*, especially in student circles in Kazan. In the pamphlet Battalov also announced that he “renounced” his previous work and begin to write poetry under the pen-name “Ivan Ivanovich Ivanov,” which Mustafin regarded as an entirely satirical act meant to make light of what he and Battalov saw as problems with Soviet minority policies. Battalov has thus been identified as a “writer-dissident,” although not all parties have agreed to this designation.⁴⁰¹

Later incidents in Battalov’s career further complicated the relationship between the poet and his society. Another of his works, *Who is the Eighth?* (rus. *Kto zhe vosmoi; tat. Sigezenchese kem?*), had received some criticism in the early 1970s from literary authorities at the Tatar Writers’ Union for its own “anti-Russian” elements. Battalov was referred to as a “nationalist” by his peers because one of the work’s characters, “who was born and raised in a Russian family became a traitor to the Motherland.”⁴⁰² Eventually, a

⁴⁰⁰ Mustafin, “Kazanskii telenok,” 50.

⁴⁰¹ In a conversation with Battalov’s nephew, Farit Battalov, he indicated to me that he takes issue with some of Mustafin’s more “imaginative” conclusions about Battalov’s politics and work. The conversation was held via email between June 12 – June 22, 2018.

⁴⁰² Mustafin, “Kazanskii telenok,” 50.

second group of peers, these ones in Union's Russian section, went through a translation of the piece and found no evidence of "nationalist" sentiments, arguing that an individual of any nationality could become a traitor. Following their decision, 150,000 copies of an official Russian translation of *Who is the Eighth?* were published by *Sovetskaia Rossiia* in 1974. But readmittance to the Party and official recognition did not necessarily soften his view of how Soviet society treated Tatars. In a later conversation with his friend, the Tatar literary critic Rafael' Mustafin, Battalov recalled an incident in which an official from the Central Committee, upset by Battalov's poor Russian, allegedly said "clearly Ivan the Terrible didn't do enough with you" (*Vidimo, Ivan Groznyi malo porabotal nad vami*).⁴⁰³ These events underline the difficulty with which some Tatar cultural figures had to navigate Soviet cultural norms. On the one hand, calling out "chauvinism" on the part of Russians frequently carried with it the threat of eventually being labeled "anti-Russian" and "nationalist." On the other, however, Battalov's experiences seem to suggest that Tatars may have been subject to slights and anti-Tatar sentiments, neither of which was *supposed* to exist in Soviet culture.⁴⁰⁴

The later events of Battalov's life present a challenging set of contradictions. Should we take his readmittance to the Party as a sign of his sincerely-held faith in communist ideology, or simply as a small-scale version of the *realpolitik* that Soviet citizens had to engage with in their everyday lives? How then do we make sense of his continued resistance to Soviet cultural norms through the clandestine use of *samizdat*

⁴⁰³ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁴⁰⁴ According to family sources, Battalov was not active in politics in either the 1980s or 1990s. The poet died at his home in Kazan in March 1995. Author's conversation with Farit Battal, June 15, 2018.

publications? And what of the loaded classification of the poet as “dissident”? Putting aside for a moment the rationale on the part of the Party for Battalov’s rehabilitation, we can speculate that Battalov’s actions from 1970 onwards illustrate an important reality about the dual identity of ethnic minorities within the Soviet Union. As far as we can tell, Battalov was a sincere communist. He was also, however, deeply devoted to his Tatar cultural heritage and took issue with what he saw as latent anti-Tatar sentiments that existed throughout Soviet society and in official and unofficial policies of Russification. The latter belief did not seem to contradict the former. It was possible, therefore, for Tatar cultural figures to see the Soviet project as incomplete or imperfect without asserting that the entire edifice had to be abandoned. Soviet cultural policy made possible the works of artists such as Nazib Zhiganov, Musa Dzhaliil’, Naki Isanbet, and Salikh Battalov, works that were arguably both Soviet and Tatar and which would, hopefully, contribute to an internationalist Soviet culture that might eventually move beyond latent prejudices and antipathies. Battalov, however, did not resort to *samizdat* and to veiled satire out of confidence in this harmonious future, but because of his own experience that, at least in the present, to question Russian tolerance was to be regarded as anti-Soviet.

Pushkin and Articulating the Soviet Canon

One of the most telling aspects of the whole Battalov affair in terms of understanding the nature of the Soviet cultural canon in the 1960s was the backlash to the author’s perceived critique of Pushkin. Although the original poem has been lost, the discussion at the January 1963 Party meeting indicate the general nature of the poem’s

transgressions.⁴⁰⁵ Notably, the poem included a dual reference to Pushkin's imprisonment at his mother's estate in Mikhailovskoe in 1824-26 and to Dzhaliĭ's imprisonment in Germany, which readers interpreted as a subtle jab at Pushkin.⁴⁰⁶ This segment of the poem is notable in that the critique of Pushkin is directly tied to a promotion of Dzhaliĭ' as a worthy object of literary praise. One might interpret Battalov's poem as suggesting that, unlike Dzhaliĭ', Pushkin never really suffered for his art. In the January 1963 discussion of the poem, one of Battalov's peers, Tikhon Zhuravlev, questioned the need to "pit Pushkin against Dzhaliĭ'," arguing that the works of the latter would not have even been known to Soviet citizens without the help of Russians.⁴⁰⁷ Zhuravlev's words privileged Russians as the arbiters of the Soviet cultural canon. Accordingly, Battalov's critique of Pushkin was also an attack on Russian primacy in the cultural canon, and thus on the canon's legitimacy.⁴⁰⁸ Yet how was it that

⁴⁰⁵ An edited version of the poem was published in 1981 under the name "Shig"ri Möräjägat" in the Tatar literary journal *Kazan utları*, the very same journal which refused its initial publication. Several aspects of the 1981 poem suggest that the two poems are one in the same, albeit with certain editorial changes to ensure publication. First, the 1981 is also addressed to Batyi Khan, and references the Mongols' legacy of authoritarianism. Second, the poem also juxtaposes Pushkin with Dzhaliĭ', although not in an overtly critical way. Third, the 1981 poem makes reference to the Sino-Soviet split, which would have been much more relevant in the late 1950s or early 1960s than two decades later. The entire first section of the poem (8 stanzas) reads as potentially critical of the Soviet regime, further lending credence to my own interpretation that the 1981 poem is a distinct, though similar version of Battalov's "A Letter to Batyi Khan." See Salikh Battal, "Shig"ri Möräjägat," *Kazan utları* no. 7 (June 1981), 183-84.

⁴⁰⁶ I. R. Tagirov, *Istoriia i politika: uchebnoe posobie dlia studentov spetsial'nosti 07.00.02 – "otechestvennaia istoriia* (Kazan: Kazanskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta, 2009), 213.

⁴⁰⁷ TsGAIPDRT, f. 1211, o. 1, d 39, l. 5.

⁴⁰⁸ In fact, David Brandenberger notes that scholarly articles in the 1930s even "identifies to a debt to Pushkin among Tatar, Bashkir, and other non-Russian literary traditions." See Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism*, 81.

Pushkin, an iconic Russian national figure, was now rendered a Soviet cultural touchstone?

For a time, the revolutionary energies of 1917 had called into question the Russian literary canon. The center of this canon, and indeed one of the centers of Russian culture more broadly, was Pushkin.⁴⁰⁹ Pushkin was already recognized by Nikolai Gogol as the “Russian national poet” prior to his untimely death in 1837, and in 1859 the critic Apollon Grigoriev famously announced that “Pushkin is our everything.”⁴¹⁰ It was the official 1880 celebration and unveiling of the Pushkin memorial in Moscow, however, that led to Pushkin’s transition from a celebrated literary figure to a symbol of Russian national identity.⁴¹¹ One of the major consequences of Pushkin’s elevation to a national symbol was that it upset the balance of Nicholas I’s oft-quoted formula of Orthodoxy-Autocracy-Nationality. Now, Russians who opposed tsarism could point to their allegiance to Pushkin as proof of their Russianness, decoupling Russian national identity with any one political worldview.⁴¹² The Bolsheviks, as the inheritors of the radical Russian political tradition of the late

⁴⁰⁹ For an explanation of Pushkin’s relevance to Russian identity, see Stephanie Sandler, “‘Pushkin’ and Identity,” in Simon Franklin and Emma Widdis, eds., *National Identity in Russian Culture*, 196-216.

⁴¹⁰ Paul Debreczeny, *Social Functions of Literature: Alexander Pushkin and Russian Culture* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 226; Sandler, “‘Pushkin’ and Identity,” 120.

⁴¹¹ Marcus Levitt, *Russian Literary Politics and the Pushkin Celebration of 1880* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 4.

⁴¹² This notion of Russia as a cultural rather than political entity had significant consequences when the 1917 Revolution came, allowing Russia Abroad to claim that it was the “real” Russia. See, for example, the memoir of the radical Viacheslav Iakushkin. Viacheslav Iakushkin, “Pushkin i Radishchev,” in *O Pushkine* (Moscow: Izdanie M. i S. Sabashnikovoykh, 1899).

nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, had the means to transform Pushkin into a pro-Soviet symbol. This transformation, however, did not occur immediately with Bolshevik victory.

Like other aspects of pre-Revolutionary culture, Pushkin came under attack from revolutionary artists, notably Vladimir Mayakovsky. In 1912 Mayakovsky had decided that Pushkin should be “thrown over the side of the steamship of modernity” and in 1918 asked why Pushkin had not received sustained criticism as had other literary figures from the Imperial period.⁴¹³ In the 1920s, however, several Marxist literary critics, including Pavel Sakulin and Vladimir Friche, denounced Pushkin as nothing more than a nobleman. These critics suggested that Pushkin had simply been a lapdog for aristocratic interests and pre-Revolutionary literature in general should be eyed with deep suspicion as an “accomplice” to the tsarist regime.⁴¹⁴ Nadezhda Krupskaja even organized a quiet purge of Pushkin’s works from public libraries.⁴¹⁵ These and similar attacks on Pushkin were consistent with broader developments in Soviet culture during the 1920s, but as with the Proletkult and much of the artistic avant-garde of the decade, their influence would be short-lived.

Not all literary critics of the early Soviet period were opposed to Pushkin in principle. Indeed, the radical position that Pushkin simply represented the artistic potential of the old aristocracy was never fully accepted. In 1931 the critic Dmitrii

⁴¹³ Evgeny Dobrenko, “Pushkin in Soviet and Post-Soviet Culture,” *The Cambridge Companion to Pushkin*, ed. Andrew Kahn (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 203.

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 204.

⁴¹⁵ Brandenberger, 78.

Blagoi, for example, utilized Marxist class analysis to suggest that Pushkin was actually alienated from his aristocratic background.⁴¹⁶ Under Blagoi's model, Pushkin might be more accurately interpreted as a sort of urban intelligentsia figure. Thus, Pushkin, while not fully proletarian, certainly did not deserve to be lumped together with the tsar and the nobility. Others, such as People's Commissar for the Ministry of Education Anatolii Lunacharskii, romanticized Pushkin as existing outside of any class at all, an artist pushed into self-exile by economic and ideological forces outside of his control.⁴¹⁷ Mayakovsky himself changed his own tune, and in 1924 referred to Pushkin as a "comrade" who did not deserve to be thrown out with the proverbial bathwater of the Russian imperial literary canon.

As the 1930s progressed, Pushkin leapt from a position of relative acceptability to one of mythical importance within the Soviet imagination. No longer a social precursor to the revolutionaries, he became a revolutionary himself: he was, as Evgeny Dobrenko has argued, "a Decembrist, an enemy of autocracy and the tsar, a persecuted genius, a lover of the people cast out by his class and by society, an internationalist and a patriot."⁴¹⁸ Pushkin was elevated as a symbol of historical progress, meaning that he was no longer just a Russian author but a Soviet one. As Paul Debreczeny has argued, the way in the Soviet state glorified Pushkin was reminiscent of other uses of the Soviet

⁴¹⁶ Dmitrii Blagoi, *Sotsiologiia tvorchestva Pushkina* (Moscow: Mir, 1931), 50.

⁴¹⁷ Dobrenko, 204.

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 207.

heroic myth also applied to war heroes and important Bolsheviks.⁴¹⁹ In 1935, a Pushkin committee was formed whose goal it was to popularize Pushkin among the masses and to encourage Soviet citizens to link celebration of Pushkin with celebration of the regime.⁴²⁰ To this end, about 19 million volumes of Pushkin and Pushkin-related literature was published in 1936 and 1937, and countless events celebrating the poet were organized across the country.⁴²¹ In 1937, the one-hundredth anniversary of the poet's death, a country-wide jubilee was held, with libraries, schools, factories, collective farms, and other institutions organizing poetry readings, lectures, and films; this was accompanied by the renaming of streets, squares, and public institutions, as well as the opening of museums and numerous other activities.⁴²² This massive demonstration of state sponsorship elevated the Pushkin cult, legitimizing him as a symbol of Russian national identity while also exporting his worship to the non-Russian peoples of the Soviet Union.⁴²³

But what was specifically Soviet about this newfound appreciation for Pushkin?

David Brandenberger has argued that the Pushkin celebration “foregrounded a single literary tradition as hierarchically superior.”⁴²⁴ Jonathan Brooks Platt has noted that

⁴¹⁹ See Paul Debreczeny, "'Zhitie Aleksandra Boldinskogo': Pushkin's Elevation to Sainthood in Soviet Culture" in *Late Soviet Culture*, ed. Thomas Lahusen (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 47-68.

⁴²⁰ Brandenberger, 79.

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁴²² Jonathan Brooks Platt, *Greetings, Pushkin!: Stalinist Cultural Politics and the Russian National Bard* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016), 1.

⁴²³ Dobrenko, 208.

⁴²⁴ Brandenberger, 80.

“most discussions of Pushkin’s significance to the Soviet collective” prioritize his Russianness, with a *Pravda* article on the date of the jubilee explicitly stating that “the Russian people have a right to be proud of their role in history and of their writers and poets.”⁴²⁵ Moreover, the events and activities associated with the 1937 Pushkin jubilee were not altogether different from similar celebrations in Russian diaspora communities.⁴²⁶ Russia Abroad had never ceased the celebration of Pushkin, and from 1925 on he became the central of the annual Day of Russian Culture, owing partly to the fact that all Russians – regardless of social class, political outlook, or religious affiliation – could identify with him. However, as in the Soviet Union, Pushkin commemoration in the 1930s was ramped up in response to a growing dislocation from the homeland and the fear that émigré children would not have a sufficient attachment to Russian identity.⁴²⁷ In Harbin, China, France, and other places with even small Russian populations, the 1937 Pushkin celebration was marked with poetry readings, musical and theatrical performances, the delivery of public lectures, the unveiling of monuments, and other related activities.⁴²⁸ A major difference, at least in Harbin, was that the day of

⁴²⁵ Brooks Platt, 79; “Slava russkogo naroda,” *Pravda*, 10 February 1937, cited in Brooks Platt, 79.

⁴²⁶ For more on how the Russian diaspora represents a continuation of pre-Revolutionary Russian culture, see Marc Raeff, *Russia Abroad: A Cultural History of the Russian Emigration, 1919-1939* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

⁴²⁷ Kyrill Kunakhovich, “The Pushkin Centennial of 1937: Russia Abroad, the Soviet Union, and the Politics of Russian National Identity,” (Undergraduate thesis, Yale University, 2005), 18.

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.*, 36. See also Wim Coudenys, “Pushkin in the House of Mirrors: The 1937 Centennial Celebrations in Belgium and the Squared One-or-Two-Cultures Paradigm,” in *Transcending the Borders of Countries, Languages, and Disciplines in Russian Émigré Culture*, eds. Christoph Flamm, Roland Marti, and Ada Raev (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018), 47-58; Ol’ga Bakich, “Pushkinskie dni v Kharbine – 1937 god,” *Zapiski russkoi akademicheskoi gruppy v SShA*, vol. 30 (1999-2000): 243-250.

celebration began with a liturgy at local Russian Orthodox Churches.⁴²⁹ In the Soviet Union, meanwhile, it was communist rhetoric, rather than rituals, which made Pushkin Soviet.

It is tempting to assert that, in canonizing Pushkin, Soviet leadership was rehabilitating Russian culture, as both Brandenberger and Brooks Platt have suggested. However, Pushkin was perhaps the only pre-Revolutionary literary figure who was never outright banned and who enjoyed almost universal acclaim throughout the Stalin and post-Stalin years. Pushkin was elevated as a symbol of historical progress, making him no longer just a Russian author but a Soviet one as well. Pushkin, before the “sun of Russian poetry,” was now also “the sun of socialism”.⁴³⁰ Pushkin’s literary genius was the proof of the kernel of progress at the core of Russian culture. Soviet cultural policies were meant to universalize the distinct cultures of the country’s diverse ethnic groups, but Pushkin provided Soviet cultural authorities with the evidence to assert that Russian culture, or at least its most progressive elements, was already universal. This thereby made Russian culture a model for all other cultures to follow. In other words, Soviet messianism was channeled through Pushkin, thereby linking Russian creativity and potential with the creativity and potential of the Soviet project as a whole.

Battalov’s critique of Pushkin helps to illustrate a split within the Soviet literary elite. Scholars have argued that “Russian poetry began with and as a subject of empire,”

⁴²⁹ Bakich, 245.

⁴³⁰ Angela Brintlinger, *Writing a Useable Past: Russian Literary Culture, 1917-1937* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2000), 137.

and have noted that Pushkin's works, as well as those of many of his contemporaries, contain discourses which were favorable to the Russian imperial project as well as hostile to particular non-Russian ethnic groups.⁴³¹ With regards to Pushkin's feelings towards Tatars in particular, the record is mixed. Although Pushkin is reported to have owned a Koran and travelled to Kazan in 1833, the poet seemed to have been little interested in Tatars themselves.⁴³² A ballet adaptation of Pushkin's "The Fountain of Bakhchisarai," first performed in 1934 in Leningrad and staged regularly throughout the remainder of the Soviet period conveyed, in the words of one scholar, "on its surface... the [Crimean] Tatars as raping and murderous people."⁴³³ Although "Bakhchisarai" concerns Crimean Tatars in particular, Russians' tendency to view their empire's Muslim peoples as relatively homogenous makes this ethnic distinction somewhat less important vis-à-vis Pushkin's attitudes towards Volga Tatars. All this is to say that Battalov's criticism of Pushkin was not out of left field, and that it relied on an interpretation of pre-Soviet Russian culture as linked to the tsarist autocracy and empire. That Battalov was not taken seriously, and was even condemned for his remarks, provides further evidence of the extent to which Soviet cultural authorities were reticent to take the side of Tatar authors over the now-mythologized aspects of Russian culture.

⁴³¹ Harsha Ram, *The Imperial Sublime: A Russian Poetics of Empire* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 4. See also Susan Layton, *Russian Literature and Empire: Conquest of the Caucasus from Pushkin to Tolstoy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

⁴³² Helen M. Faller, *Nation, Language, Islam: Tatarstan's Sovereignty Movement* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2011), 37.

⁴³³ Kathryn Karrh Cashin, *Alexander Pushkin's Influence on the Development of Russian Ballet* (Ph.D. diss., Florida State University, 2005), 167.

Pushkin's emergence as a beacon of Soviet cultural genius also underscores significant developments in Soviet nationalities policy that began under Stalin. Historians have long asserted that Stalin's so-called "Great Retreat" of the late 1930s ushered in a period of Russocentrism and Russification policies and a corresponding "downgrading" of the promotion of ethnic minority cultures. But if we take Pushkin as a model for how Soviet culture adapted elements of the pre-Revolutionary Russian cultural canon, then the emergence of Russian culture as the "first among equals" was more about making Russian culture Soviet than it was about making Soviet culture Russian. It was possible to purge pre-revolutionary art of anti-Soviet sentiments, to decontaminate the past so as to make it in line with Soviet ideological necessities. Arguably, the only thing left of Russian culture was Soviet; it followed clearly that attacking these Soviet-condoned aspects Russian culture was tantamount to a critique of the Soviet system in general. The cultures of other Soviet peoples, however, had not yet reached this stage of development – just as it was Russian workers who led the 1917 Revolution, it was Russian authors who presaged the coming socialist culture. Whereas Battalov could not critique Pushkin lest he be labeled an anti-Russian nationalist, Battalov's detractors could critique the poet's use of the Mongol past as a site of Tatar national identity. Russian culture had become Soviet, but Soviet Tatar culture was still being articulated and, therefore, its boundaries could and should be extensively policed.

Perceptions of Tatars' Status within "Their" Cultural Institutions

That the established model of Soviet culture was inherently hierarchical and unequal was not lost on Tatars. However, articulating such a position carried with it risk

of condemnation or, as in Battalov's case, expulsion from the Party. In the aftermath of Khrushchev's "Secret Speech" and the resulting campaign against Stalin's cult of personality, one official in the Tatar Writers' Union brought up the issue of cultural Russocentrism. In an open Party meeting on 27 June 1956, a Comrade Kucharbaeva asserted that "in the phrase 'Great Russian people' one can perceive racism."⁴³⁴ Tatars' feeling of Russian cultural primacy mingled with the awareness that, although numerous Tatar intellectuals and bureaucrats had been or otherwise repressed in the 1920s and 1930s, the Purges had not targeted, as Rafael' Mustafin puts it, "Great Power chauvinists."⁴³⁵ Predictably, however, Kucharbaeva was immediately condemned by her colleagues for her "erroneous," "destructive, anti-Party" sentiments. That Russia would occupy the central space in Soviet culture was a *fait accompli*, and would not be challenged even as the Thaw presented Soviet citizens with the hope that the system could change for the better. The Soviet Union's non-Russians had not reached the level of Sovietness that Russians had achieved even before 1917, and thus had to follow in Russian footsteps.

Other incidents within Party committees suggest that Tatars' sense of their second-class status contributed to personal disagreements among Party members and to a broader feeling that Tatar cultural production was being dominated by non-Tatars. At a Party Bureau meeting for the Tatar State Opera and Ballet Theater on 29 June, 1963, for example, Party member Dzhilil' Sadrizhiganov was criticized by his peers for exhibiting

⁴³⁴ TsGAIPDRT, f. 1211, o. 1, d. 30, l.41 (Minutes of Open Party Meeting), 27 June 1956.

⁴³⁵ Mustafin, "Kazanskii telenok," 53.

a “constant tendency to sow ethnic strife.”⁴³⁶ Sadrizhiganov’s colleague, Isai Sherman, provided evidence for this charge by claiming that Sadrizhiganov had referred to the latter as “a Jew” and had made references to “Jewish domination” of the arts.⁴³⁷ Sherman, the theater’s head conductor, argued that “the question of who belongs to what nationality (*natsional’nost’*) should not exist in any cultural institution,” and put the issue before the bureau.⁴³⁸ Initially, Sadrizhiganov, himself a conductor and a pedagogue at the Theater, denied the charges, while a colleague, Petr Speranskii, tried to suggest that the whole incident had been an unfortunate joke gone wrong. The discussion was brief, and the official statement condemned Sadrizhiganov for his “unseemly, anti-Party attitude towards the national belonging of other members of the CPSU, to his colleagues, and to the head conductor of the theater Comrade Sherman.”⁴³⁹ Sadrizhiganov remained at the theater until 1970, at which point he began teaching at the vocal department of Kazan State Pedagogical Institute, where he remained until his retirement in 1979. Ultimately, his transgression of Soviet norms regarding ethnicity had little effect on his career.

This relatively small and inconsequential incident nevertheless reveals a great deal about how individual artists existed within a world in which artistic production was meant to be both “internationalist” and specifically “ethnic” or “national.” Although

⁴³⁶ TsGAIPDRT, f. 1954, o. 1, d. 66, ll. 12-15 (Minutes of Party Bureau meeting) 29 June 1963. Dzhaliil’ Gaiazovich Sadrizhiganov is the brother of composer Nazib Zhiganov.

⁴³⁷ Ibid.

⁴³⁸ Ibid.

⁴³⁹ Ibid.

Sadrizhiganov articulated specific anti-Semitic tropes, Tatar artists in other institutions also questioned the contributions of non-Tatars and wondered whether or not non-Tatars belonged in the TASSR's "national" cultural institutions at all.⁴⁴⁰ This broader question, however, butted up against the established reality that Soviet policy from the late 1930s on acknowledged the cultural authority of Russia and Russians over other Soviet peoples. At the same time, however, Sherman's own statement also illustrates the challenging position of artists not of the titular nationality in the ethnic republics. Sherman criticizes Sadrizhiganov by saying that the latter was always obsessed with everyone's national identity, but wonders how this squares with the fact that the theater exhibits a clear "preference for national cadres."⁴⁴¹ Sherman goes on to emphasize his own contributions to Tatar culture as a musician. Taken together, these two points of Sherman's statement are a way of undercutting Sadrizhignov by claiming that it is "national cadres" who dominate Tatar cultural institutions, and that non-Tatars like himself are honest and devoted contributors to Tatar culture. Sherman implies that Sadrizhiganov and others have nothing to complain about given the extent to which Tatars receive preferential treatment in cultural institutions which, both in name and in reality, are theirs. If Sadrizhiganov's comments can be read as resentment against non-Tatars in positions of authority in Tatar cultural institutions, then Sherman's seems to be equally full of resentment towards Tatar artists who, having been granted their own national institutions by Soviet power, are unsatisfied with their position.

⁴⁴⁰ See chapter 2.

⁴⁴¹ TsGAIPDRT, f. 1954, o. 1, d. 66, ll. 12-15 (Minutes of Party Bureau meeting) 29 June 1963.

Administratively, Tatars could also make the case that Soviet cultural policy did not sufficiently prioritize the development of Tatar Soviet culture. In a meeting of the Tatar Composers' Union leadership on 28 April 1963, composer Nazib Zhiganov questioned the lack of Tatar compositions being performed by the Tatar State Philharmonic in Kazan. Stating that "the Philharmonic should promote Tatar music... as well as the work of the composers of Tataria," Zhiganov asked Philharmonic Director Kh. Kalinina to explain the situation.⁴⁴² According to Kalinina, although the Philharmonic did often host concerts showcasing such compositions, it did not receive special subsidies to do so and was often in dire straits financially. The Philharmonic's artistic director backed up Kalinina, saying that "a concert costs 2000 roubles, but we can only charge one rouble per ticket [and] only have 800-900 seats in the concert hall."⁴⁴³ The simple fact of the matter was that Tatar cultural institutions operated at a loss by design, as state policy controlled ticket prices and thereby kept the Philharmonic from operating up to its stated mission. On the contrary, the lack of available funds meant that the Philharmonic relied on musicians who were more familiar with classic Russian or European pieces than with recent Tatar compositions, thereby further diminishing its potential to promote Tatar works and performances. Widespread underfunding need not be a sign of Moscow's malicious intent to sabotage the work of Tatar cultural institutions, but it does seem to underscore Terry Martin's argument that Soviet nationalities policies

⁴⁴² Natsionalnyi arkhiv Respubliki Tatarstan, f. 7057 (Tatar Union of Composers), o. 2, d. 37, l. 41 (28 April 1963). (Meeting minutes of Union leadership).

⁴⁴³ *Ibid.*, l. 42.

were always “soft line” and could be compromised in the face of ideological, political, or economic complications.⁴⁴⁴

Tatar artists, however, seemed to perceive inequities in terms of state and Party support for Tatar cultural production in the TASSR’s artistic venues as more than simply a byproduct of financial problems. This awareness appears to have been strongest at the Tatar State Academic Theater, which alone of the Tatar republic’s cultural institutions showcased performances solely in the Tatar language, although among these were translation of Russian or world classics. At a Party meeting for the Molotovskii district committee (which oversaw the theater) on 29 March 1954, theater employee Sadykova complained that the Party administration took little interest in workings at the theater, causing quality-control problems with performances.⁴⁴⁵ Sadykova went on to suggest that the Ministry of Culture was similarly disinterested in the theater, and that it often sent ethnic Russians with no knowledge of the Tatar language to performances, making the entire exercise of oversight pointless.⁴⁴⁶ The biggest problem, however, was that the Academic Theater received comparatively less funding for advertising than did other theaters in Kazan, where performances were frequently in Russian. The unspoken implication is that Tatar artists working at the Academic Theater felt that the republic’s cultural administration put less value and importance on Tatar-language performances,

⁴⁴⁴ See Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*.

⁴⁴⁵ TsGAIPDRT, f. 411, o. 1, d. 50, l.15 (minutes of Party conference) (29 March 1954).

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

judging them as either less likely to receive sufficient audience attendance or not worthy of official patronage.

Conclusion

Perceptions of inequality in terms of administrative support of the arts in the Tatar republic flow naturally from an understanding that, by the 1950s, Soviet culture had become hierarchical in terms of both the artistic forms and cultural content which it promoted. What is crucial here, though, is not that this inequality *really* existed, or that this hierarchy *did* promote Russian culture as the progressive core of Soviet culture, but that, by the 1950s, some Tatar artists were beginning to see the situation that way. Certainly, from the perspective of Tatar “true believers,” the construction of Soviet socialism went hand-in-hand with the development of the Tatar nation. Some, such as Salikh Battalov, however, increasingly identified an unwillingness in the country’s literary and artistic elite to critique the lingering influence of pre-Revolutionary Russian prejudice towards Tatars in particular and non-Russians in general. Similarly, employees in the Tatar republics theaters relied on state support to promote Tatar cultural performances, but implicitly noted that administrative policies seemed to view the success of Tatar-language performances as secondary to those in the Russian language. By the 1950s, not only was the Russian language the Soviet Union’s *lingua franca*, but so too was Russian culture arguably the *cultura franca* of Soviet socialism. Increasingly, Tatars recognized that Soviet nationalities policy privileged the already-universal *Russian* Soviet culture above the still-particular Tatar Soviet culture.

It is not surprising that these revelations took place in the years immediately following Stalin's death and Khrushchev's assumption of power. Partially because the historiography of this period has been, until recently, dominated by discussions of the Thaw, the peculiarities of the Tatar position in this period has been mostly overlooked. Indeed, Khrushchev's ascendance, while signaling the end of the most violent and repressive aspects of Stalinism, also had detrimental effects on minority cultures. In November 1958, Khrushchev pushed forward an education reform that had long-lasting impact on the national republics of the Soviet Union, with particularly significant consequences for the Tatar autonomous republic. The Theses on Education shifted language education away from the principle of "mother tongue" education to "parental choice", allowing parents in national republics to send their children to Russian-language schools and to forgo education in the titular republican language.⁴⁴⁷ Combined with economic changes that occurred during and after the Great Patriotic War, the education reform had the effect of increasing Russian linguistic dominance over urban society in the TASSR, especially in Kazan. These developments understandably troubled Tatar cultural figures, who must have seen the convergence of cultural, administrative, educational, and economic changes as problematic for the future fate of Tatar culture. The emergence of conflicts about the nature of Tatar culture and its relationship with the broader Soviet culture during this period speaks to the challenges that faced non-Russian Soviet citizens from the early 1950s through 1970s.

⁴⁴⁷ For a brief discussion of this change, see Jeremy Smith, *Red Nations: The Nationalities Experience in and after the USSR* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 208-211.

CHAPTER FIVE

Reconfiguring Tatar Identity During and After the Collapse of Communism

The collapse of the Soviet Union along ethnic lines has long been interpreted as evidence for the significance of Soviet nationalities policies.⁴⁴⁸ The resulting independence of the fifteen constituent states of the former Soviet Union necessitated a reevaluation of the Soviet period, with socialist narratives, symbols, and achievements being questioned, revised, and, at times, erased. This process was complex and convoluted, and in some states – such as Ukraine or the Baltic states - it involved a strong backlash against what was increasingly seen towards the end of the Soviet period as Moscow-driven efforts of Russification through the guise of Sovietization. Although most of the post-Soviet states contained significant minority populations, each understood themselves and were understood by their populations primarily as nation-states, and both public and private energies and resources were utilized in the 1990s and 2000s to cultivate national identities and popularize national narratives and symbols. This process was significantly different, however, for those former autonomous republics that still lay within the boundaries of the former Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR). In the case of the Tatar ASSR, officially renamed the Republic of Tatarstan in 1992, political, cultural, and demographic considerations led to a situation in the 1990s which the ethnically diverse republic was recognized as a “sovereign state and a subject of international law” which retained significant power vis-à-vis Moscow which,

⁴⁴⁸ Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993).

nevertheless, fell short of full independence.⁴⁴⁹ A crackdown on the regions under President Vladimir Putin in the early 2000s led to changes in the Tatar constitution in which Tatarstan now retains “full possession of the State authority... beyond the competence of the Russian Federation.”⁴⁵⁰

The so-called “Tatarstan model” of sovereignty within the Russian Federation, as well as its breakdown under Putin, has long been the object of interest for political scientists, but has yet to be fully integrated into histories of the Soviet collapse. Whereas Helen M. Faller has suggested that Tatarstan’s quest for political sovereignty can be understood as a story about “the unmaking of Soviet people,” I argue that such a designation obscures the significant way in which Soviet-era practices, narratives, and symbols retained their significance in late-Soviet and post-Soviet Tatar culture.⁴⁵¹ Ultimately, Soviet-era Tatar culture consisted of the application of socialist forms to Tatar national content and the integration of what was “Tatar” into the broader mosaic of Soviet society. Thus, the promotion of specific, unique, and national Tatar cultural products in the form of musical pieces, heroic narratives, literary efforts, and other such objects was intended to foster Soviet international solidarity. To put it more simply, Tatars were meant to be Tatar, but only in the same way as Bashkirs were to be Bashkir, or Uzbeks Uzbek – the Soviet way. But as Soviet authority and ideology collapsed, Tatar cultural figures were forced to reconfigure Tatar identity in and after the period of

⁴⁴⁹ U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, *Report on the Tatarstan Referendum on Sovereignty: March 21, 1992* (Kazan and Pestretsy: April 14, 1992), 4.

⁴⁵⁰ Article I, Constitution of the Republic of Tatarstan, 2002, accessed 15 May, 2019, <http://www.tatar.ru>.

⁴⁵¹ Helen M. Faller, *Nation, Language, Islam: Tatarstan’s Sovereignty Movement* (Budapest: Central European university Press, 2011), 1.

sovereignty. Former Communist Party members, university professors, members of professional unions, historians and others participated in this process, the result of which was to both promote Tatar culture and history and to stabilize Tatars' position within a Moscow-dominated Russian Federation.

This chapter examines the reconfiguration of Tatar identity in the wake of the end of the Soviet experiment. I argue that efforts to reconceptualize the meaning of Tatar identity with respect to the Soviet heritage have nevertheless led to the maintenance of important characteristics of the Soviet-Tatar relationship, better understood as the Moscow-Tatar relationship. The first section of this chapter explores the history of the Tatar national movement from Perestroika through the 1990s, emphasizing how the desire for Tatar sovereignty prioritized the preservation and promotion of Tatar ethnic culture (language, media, history). I argue that nascent Tatar civil society, which included various groups agitating for different levels of autonomy versus outright independence, promoted policies which were broadly in line with the longstanding goals of Tatar State and Party elites, many of whom remain in power, even today. In the second section, I move into the 2000s and examine how Tatar literature and film has harkened back to the late-Imperial period in order to illuminate important characteristics of Tatar religious identity. These more recent explorations of Tatar identity have sought to address the relationship between Tatars and Russians amicably while still maintaining their demands for cultural autonomy along ethnic and confessional lines. Finally, the third section investigates late-Soviet and post-Soviet treatment of the Tatar war hero Musa Dzhaliil'. I argue that the untouchability of the Dzhaliil' myth underscores the degree to which Soviet Tatar symbols and narratives legitimize Tatarstan's continued,

though diminished, political and cultural sovereignty with a Russian-dominated Russian Federation.

The Tatar National Movement & Politico-Cultural Changes in the 1990s

The eventual fate of the Tatar Republic, with regards to its special status within the RSFSR and the continued protection of Tatar ethnic culture, was an open question at the time of Perestroika. For decades, economic development had brought an influx of Russians and other nationalities into the republic, leading to a situation in which, by 1989, ethnic Tatars accounted for 48.5% of the population, Russians 43.3%, other nationalities making up the remainder.⁴⁵² Tatar cities, especially Kazan and Naberezhnye Chelny, which together held about 2/3 of Tatarstan's urban population in 1991, retained ethnic Russian majorities throughout the Soviet period, with Russians often occupying more elite jobs, especially in industry.⁴⁵³ Perhaps more threatening for ethnic Tatars was the long-term degradation of Tatar language education opportunities in Tatarstan's urban centers: in 1917, 31 Tatar nation schools existed in Kazan; only two remained by 1945, and none of any quality by 1990.⁴⁵⁴ Whereas the broader Soviet intelligentsia and dissident movement was motivated by economic hardship and democratic hopes to denounce the Communist Party, important segments of ethnic Tatar society instead revolved their critiques of the Soviet system around how communism had wrought

⁴⁵² Faller, *Tatarstan's Sovereignty Movement*, 1. For an overall analysis of economic modernization and the resulting influx of Russians and others to the Tatar Republic, see Al'fiia Galliamova, *Tatarskaia ASSR v period Poststalinizma (1945-1985 gg.)* (Kazan: Tatarskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 2015).

⁴⁵³ Sergei Kondrashov, *Nationalism and the Drive for Sovereignty in Tatarstan, 1988-92: Origins and Development* (New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 2000), 4, 8-14.

⁴⁵⁴ Faller, *Tatarstan's Sovereignty Movement*, 45.

cultural damage in the forms of inequitable distribution of resources, assimilationist policies, or outright Russification.⁴⁵⁵ Emerging alongside but separate from the wider societal critique of the Soviet system, the Tatar national movement eventually included various civic organizations, political parties, youth groups, and other bodies which articulated support for various shades of Tatar sovereignty from autonomy through outright independence.

The struggle for legal sovereignty within a Russian federal framework from 1990-1994 was the result of both internal political groups within the Tatar Republic and larger confrontations between Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin. In August 1990, the Tatar parliament challenged Gorbachev by issuing a unilateral declaration of sovereignty which was quickly supported by Yeltsin, who told Tatars that they could have “all the sovereignty they could handle.” Despite Yeltsin’s initial support, Tatar President Mintimer Shaimiev’s support for the August 1991 coup led to exacerbated tensions between Moscow and Kazan, and in October 1991 a group of radical Tatar nationalists launched a protest, demanding the Tatar parliament declare independence. Some protestors eventually attempted to storm the building, leading to several injuries among protestors and local police. This incident was the only instance of violence during the struggle over sovereignty. In light of these tensions, the Tatar government declared in February 1992 that they would hold a national referendum on the issue of sovereignty. The wording of the referendum was as follows:

⁴⁵⁵ Kondrashov, 61.

“Do you agree that the Republic of Tatarstan is a sovereign state and a subject of international law building its relations with Russia and other republics and states on the basis of equal treaties?”

Despite threats from Moscow that the referendum would incite violence, and even a decision on 13 March by Russia’s Constitutional Court that the referendum was unconstitutional, the referendum went forward on 21 March. The results indicated that 61% of respondents answered yes, and 37% no, with polling data suggesting that Tatar districts voted overwhelmingly in favor and Russian or more mixed areas (including Kazan) tending to vote against sovereignty.⁴⁵⁶ Although most mainstream segments of the Tatar national movement favored the referendum, as well as the eventually 1994 bilateral treaty between Moscow and Kazan which solidified Tatarstan’s legal status until the ascension of President Vladimir Putin, some more radical figures denounced sovereignty as insufficient, calling instead for more drastic measures.

Significantly, however, the factors which played a major role in motivating the participants of the Tatar national movement had long been an object of criticism even for members of the Tatar Communist Party. During Perestroika, criticisms of Soviet nationalities and educational policies amongst Tatar Party members came to a head. At issue were the very realms which Tatar cultural figures has laid out almost two decades earlier with regards to diminishing educational and institutional resources devoted to the Tatar language. At an open Party meeting of the Tatar Union of Writers on 23 March 1987, poet Salikh Battalov, reinstated to the Party in 1975, argued that current policies

⁴⁵⁶ U.S. Commission, 1-5.

regarding Tatar language education were no longer in line with Leninist principles.⁴⁵⁷ Tatar language education had been limited to a small number of ethnic Tatar students, primarily in the countryside, making its status as the official language of the republic purely symbolic. At a similar Party meeting on 20 October 1987 Battalov again brought up the issue, this time arguing that concrete changes to nationalities policy were necessary.⁴⁵⁸ He further suggested that the recent integration of Russian émigré author Arkadii Averchenko into the Soviet canon should lead to similar changes in the Tatar literary canon. Specifically, he hoped that Tatar émigré writer Gaiiaz Iskhaki, a Tatar nationalist who had fled Soviet Russia for Turkey in 1920, could be reevaluated for similar integration.

Articulating frustration with Soviet policy and even calling for the rehabilitation of a Tatar nationalist writer were not necessarily at odds with the maintenance of Soviet internationalist society. Rather, it was through the promotion of Tatar interests that a more egalitarian and fair Soviet Union could be established. Playwright Tufan Minnullin [tat. Tufan Mingnullin] articulated this position in a Party meeting on 22 December 1987, stating that “only a deeply national writer can become a true internationalist.”⁴⁵⁹ As I. A. Guzel’baeva argues in her analysis of the Perestroika-era Tatar intelligentsia, the articulation of a sort of “national ideology” in which Tatar cultural and educational elements of socialist society were strengthened was complementary to the needs of Party

⁴⁵⁷ Tsentral’nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv istorio-politicheskoi dokumentatsii Respubliki Tatarstan (TsGAIPDRT), f. 1211 (Primary Party Organization, Tatar Union of Writers), o. 1, d. 67, l. 9 (Minutes of Open Party Meeting 23 March 1987).

⁴⁵⁸ TsGAIPDRT, f. 1211, o. 1, d. 67, ll. 62-63 (Minutes of Open Party Meeting 20 October 1987).

⁴⁵⁹ TsGAIPDRT, f. 1211, o. 1, d. 67, l. 111 (Minutes of Party meeting 22 December 1987).

policy.⁴⁶⁰ Still, republican authorities did not initially prioritize cultural autonomy in their efforts to secure more power vis-à-vis Moscow, focusing instead on the republic's difficult economic position in which much of its industrial infrastructure and resources were officially under USSR or RSFSR, rather than TASSR, control.⁴⁶¹ Even those Party members, like Battalov and Minnullin, who emphasized specifically “Tatar”, rather than republican, issues, sought a solution in which the Soviet Union was preserved, albeit in a form in which Tatarstan was elevated to Union status.⁴⁶² This partially explains TASSR President (and Secretary of the Tatar Party) Shaimiev's declaration of support for the August 1991 coup. The failure to preserve the Soviet Union, even in modified form, encouraged the republican establishment, already in 1990, to stake out a position alongside the rising Tatar national movement.

One of the first and most influential civic organizations of the Tatar national movement was the Tatar Public Center (*Tatarskii obshchestvennyi tentr* or TOTs – briefly also known as the All-Tatar Public Center or VTOTs). Founded and headed by a professor at Kazan University and parliamentary deputy Marat Muliukov, the TOTs became the locus for Tatar cultural and political activists dedicated to supporting

⁴⁶⁰ I. A. Guzel'baeva, “Dialog tvorcheskoi intelligentsii i vlasti v period perestroiki (na materialakh respubliki Tatarstan)”, *Vestnik Tomskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta* no. 404 (2016), 59.

⁴⁶¹ Kondrashov, 96.

⁴⁶² In August 1990, the Supreme Soviet of what was then the TASSR passed a sovereignty declaration in which the republic was officially designated the Tatar Soviet Socialist Republic (TSSR), a status agreed to by Moscow that December. *Ibid.*, 102.

perestroika and the corresponding democratization of Soviet society.⁴⁶³ The organization, formed in early 1989, include a significant number of academics and social scientists in its drafting committees, but its overall membership included members of numerous “non-formal” groups of Tatars inside and outside of Tatarstan.⁴⁶⁴ After its first major congress in February 1989, TOTs issued a list of proposals to the Plenum of the Central Committee of the Soviet Union titled “On the Improvement of Interethnic Relations within the USSR.” The statement begins by asserting that “Stalinist nationalities policies led to the creation of a multi-leveled and controversial federation no longer answering to the principle of equality among the peoples of the Soviet Union.”⁴⁶⁵ Of particular concern was the hierarchical structure of Soviet federalism in which autonomous republics had significantly less political weight in Moscow than their union counterparts. The “Tatar nation”, in particular, “has the sixth highest population and are distributed throughout the territory of the USSR... but does not have representation in the central organs of the USSR and the RSFSR.”⁴⁶⁶ Such a situation not only limited local control of economic resources but also limited the Tatar government’s ability to address local socio-cultural concerns.

The TOTs prioritized cultural revitalization in much the same way as had Battalov, Minnullin, and other Party officials. Indeed, at the XI Congress of Tatar

⁴⁶³ D. M. Iskhakov, *Chetvertaia tatarskaia revoliutsiia v XX veke. Ch. 1. Nachalo: Stenogramma I-go s’ezda Tatarskogo obshchestvennogo tsentra (1989 g.)*. (Kazan: Institut istorii im. Sh. Mardzhani AN RT, 2009), 4; U.S. Commission, *Referendum*, 5.

⁴⁶⁴ Kondrashov, 117.

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 220.

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 221.

Writers in May 1989, Tatar writers issued an official statement arguing that TOTs' proposals deserved the republican authorities' serious consideration.⁴⁶⁷ Specifically, TOTs called for "representation for national groups in local organs of power," educational opportunities, and "the development of moral culture" (*razvitie dukhovnoi kul'tury*).⁴⁶⁸ This last point included the "revival of pre-existing national theaters and the creation of cultural centers, philharmonic offices" as well as the expansion of Tatar-language radio and television programs not only within the territory of the Tatar Republic but throughout the Soviet Union in areas populated by ethnic Tatars.⁴⁶⁹ Training a new generation of Tatar-capable bureaucrats, journalists, and others would require further investment in pedagogical institutes, universities, and other educational facilities. TOTs asserted that such major structural changes were necessary because the Soviet system had utterly failed to provide for Tatars' equal status within the country. Noting that there was a serious insufficiency in the numbers of theaters, museums, journals, and Tatar-language books, TOTs suggested that the numbers of such necessary cultural media "cannot be compared with that of the pre-revolutionary period or with that of earlier years of Soviet power."⁴⁷⁰ The overall position of the Tatar language, TOTs argued, was "catastrophic" and "stagnant," with younger generations of Tatars particularly prone to estrangement from the Tatar language.⁴⁷¹

⁴⁶⁷ Kondrashov, 122.

⁴⁶⁸ Iskhakov., 223.

⁴⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 223-24.

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 227.

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 227.

Behind the general arguments established in TOTs' petition to the Central Committee were specific critiques of Soviet-era cultural policies which enforced the uniformity of historical inquiry and which linked the achievements of Soviet-era Tatar figures with Soviet values and beliefs. The critique of Soviet historiography is a familiar one: the TOTs petition stated simply that "by the 9 August 1944 Resolution of the Central Committee of the All-Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks)" the period of the Volga Bulgars, the Kazan Khanate, and the Golden Horde "was expunged from the history of the Tatar people."⁴⁷² TOTs asserted that revision of Soviet historiography was a necessary objective of the Tatar national movement and that cultural sovereignty could only be achieved through new historical inquiries directed by Tatar scholars. Although the statement did not dictate *how* this historiography would be revised, it argued that "objective" exploration of this period with an emphasis on "illuminating the ethno-genesis of the Tatar people."⁴⁷³

Indeed this search for Tatar heritage and the central characteristics of Tatar national, ethnic, or religious identity became a major feature of Tatar nationalist literature in the 1990s and 2000s. Much of this literature, like their Soviet antecedents, focused on deriving a historical narrative of Tatar development and sovereignty which allowed Tatar to escape from the subordinate position assigned to it by Marxist historiography. What differentiated post-Soviet literature, however, was that revisionism could now exist completely outside of Marxist models and instead rely on other rhetorical tools to identify

⁴⁷² Iskhakov, 229.

⁴⁷³ Ibid.

and legitimize narratives of Tatar history. In the 1990s especially, this freed Tatar historiography from the ideological need to make historical narratives subservient to the ideological goals of the Soviet state. In practice this led to numerous works which explicitly condemned Russian imperialism and denounced Soviet-era Tatar textbooks as guilty of covering up official Tatar history. In Vakhit Imamov's 1994 *The Hidden History of Tatars*, for example, the author argues that "the Tatar people, unfortunately, do not even know half their history," partly because their history had been written "under the 'guidance' of Russian 'experts.'"⁴⁷⁴ 120,000 copies of Imamov's text were published in Naberezhnye Chelny, one of the major centers for Tatar nationalist literature in the 1990s, along with numerous of similar texts by various authors. The influence of nationalist historical revisionism extended into the realm of education and scholarship, as well, leading to a more nationalized curriculum in schools by the end of the 1990s.⁴⁷⁵

Concerns for the well-being of Tatar society and culture permeated the environment of the Tatar Republic in the 1990s and 2000s. The Tatar national movement articulated a series of positions in-line with longstanding critiques of Soviet society from within the Tatar Communist Party, but the diversity of the republic meant that an outright victory of nationalist forces in the 1990s was all but impossible. Nevertheless, a small number of Tatar cultural and social elites in the 1990s advocated for the promotion of Tatar interests in such a way as to silence the presence, within Tatarstan's borders, of

⁴⁷⁴ Vakhit Imamov, *Zapriatannaia istoriia tatar* (Naberezhnye Chelny: Gazetno-knizhnoe izdatel'stvo "Kamaz," 1994), 3.

⁴⁷⁵ See Katherine Graney, "Education Reform in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan: Sovereignty Projects in Post-Soviet Russia," *Europe Asia Studies* 51:4 (1999): 622-623.

other, non-Tatar ethnic groups.⁴⁷⁶ This tendency was most clear in the quasi-historical writings of both academics and literary figures, many of which harkened back to Tatars' pre-Russian past. As the decade wore on, however, extreme nationalist positions became thoroughly marginalized. As Helen Faller notes, by the 2000s, the feeling among Tatar nationalists was that sovereignty no longer existed in any meaningful sense.⁴⁷⁷

Drawing the Boundaries of Tatar Religious Identity through a Usable Past

Putin's ascension to power on 31 December 1999 signaled the beginning of a new effort to reverse Moscow's weakened grip on its minority republics. In a 2002 meeting with the Presidents of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan, Putin allegedly threatened to "find Wahabbists" in the republics if they did not agree to his centralizing demands.⁴⁷⁸ The use of religion as a tool to rein in the non-Russian republics underscores the extent to which Islam has come to play a role in post-Soviet Tatar society. Already by the end of the Soviet period, some scholars pointed to a resurgence of Islam among Tatars and other Muslim peoples of the Middle Volga.⁴⁷⁹ Helen Faller argues that, in the 1990s, "for many, being Tatar has come to entail observing or at least acknowledging the Islamic calendar." In addition, through 2000, Faller observed that "increased observance of

⁴⁷⁶ This trend has not completely vanished since the 1990s, as is clear most notably from the works of Favziia Bairamova. See Agnes Kefeli, "Noah's Ark Landed in the Ural Mountains: Ethnic and Ecological Apocalypse in Tatarstan," *The Russian Review*, vol. 73 (October 2014): 596-612.

⁴⁷⁷ Faller, *Tatarstan's Sovereignty Movement*, 16.

⁴⁷⁸ For the role of Islamophobia in Russian policy and a brief overview of its effects on Tatarstan, see Alexander Knysh, "A Clear and Present Danger: 'Wahhabism' as a Rhetorical Foil," *Die Welt des Islams*, vol. 44, no. 1. (2004): 3-26.

⁴⁷⁹ Nadir Devlet, "Islamic Revival in the Volga-Ural Region," *Cahiers du Monde russe et soviétique* vol. 32, no. 1 (Jan-Mar 1991): 107-116.

Islam was particularly pronounced among people under the age of 30 whose upbringing mostly occurred during the period of increased freedom of speech initiated by Gorbachev's reforms."⁴⁸⁰ This suggests that, while the level of devout observance is difficult to grasp, a significant percentage of ethnic Tatars in the republic maintain at least some connection to and familiarity with Islam. Although, as Faller argues, "increasing Muslim religiosity illustrates how many Tatar-speakers' worldviews have diverged from those of people they identify as Russians," religious identity has also served a different, reconciliatory role in post-Soviet Tatar cultural productions.⁴⁸¹ These works have attempted to reconsider Russian imperialism and anti-Islamic policies as historical mistakes, organized by a tyrannical state divorced even from the interests of average Russians. Under these assumptions, a resurgent Islamic Tatar identity does not prevent either Tatars' peaceful contributions to Russian society nor the possibility of real partnership between Tatars and Russians.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Orthodox missionary efforts of the late imperial period, as well as the broader history of imperial Russia's conquest and control of Tatarstan, have been the subject of textbooks, films, and works by prominent Tatar literary figures. These subjects, which, like other religious topics, tended to be either deemphasized or scrubbed of any complexity during the Soviet period, have now become sites from which to explore Russia's complex imperial past and its continuing multiethnic present. Tatar cultural figures have latched onto the topic of late imperial Russia's

⁴⁸⁰ Faller, 296.

⁴⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 295.

missionary efforts among ethnic Tatars as both a crucial historical moment in the formation of the Tatar nation and Tatar identity, as well as an allegory from which to examine continued Russian-Tatar relations in the Russian Federation. In doing so, they articulate a vision of a Tatar past that is both distinct from and tied to the history of Russian imperialism, thereby reasserting Tatarstan's demand for cultural autonomy while emphasizing the integral role of Tatars in Russian history. These "reimaginings" of the past do not explicitly claim historical accuracy, but they do implicitly claim validity through their particular political and moral readings of the past, suggesting an underlying truth that exists outside or behind accepted historical narratives.

One of the most widely publicized and distributed historical fictionalizations of the period of Il'minskii's missionary project is Ramil Tukhvatullin's 2004 film *Zuleikha*. The film, based upon noted Tatar nationalist Gaiaz Iskhaki's 1912 play of the same name, reimagines the Orthodox missionary efforts of the Russian Empire among the indigenous Tatar population of what was then called Tataria. The central character of the film is Zuleikha, a Tatar woman accused of apostasy by the local Orthodox priest. After she is found guilty of reverting to Islam and cohabitating with her Muslim husband, Zuleikha is sent first to a monastery and then to live with a Russian (Orthodox) husband, Peter, a drunk who routinely beats and rapes her. Although technically a Kriashen (Baptized, Orthodox Tatar) by Russian standards, meaning that she is a baptized Orthodox Christian, she maintains her devotion to Islam and to the Tatar (Muslim) community, including her Tatar husband. In this way, Zuleikha acts as a metaphorical representation of the Tatar community as a whole, which, although nominally divided by Russian (Orthodox) attempts at conversion, is actually unified in its allegiance to its "true" Tatar (Muslim)

identity. The film is a relatively faithful adaptation of Iskhaki's original play, which Agnes Kefeli has argued is itself a refashioning of a traditional Islamic tale as an "appeal for national and religious unity among the ethnic Tatars."⁴⁸² In doing so, it posits that "ethnicity, language, and religion determined national identity for both colonized and colonizers," and thus places Orthodox Tatars (Kriashens) in an ultimately doomed position between two primordial identities.⁴⁸³

The most noteworthy aspect of the film, however, is its inclusion of Nikolai Il'minskii and his colleague, Evfimii Malov.⁴⁸⁴ Although Iskhaki's original play was set in roughly the period that Il'minskii was active at the Kazan Theological Academy, he does not appear in the play. Tukhvatullin's decision to include Il'minskii is reflective of the fact that Il'minskii has come to be identified in both Western and Russian historiography as a central figure in late imperial religious policy. As Tatar historian R. M. Mukhametshin has argued, "by revolutionizing the role of the [Orthodox] Church and faith in the education of non-Russian children," Il'minskii helped to "change the methods of Russification policies."⁴⁸⁵ In the film, Tukhvatullin refrains from depicting Il'minskii as an outright Russifier, establishing instead an image of the missionary that challenges

⁴⁸² Agnes Kefeli, "The Tale of Joseph and Zulaykha on the Volga River: The Struggle for Gender, Religious, and National *Identity* in Imperial and Postrevolutionary Russia," *Slavic Review* vol. 70, no. 2 (Summer 2011), 375.

⁴⁸³ Agnes Kefeli, *Becoming Muslim in Imperial Russia: Conversion, Apostasy, and Literacy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), 26.

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 262.

⁴⁸⁵ R. M. Mukhametshin, "N. I. Il'minskii – ideolog pravoslavnogo missionerstva" in *Islam v istorii i kul'ture tatarskogo naroda*, eds. Ia. G. Abdullin, R. M. Amirkhanov, F. M. Sulmanov (Kazan: Akademiia nauk RT, 2000), 79.

the viewers to question the conflicting allegiances of nation and faith. As represented by Tukhvatullin, Il'minskii believes that nationality or ethnicity serve as alternative identities to religious confession which, at least potentially, can sap devotion to a shared Islamic identity amongst Russia's Muslim populations.⁴⁸⁶ When confronted by Malov with news of apostasy among Kriashens, Il'minskii dismisses the problem and cites a Kriashen colleague saying that Tatars "who are not destroyed through force... you can destroy through learning."⁴⁸⁷ Although not explicitly stated in the film, the divergence here between Il'minskii, who favored conversion through translation of Orthodox liturgy into non-Russian languages and through broad educational efforts, and Malov, who favored polemical, heated religious debate on the merits of Orthodoxy versus Islam, is historically-based.⁴⁸⁸

The opening conversation between Il'minskii and Malov centers Tukhvatullin's exploration of Tatar identity on the issue of Islam. Whereas Malov, dressed in the garb of a traditional Orthodox priest, vehemently lays the blame for the continued resilience of the Islamic faith on Catherine the Great's ending of the practice of forced conversion, Il'minskii, in a Western suit, argues that centuries of forceful policies could not solve the problem of Russia's multifathed peoples and that only a turn towards national policy can successfully weaken the empire's Muslim peoples by dividing them internally. By

⁴⁸⁶ These statements are consistent with recent historiographic interpretations of Il'minskii's missionary system that underscore the fact that Il'minskii saw that religious and ethnic identities were linked.

⁴⁸⁷ *Zuleikha*, DVD, directed by Ramil Tukhvatullin (2004: Kazan, Tatarstan, Russian Federation: Ramai Studio).

⁴⁸⁸ Robert P. Geraci, *Window on the East: National and Imperial Identities in Late Tsarist Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 88-90.

emphasizing these aspects of Il'minskii's policies and actions, Tukhvatullin establishes the figure as a physical embodiment of Russian imperialism, albeit not as one who is focused on a rigid and straightforward policy of Russification. Indeed, although the subject matter of the film concerns the late imperial period, it also reflects contemporary understandings of the Soviet period. For viewers who lived through the communist era, Il'minskii's emphasis on national policy would harken to Soviet nation-building efforts that sought to replace traditional allegiances, religious or otherwise, with new loyalties to national and supranational entities.⁴⁸⁹ *Zuleikha* is an attempt to reintegrate Islam into conceptions of Tatar history by suggesting some necessary element of Tatar identity was lost or forced underground during the Soviet period. Tukhvatullin connects the loss of religious identity with a broader sense of cultural loss by emphasizing how Zuleikha's imprisonment and forced cohabitation with a Russian isolate her from her community, her language, and her customs, and further suggests that Zuleikha's child, raised as an Orthodox Christian, is also alienated from his heritage.

Tukhvatullin is careful, however, not to identify loss of religious identity as a problem with a clear perpetrator and victim. One scene, which takes place in a Kriashen village unaffected by apostasy, underscores the connection between faith, language, and culture not only among Tatars but also among Russians themselves. In this scene, an ethnic Russian is visibly annoyed by one of the local Kriashens who can hardly speak Russian, remarking that one can hardly be Orthodox without speaking Russian. In a later scene, after a decision has been made to raise a cross in Zuleikha's village, a priest and

⁴⁸⁹ See Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*, Adrienne Edgar, *Tribal Nation*.

his followers are confronted by the local Islamic elder (*khazrat*). The elder implores the priest not to destroy the village mosque (by converting it to a church through the raising of a cross), as it was built with local funds. After the priest's refusal, the elder explains that both faiths "pray to the same god" and that they both still "sail on the same boat." Although their religions seem at odds, the elder believes that Orthodox-Muslim antagonism is manufactured and is simply a reaction to the state's violent policy. Soon thereafter, a local Tatar burns down the former mosque, now an Orthodox church, but then approaches the hysterical priest and begins loudly weeping. Here Tukhvatullin is emphasizing the shared pain of both the Orthodox and Muslim communities.

These scenes are central to the overall message of the film, which is summed up by the narrator after the film's conclusion. The narrator suggests that Russia, as a land of two great confessions, was beset by tragedy and that the tale of Zuleikha is meant to serve as a warning of the potential violence that coincides with religious conflict. Indeed, the film, as framed by the introductory and concluding narration, acts as a parable. It is a lesson of the past that implores the audience in the present to respect religious difference, as religious faith can be central to individual and collective identities. However, the overall theme of religious toleration is also complicated by numerous sub-themes, such as the loss of heritage for children of mixed marriages. It is through these sub-themes that Tukhvatullin presents the potential consequences for a society in which religious difference is not tolerated or considered unimportant.

Zuleikha plays a delicate balancing act with its message, on the one hand encouraging openness and tolerance between faiths, and tightly linking Tatar national

identity with the Islamic confession (and Russians with the Orthodox one) on the other. The film thus presents us with two major propositions. The first promotes a reconciliation of Tatars and Russians on the basis of mutual respect and cultural autonomy. Although the concluding narration emphasizes the struggle of the Tatar people (*khalik*) against the Russian state, it is clear that those who suffer are from all communities. Indeed, the film's two major Russian characters, the priest and Zuleikha's Russian husband, Peter, are, at times, portrayed with some sympathy. The burning of the church is as traumatic for the priest as had been the raising of the cross for the Islamic elder, and just as Zuleikha fears that her son will lose his Tatar heritage, so too does Peter suspect that his Tatar wife will take his son away from him. The second message of the film is that religious and emotional resilience, rather than physical confrontation, are central to Tatar identity. Zuleikha's deathbed plea with her son, an Orthodox Christian, that she be buried in an Islamic cemetery despite her official status as a Kriashen, indicates her continued devotion to her faith and her community. Viewers are meant to take note of religious devotion as a sort of collective identity and memory that creates a community defined by shared beliefs, values, and experiences that Zuleikha's son has seemingly been stripped of.

Zuleikha's message of resilience rather than violence emphasizes a need for peaceful engagement between Russia's peoples and their various confessions. Nevertheless, it shares with more radical nationalist works a call for action that emphasizes devotion to Islam as an essential part of both individual and collective Tatar identity. For Tukhvatullin, the struggle to retain Tatar cultural identity against violent repression in the imperial period acts as a parable for Tatars living in the early twenty-

first century, as well as a convenient site from which to extract the essence of nationhood. The imperial period is useful for those Tatar nationalists who seek to delineate the Tatar nation because clear lines can be drawn between the oppressed – primarily Tatars, but also some Russians – and the oppressors – the state, somewhat ambiguously connected with Russians. Such clear distinctions are harder to make in works focusing on the Soviet period, especially considering the fact that religion was repressed during this period. By recalling the imperial past and historicizing Iskhaki's *Zuleikha* through the inclusion of Il'minskii, Tukhvatullin elaborates on a particular vision of the past that condemns Russian state efforts to divorce Tatars of their faith. Instead, Tukhvatullin presents a case for tolerance based upon the immutability and distinctness of Russian/Orthodox and Tatar/Muslim identities. *Zuleikha* is a story of two distinct communities that are damaged by their inability to accept each other's separate existence, and *Zuleikha*'s son, bereft of a unified heritage, is symbolic of the consequences when this separateness is not respected.

These themes are further explored in Tatar author Tufan Minnullin's 2010 short story, "The Damned." Published in Russian in the literary journal *Nash sovremennik*, a publication well-known for its Russian nationalist leanings, "The Damned" again focuses on Il'minskii's missionary project to explore contemporary Tatar identity. In the story, Minnullin reimagines Evfimii Malov's interactions with Il'minskii, as well as with a local Tatar convert to Orthodoxy, Sakhigarai Akhmerov. Through the prism of conversion, Minnullin argues that religious identification and national and ethnic heritage are intricately connected, such that abandoning one's faith inevitably leads to estrangement from one's community. "The Damned" also features a direct critique of Russian imperial

policy, again embodied in Il'minskii. In a conversation with Malov, Il'minskii reminds his colleague that "we are not simply missionaries but politicians as well. And know that our eventual goal is to lead all non-Russian peoples of Russia to a common Russian identity."⁴⁹⁰ Here Minnullin is referring to the nature of the real Il'minskii's missionary efforts, which allowed for relative cultural independence for minority groups (through translation of Orthodox liturgy into non-Russian languages) but, nevertheless, sought to create a sort of pan-imperial identity unified through Orthodoxy.⁴⁹¹ Minnullin places imperialism as the backdrop of individual conversion, highlighting the connection between state policy and the destruction of individual identity.

"The Damned" is a reimagination of Malov's 1891 conversion of Akhmerov, a Muslim Tatar and son of a local Islamic elder. The facts of the conversion itself does not appear in the historiography of Il'minskii's missionary project and, it can be assumed, is fictionalized here. The story begins with Malov writing in his diary, reflecting on recent apostasy within the Kriashen community of Kazan. He suddenly thinks of Il'minskii, who "was sent by Petersburg to carry out Russification policies" in Kazan and elsewhere. He then recalls a conversation in which Il'minskii claimed that efforts should be made to convert prominent Muslims so as to set an example to others.⁴⁹² Although Malov objects to the conversion of Akhmerov on the grounds that the Tatar's character is questionable, he relents, and Il'minskii tell him that Akhmerov's character is of no consequence and

⁴⁹⁰ Tufan Minnullin, "Proklatiye," *Nash sovremennik*, 4 (April, 2011), 277. Hereafter "The Damned." 277.

⁴⁹¹ Geraci, *Window on the East*, 47-85.

⁴⁹² Minnullin, "The Damned," 276.

that is it “his name” and “the fact” of his conversion that is important.⁴⁹³ The remainder of the story describes Akhmerov’s arrival in Malov’s home, their ensuing discussion, and, eventually, Akhmerov’s shameful exit onto the streets, where he is hit and cursed by his fellow (Muslim) Tatars. Through the discussion, it becomes clear to Malov that Akhmerov is simply interested in Orthodoxy for its tangible benefits, especially alcohol, liaisons with Russian women, and higher social standing among the city’s Kriashen community.

In “The Damned,” Minnullin draws a clear link between the missionary encounter and cultural imperialism which, according to the fictionalized Il’minskii, aims to forge a Russia in which there is “only one people – a Russian one.”⁴⁹⁴ However, not only is the missionary project suspect because of its imperial overtones, but also because it is a corrupting force which threatens the unity of Tatar identity. We see this corruption or confusing of identity in *Zuleikha* when the title character and her Russian husband, Peter, argue over the heritage of their son. We similarly see it in Akhmerov’s abandonment of Islam, embodied in his adoption of a Christian name, also Peter, in exchange for worldly pleasures. Both Peter, a drunkard who physically abuses Zuleikha, and Akhmerov, a drunkard and a womanizer, reflect Il’minskii’s documented fears that Tatar converts to Orthodoxy would become Russified not only in positive ways but would also tend to

⁴⁹³ Ibid., 277. This idea is consistent with Islamic practice in which the act of calling oneself a Muslim is an important first step to the eventual spiritual transformation of the individual. See Devin DeWeese, *Islamization and Native Religion in the Golden Horde: Baba Tukles and Conversion to Islam in Historical and Epic Tradition* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994).

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid.

adopt Russian vices.⁴⁹⁵ Minnullin himself also sees the adoption of Orthodoxy as inseparable from a more thorough form of Russification that is fundamentally antagonistic to Tatar identity and culture. Minnullin's sympathy with the nationalist vision of Iskhaki condemns Russia's conversion efforts not necessarily because Islam is preferable to Orthodoxy in general, but because each religion is tied to individual and communal heritage. Therefore, conversion can only lead to an individual's alienation from his or her own cultural heritage. Akhmerov is "damned" because he is between two communities and belongs to neither; Zakhar, the son of Zuleikha and Peter, is not condemned outright, but his conflicted reaction to his mother's deathbed request that she be buried in the Muslim cemetery hints at his divided heritage and allegiances.

Support for such an interpretation of "The Damned" can be found in various interviews with Minnullin over the past decade. In a 2009 interview, Minnullin stated his opposition to mixed marriages on the basis that they could lead to the dissolution of the Tatar people. He argues that when people have "different upbringings, different beliefs about life, different views," and are also of different ethnicities, "nothing good can come of it."⁴⁹⁶ He explains that all couples have problems in the early stages of marriage, but that it is the issue of ethnicity that is the biggest complication that, in his view, cannot be overcome. According to Minnullin, there is a fundamental incompatibility between different peoples that makes the idea of a mixed family a dangerous one. Minnullin does

⁴⁹⁵ Geraci, *Window on the East*, 129-30.

⁴⁹⁶ Albina Khazieva, "Tufan Minnullin. Simvoly tatarskogo national'nogo kharaktera," *Agentstvo kul'turnoi informatsii*, accessed 13 April, 2019, <http://culture.tatar.ru/tvorchestvo/teatr.htm/pub/62>.

not specify for whom this applies, and it remains unclear whether a Tatar-Bashkir or Tatar-Uzbek marriage would be less destructive than would a Russian-Tatar one. But marital problems are only one aspect of the issue – more significant is that, in Minnullin’s view, in such marriages, the “Tatar nationality is lost.”⁴⁹⁷ In a 2001 interview with *Zvezda povolzh’ia*, a Tatar newspaper, Minnullin claimed that “in the past, mixed marriages occurred only amongst the upper levels of society... for political purposes.”⁴⁹⁸ Such children were isolated from their native languages and cultures and, as such, never felt the importance of their heritage. Minnullin argues that, even in contemporary times, those concerned with their careers “have no need to know and feel the beauty of their native language.”⁴⁹⁹

Mixed marriages, according to Minnullin, are a vehicle for homogeneity rather than heterogeneity. Minnullin argues that all Tatars should know “their own language, their own history, their own traditions [and] songs which the people sing in both happiness and grief.”⁵⁰⁰ Unfortunately, for Minnullin, children do not know these things because they no longer are raised in families which pass on a unified heritage to the next generation. Such concerns are far from the overt Russification planned by the fictionalized Il’minskii, but there are deeply connected in that Minnullin sees them both as zero-sum games. Accordingly, mixed marriages can shatter the cultural identity of a

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁸ World Association of Writers, *Tatarskii put’: prava naroda i politkorrektnost’* (Kazan: Magarif, 2003), 18.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid., 16.

family as much as destructive state policies can. It is the metaphorical Tatar family, the *narod* or *khalik*, which is endangered by Russian cultural imperialism and by changing attitudes towards mixed marriages and the integration of the peoples of the Russian Federation and former Soviet Union. Minnullin worries that, as in the case of Akhmerov, who renounces his Islamic heritage in favor of higher social status and material rewards, Tatars are increasingly thinking of ethnicity as a definable commodity rather than as an intrinsic part of their identities. Although he might consider Minnullin's positions to be a critique of multiculturalism, it would be more accurate to refer to Minnullin's beliefs, like those of other Tatar nationalists, to be in line with the promotion of diversity through strong protections for cultural autonomy. Both Minnullin and Tukhvatullin see Russia as made up of many ethnicities and cultures and propose that tolerance can be possible through the clear delineation of distinct peoples.

Although it is difficult to judge the resonance of "The Damned" and *Zuleikha*, it is clear that both have, to some degree, entered the public consciousness. Minnullin's status as both a cultural and political figure underscores the reality that his positions exist in mainstream discussions about Tatar identity among Tatar elites, if not average citizens. As for *Zuleikha*, the original Iskhaki play is currently part of Tatarstan's public school curriculum, and upon the film's release in 2005, it was distributed by mosques and Islamic schools and was premiered at the Tatar State Academic Theater.⁵⁰¹ *Zuleikha* was estimated to have been viewed by about 200,000 people in Tatarstan during its initial

⁵⁰¹ Kefeli, *Becoming Muslim in Imperial Russia*, 262.

release and was also distributed to international film festivals.⁵⁰² Moreover, the publication of “The Damned” in *Nash Sovremennik* illustrates the extent to which Minnullin’s argument – that Tatars should be Muslim, and Russians Orthodox, have resonance outside of the Tatar community as well. It seems fair to suggest that this rigid segregation of ethnic identities along confessional lines is one which holds deep appeal amongst Russian nationalists, who likewise champion the continued separateness of Russian nationalities.

The Persistence of Soviet Narratives and Symbols: The Case of Musa Dzhaliil’

Despite major ideological, political, and cultural changes since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, some constitutive elements of Soviet society have remained the bedrock of post-socialist Russia. Perhaps no single aspect of Soviet culture is as persistent as the symbolic centrality of the Great Patriotic War. In the case of ethnic Tatars, the Great Patriotic War has continued to be connected with and understood through the experience of the Tatar poet, Musa Dzhaliil’. The myth of Dzhaliil’'s heroism, enshrined chiefly in the *Moabit Notebooks* but also in numerous monuments, institutions, schools, streets, and awards bearing his name, has retained its potency in the post-Soviet period. What is striking about the symbolism surrounding Musa Dzhaliil’ is that it remains almost completely unchanged since its initial inception in the early-to-mid 1950s.⁵⁰³ Dzhaliil’'s devotion to the Stalinist Soviet Union, his capture and (supposedly

⁵⁰² “Fil'm ‘Zuleikha’ stal prizerom kinofestivalia ‘Berlin-Aziia’”, *Islam News: Informatsionnoe agentstvo Rossii*, 11 December 2006, <https://islamnews.ru/news-fil-m-zulejha-stal-prizerom-kinofe>.

⁵⁰³ Serguei Alex. Oushakine, “‘We’re nostalgic, but we’re not crazy’: Retrofitting the Past in Russia,” *The Russian Review* vol. 66, no. 3 (Jul, 2007): 451-482.

feigned) enlistment in the Nazi-organized Idel’-Ural Legion, and his underground anti-fascist activities that led to his death, including his authorship of the *Moabit Notebooks*, have not been substantially revised or even revisited by mainstream Tatar cultural figures despite the collapse of the regime which enshrined these moments in order to tie Tatar identity more closely to Soviet ideology. The persistence of Musa Dzhaliil’ as a symbol of Tatar nationhood into the twenty-first century underscores the extent to which structures and narratives erected during the Soviet period continue to serve as bastions of contemporary Tatar identity.

An incident from 2009 illustrates the inflexibility of the Dzhaliil’ narrative and the danger for those who, in good faith or bad, have attempted to reassess the legitimacy of the Soviet-era narrative. Briefly summarized, the episode begins with the publication of a short “historical drama” in the Tatar nationalist journal *Miras* by Tatar Writers’ Union member Akhmat Sakhapov [tat. Äkhmät Säkhapov].⁵⁰⁴ The story, “The Death of ‘Barbarossa’” depicts Nazi wartime leadership’s attempts to secure an alliance with Turkey through partnership with the Tatar nationalist Gaiiaz Iskhaki, who had fled the Soviet Russia for Turkey in 1920. Ostensibly, the play depicts Nazi promises of creating an independent Tatar-Bashkir state after victory as a way of securing Turkish entry into the war. However, Iskhaki, in consultation with Turkish President İsmet İnönü, rejects Hitler’s offer and dooms the chances for a Nazi victory.⁵⁰⁵ In the midst of these

⁵⁰⁴ Äkhmät Säkhapov and Esfir Yahudin, “‘Barbaross’ inkiyrazı (Tarikhi drama),” *Miras* no. 6 (2009), 43-62; *Miras* no. 7 (2009), 41-59.

⁵⁰⁵ In actuality, Nazi Germany was interested in Turkey’s entrance into the war, but the specific conversations in “The Death of Barbarossa” are presumed to be fictionalized.

machinations are several small references to the collaborationist Idel-Ural Legion, as well as to Musa Dzhaliġ' and a few other Tatar figures. The response was immediate – prominent Tatar cultural figures, including dramatist Tufan Minnullin, writer Rafael' Mustafin, and the historian Iskander Giliazov [tat. Iskändär Göläjev], accused Sakhapov of “slander” and condemned all those with “lowly souls” who tarnished Musa Dzhaliġ's image.⁵⁰⁶ At the same time, they sent a letter about Sakhapov's play to the President of the Republic of Tatarstan and instigated an official investigation by the Tatar State Prosecutor's Office.⁵⁰⁷ In light of these actions, *Miras* lost all public subsidies, and issues six and seven in 2009 in which the play appeared were removed from sale.⁵⁰⁸ Sakhapov himself was kicked out of the Tatar Writers' Union not long thereafter. His response was simple: the play wasn't even about Dzhaliġ', “it is about Gaiaz Iskhaki!”⁵⁰⁹

Of course, Sakhapov's play does include a few oblique references to Dzhaliġ' which may explain his peers' reaction. As Sakhapov notes, “no one in the play criticizes Musa Dzhaliġ' or speaks poorly of him. They only praise him.”⁵¹⁰ Unfortunately, the praise comes from Adolf Hitler, who claims that Dzhaliġ' and Shäfi Almaz, another Tatar

⁵⁰⁶ Sasha Dolgov, “Hitler Musa Jälilne maktaganmı?”, *Azatliq Radiosi*, accessed 26 February, 2019, (<http://www.azatliq.org/a/1797066.html>).

⁵⁰⁷ Françoise Daucé, “Les compositions mémorielles autour de la Guerre patriotique. L'exemple du souvenir de Moussa Djalil, Tatar, stalinien, poète et patriote”, *The Journal of Power Institutions in Post-Soviet Societies* (Online), no. 12 (2011), (<http://journals.openedition.org/pipss/3864>), accessed 2/26/2019.

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁹ Dolgov, “Hitler.”

⁵¹⁰ Ibid.

figure associated with the Idel-Ural Legion, came to his birthday celebration and “praised” him.⁵¹¹ Hitler also says that “Dzhalil’ praised me in the poem ‘Atilla,’ which he wrote for me.” In return, Hitler gave Dzhalil’ an apartment, a car, and a printing press for his work.⁵¹² Earlier in the play, in a negotiation between Franz von Papen, Hitler’s ambassador to Turkey, and Iskhaki, von Papen tells Iskhakiy that his future vice-presidents in the Idel’-Ural state will be Shāfi Almaz and Musa Dzhalil’, both of whom are apparently already serving as parliamentary deputies in the Third Reich.⁵¹³ At no point in the play is there any indication that these discussions are meant to be taken at anything but face value: the reader is given no real reason to doubt Hitler or von Papen, as the discussions between the two do not differ in any marked way from their discussions with Iskhaki. But there is another lingering element of Dzhalil’ in the play, and that is the complete absence of any of the standard features of the official narrative. There is no suggestion that Dzhalil’ is feigning his admiration of Hitler, and even his imprisonment is wiped away, with Hitler himself claiming that he saved Dzhalil’ from imprisonment and execution.⁵¹⁴ This is a very different portrait of Dzhalil’ than has been popularized and glorified, and also diverges from the accepted sketchy factual record established by both Soviet and post-Soviet scholars.

⁵¹¹ Sakhapov, “‘Barbaross’ ĩnkıyrazı”, *Miras* vol. 7, 53.

⁵¹² *Ibid.*

⁵¹³ Sakhapov, “‘Barbaross’ ĩnkıyrazı”, *Miras* vol. 6, 47.

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 55. Sakhapov, “‘Barbaross’ ĩnkıyrazı”, *Miras* vol. 7, 53.

Dzhalil's characterization in "The Death of 'Barbarossa'" was only the most recent of several related controversial commentaries on Dzhalil'. In the same month that the play appeared in *Miras*, several of Sakhapov's critics participated in a workshop reacting to these statements. At this workshop, Minnullin stated that, in a previous article of Sakhapov's in *Miras*, the author had listed Dzhalil's birth year "but placed a question mark in place of the year of his death."⁵¹⁵ Minnullin insinuates that Sakhapov's denial of Dzhalil's 1944 death is almost treasonous, stating that "the very year, day, hour, and minute of Dzhalil's execution by the fascist guillotine is well known."⁵¹⁶ The overall consensus among members of the workshop is that not only is Sakhapov's work offensive, but it is has no factual basis. Some of the critiques almost reach the point of absurdity, with one critic questioning why Sakhapov refers to Adolf Hitler as "Adolf von Hitler."⁵¹⁷ Sakhapov later admitted that Germany did execute ten Tatars who had fought against Germany, but that the names of Dzhalil' and Almas were not among them (Dzhalil' had allegedly used the pseudonym Gumerov in the official narrative.)⁵¹⁸ In questioning the official account of Dzhalil's 1944 execution in Plotzensee Prison in Berlin, Sakhapov refers to the 1974 novel *Musa* written by Tatar author Shaikhi Mannur. According to Sakhapov, censored passages from the novel, which Sakhapov had seen while working as an editor at the Tatar Publishing house, indicated that Dzhalil' had

⁵¹⁵ Söyembikä Kashapova, "Musa Jälil: Tik antıma taplar kunmasın" *Azatlıq Radiosi*, last updated 25 May, 2009, <http://www.azatliq.org/a/1738966.html>.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid.

⁵¹⁷ Dolgov, "Hitler."

⁵¹⁸ Ibid.

shown great respect to Hitler. It also put forth a theory that Hitler, as a descent of the Huns, was legitimately interested in helping to establish an independent Idel’-Ural state on former Soviet territory after the war.⁵¹⁹

However, according to these critics, the responsibility for “dirtying” Musa Dzhaliil’s name went beyond Sakhapov and *Miras* alone. Another important figure of their ire was Tatar nationalist writer Favziia Bairamova [tat. Fävziyâ Bâyrâmovâ].⁵²⁰ Bairamova, leader of the pro-independence Tatar nationalist party “Ittifak,” first rose to prominence during the late 1980s and early 1990s as part of the sovereignty debates which gripped Tatar civil society during this period. Best understood as an exclusionary nationalist, Bairamova had long been at odds with more moderate writers and cultural figures. Among Bairamova’s actions, the participants of the 2009 workshop found Bairamova’s championing of Tatar émigré figure and Radio Azatlyk (the Tatar-Bashkir service of U.S. funded Radio Liberty) head Garif Sultan (1923-2011) troubling. In a 2008 blog post on the “Ittifak” website, Bairamova recounted Sultan’s biography and described two conversations she had with him in 1990 and 2007.⁵²¹ Bairamova argues that Sultan had been a staunch advocate for Tatar political and cultural rights and had defected to the West because he viewed the Soviet Union as a pro-Russian imperial regime. Like Dzhaliil’, Sultan served in the Idel’-Ural Legion after his capture in 1942,

⁵¹⁹ Ibid.

⁵²⁰ For a concise treatment of Bairamova’s ideology and her political and social standing with Tatarstan, see Agnes Kefeli, “Noah’s Ark Landed in the Ural Mountains.”

⁵²¹ Favziia Bairamova, ““K budushchemu nado gotovit’sia...” *Azatlyk Vatan: informatsionnoe izdanie tatarskoi partii natsional’noi nezavisimosti “Ittifak”* last updated 24 September, 2008, http://azatlyk-vatan.blogspot.com/2008/09/blog-post_24.html.

but his German-language skills led him to work as a translator for German authorities. Although he did not know Dzhaliġ personally, Sultan claimed that both had received German citizenship for their service in the Legion.⁵²² Finally, Sultan claimed that Dzhaliġ only became actively engaged in anti-fascist actions when it became clear the Soviets would win the war, making the poet an opportunist rather than a hero.

In the 2009 workshop, several of Sakhapov's critics took issue with Bairamova's attempted rehabilitation of Garif Sultan. Mustafin argued that efforts to place Sultan, "one of those who served the German fascists and an enemy of the people," alongside Dzhaliġ, Tukay, and other prominent Tatar national figures was shameful.⁵²³ By "listening to [Sultan's] words and repeating his opinions," Bairamova was serving foreign interests against those of her own people.⁵²⁴ This later point is particularly interesting because it points to an important cleavage among ethnic Tatars, with those outside of the former Soviet Union, like Sultan, being accused of nefarious, anti-Tatar activities. Giliyazov further articulates this division by suggesting that criticism of Dzhaliġ "was not born of our environment" but was rather the product of "Shikhap Nigmati, Enver Galim, Garif Sultan, and other emigres" who fled the Soviet Union for the West.⁵²⁵ The tendency "to make white black and black white" ultimately originates, according to Giliyazov, in Western historical revisionism. The attacks on Sultan and his

⁵²² As proof, Sultan points to Dzhaliġ's long imprisonment, his official trial, and his execution by guillotine rather than by firing squad as evidence of the poet's legal German status.

⁵²³ Kashapova, "Musa Jalil."

⁵²⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵²⁵ *Ibid.*

surrogate, Bairamova, serve to underline the fact that loyalty to the official Dzhaliil' narrative is something of a Shibboleth for true Tatar patriotism and nationalism. Although Bairamova claims that Sultan was also a Tatar nationalist, and offers up his activities through Radio Azatlyk as proof, these actions are not in line with what Tatar culture figures in Tatarstan see as evidence of service or devotion to the Tatar people. Moreover, Giliyazov and his colleagues presume that any such anti-Dzhaliil' attitudes must have originated elsewhere, and could not be a product of society in either the Tatar ASSR or the Republic of Tatarstan. This view, however, is challenged by Sakhapov's defense of "The Death of 'Barbarossa.'" "

Indeed there were some late-Soviet rumblings against the official Dzhaliil' narrative. In the case of Mannur's 1974 novel, this complex questioning of Dzhaliil's allegiances, if that is, in fact, what Mannur intended, was silenced. Other narratives which challenged Dzhaliil's loyalty, heroism, or death, discussed in chapter 3, were likely unheard or unspoken within the Soviet Union itself. However, more subtle revisions and engagements with the Dzhaliil' myth have left a paper trail that may help to illuminate the antecedents of Sakhapov's play. The most notable is the 1985 staging of the play *Day X* based on Tatar dramatist Dias Valeev's drama *Poet and War*. In an article-interview in the Tatar daily newspaper *Evening Kazan* in 1985, writer Liubov' Ageeva introduces the play by suggesting "what new can be said about the poet-hero if it seems to us that we know every single one of his footsteps?"⁵²⁶ The acknowledgement of the inertia of the

⁵²⁶ Liubov' Ageeva, "Vechen chelovek ili ne vechen?" *Vechernaia Kazan'*, 28 February 1985, quoted in "Bol'shoi dramaticheskii teatr imeni V. I. Kachalova oznamenoval 49-letie Velikoi Pobedy spektaklem 'Den' lks' po p'ese tatarskogo dramaturga Diasa Valeeva 'Poet i voina'", *Kaz@nskie istorii: kul'turno-prosvetitel'naia gazeta*, accessed 28 February, 2019, <http://history-kazan.ru/13584-1548>.

Dzhalil' myth precedes the discussion of the play, which purports to focus greater attention the psychological and moral aspects of Dzhalil's wartime fate than on a more typical emphasis on simplistic heroism. Playwright Valeev argues that his goal as a writer is to illuminate "how a person will behave in a critical situation," and justifies taking slight liberties with the official facts (in *Day X*, Dzhalil' plays a cat-and-mouse game with German counter-intelligence that is not documented) by suggesting that showing Dzhalil's heroism through an interior battle of principles is more significant than simply recounting his physical suffering.⁵²⁷

Valeev's play received significant pushback from members of the Tatar Party elite. For much of 1984, the play was left off of the official performance listings at the Kachalov Theater and was performed only sporadically.⁵²⁸ The rationale for this treatment of the play was that its treatment of the Germans as a "clever and insidious enemy" was not in keeping with the official line in which Germans were to be represented as barbarous and cowardly villains.⁵²⁹ Just as interesting is that Valeev's play was one of two plays about Dzhalil' which were performed around this period, the latter being Tufan Minnullin's *Conscience Has No Choices*. According to Valeev, Minnullin's status as head of the Tatar Writers' Union from 1984, as well as his close relationship with celebrator director Marsel' Salimzhanov and Party Secretary of the Tatar Obkom Rais Beliaev (1984-87), secured his play's place in the official repertoire

⁵²⁷ Ibid.

⁵²⁸ Guzel'baeva, "Dialog tvorcheskoi intelligentsii," 57.

⁵²⁹ Ibid.

while sidelining Valeev's own effort.⁵³⁰ Valeev went on to claim that his own play's foregrounding of a particular form of individual, moral "patriotism" was no longer appealing to Party leadership by the mid-1980s.⁵³¹ Indeed, as Iu. Fedotov, an actor who portrayed Dzhaliġ in *Day X*, reminisces, "it's strange, but working on *Day X* I didn't think about the war but about today."⁵³² The play thereby invited viewers – as well as performers themselves – to see Dzhaliġ not as a towering, distant figure, but as a metaphorical representation of the personal moral struggles of any individual. This was an important change from the Brezhnev period, in which the image of the war was simplified much along Stalinist lines.⁵³³

Minnullin's *Conscience Has No Choices* takes a similar if functionally different tack in terms of putting Dzhaliġ into conversation with the modern viewer. In one passage, Dzhaliġ appears in the imagination of an unnamed poet from the present.⁵³⁴ The poet tells Dzhaliġ that he has waited so long to meet him, but Dzhaliġ, apparently living his last days in German captivity before his execution, is suspicious that the poet is only interested in condemning him.⁵³⁵ Rather, the poet tells Dzhaliġ that the *Moabit*

⁵³⁰ Dias Valeev, *Chuzhoi ili V ocheredi na Golgofu*, excerpts on *Kaz@nskie istorii*, accessed 28 February, 2019, <http://history-kazan.ru/13584-1548>.

⁵³¹ *Ibid.*

⁵³² Ageeva, "Vechen," *Vechernaia Kazan'*, quoted in *Kaz@nskie istorii*, accessed 16 February, 2019, <http://history-kazan.ru/13584-1548>.

⁵³³ Yan Mann, "Contested Memory: Writing the Great Patriotic War's Official History during Khrushchev's Thaw," (Ph.D. diss., Arizona State University, 2016), 386.

⁵³⁴ Tufan Minnullin, "Literaturnyi Tatarstan. O Dzhaliġe. 'U sovesti variantov net'" *Literaturnaia gazeta*.

⁵³⁵ Here Dzhaliġ seems to be under the impression that, as a POW, he would be seen as something less than heroic by his fellow Soviet citizens.

Notebooks are well-known in Kazan and Dzhaliil' is "talking to a person who, since childhood, has bowed before [his] masculinity and uncommon talent."⁵³⁶ The poet then explains that he is to write about Dzhaliil', but that he has not found the words to sum up Dzhaliil's meaning, that being the reason why he has chosen to visit Dzhaliil' in his imagination. He says that those of his generation "do not have your strength of soul, your confidence in yourself."⁵³⁷ Eventually, he suggests that Dzhaliil' did not have to die at all – that he could have avoided wartime service like so many others. To this, Dzhaliil' simply replies "conscience has no choices."⁵³⁸ Through the text, Minnullin places the audience into a conversation with Dzhaliil', but the conversation only serves to heighten Dzhaliil's unreachability and his distance from the present. There are references to Dzhaliil's suffering and sacrifice in a way that underline the fact that we as readers and viewers cannot access Dzhaliil's experiences and thus will be, like the unnamed poet, at a loss for words to describe the meaning of Dzhaliil's life.

Perhaps the most interesting fact that we can take from both Valeev's and Minnullin's theatrical depictions of Dzhaliil' is that neither text is burdened with factual, descriptive representations of the poet. Neither seeks to accurately portray Dzhaliil's wartime experiences, but seeks to use a symbolic representation of these experiences as a way of metaphorically connecting or distancing the present with respect to Dzhaliil'. Indeed, given these texts, already by the late Soviet period the facts have ceased to have a

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵³⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵³⁸ *Ibid.*

significant impact on the overall dialogue around Dzhaliġ'. This feature of Dzhaliġ' literature remains a significant part of contemporary trends. As journalists have noted in articles about the "Death of 'Barbarossa'" and the resulting backlash, Sakhapov himself has provided no sources which back up his claims regarding Dzhaliġ's purported admiration of Hitler (neither has he proven that Hitler was referred to as Adolf von Hitler).⁵³⁹ Sakhapov has not made a genuine attempt, outside of his literary works, to provide for a documented alternative theory of Dzhaliġ's wartime activities. Much more surprising, however, is the extent to which Sakhapov's critics are also completely uninterested in the facts, tending to dismiss Sakhapov's work as a moral failure rather than an academic or literary one. In the June 2009 workshop, for example, poet Ilfak Ibrahimov dismisses criticisms of Dzhaliġ' by saying "one should not stain the great personalities that have become great symbols of our nation."⁵⁴⁰ Minnullin goes further by arguing that "a nation without heroes cannot be great," and that Dzhaliġ's status is beyond reproach.⁵⁴¹

As French scholar Franoise Dauc  argues in her 2011 article about the poet, criticism of Dzhaliġ' has become "impossible" in the current climate in Tatarstan.⁵⁴² Indeed, it seems fair to argue that Dzhaliġ' has not been treated as a historical object in any comprehensive fashion since the end of the Soviet Union, whether within or outside

⁵³⁹ Dolgov, "Hitler."

⁵⁴⁰ Kashapova, "Musa J lil."

⁵⁴¹ Ibid.

⁵⁴² Dauc , "Les compositions m morielles."

of the Russian Federation. As proof of the official narrative surrounding Dzhaliil', Minnullin offers that the *Moabit Notebooks* are written with such deep humanity that they cannot possibly have been written by anyone but a true Soviet hero. Even historian Iskander Giliyazov, who has conducted archival research in Moscow and Germany, suggests simply that "if we look too hard, we may find contradictions," but that such contradictions are irrelevant.⁵⁴³ The other participants of the 2009 workshop echoed these remarks.

What are the reasons for Dzhaliil's untouchability? First and foremost, the Dzhaliil' myth seems governed by inertia. As is the case across the former Soviet Union, figures in leadership roles in Tatarstan's political and cultural institutions are, in many cases, holdovers from the Soviet period. The narrative dominance of the Dzhaliil' myth amongst Tatar Party leadership in the late-Soviet period may also explain the critical treatment of Dias Valeev's *Day X*. A second explanation is the perception amongst leading Tatar cultural figures that criticism of Dzhaliil' originates in the West and is promoted by Nazi collaborators like Garif Sultan, the U.S. government through Radio Azatlyk, and even George Soros.⁵⁴⁴ In condemning Sultan and other ethnic Tatars in the West, the Dzhaliil' myth serves to more clearly delineate the ideological borders of the Russian Tatar community against its non-Russian co-ethnics.

⁵⁴³ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁴ Daucé, "Les compositions mémorielles."

However, perhaps the most potent reason why Dzhaliil's myth remains untouchable is that the poet represents Tatar contributions to the Soviet Union (and its successor, the Russian Federation) in such a way which justifies the continued, though diminishing, political and cultural sovereignty of the Republic of Tatarstan. Indeed, Tatar politicians and cultural figures have been preoccupied since Putin's ascension to power in 2000 that Tatarstan's rights secured during the Parade of Sovereignties in the 1990s will be reversed and that Tatarstan, as well as other ethnic republics, will be converted into a standard *guberniia* without any special privileges whatsoever. Indeed this very issue has been broached by Russian politicians and nationalists across the Russian Federation who question why ethnic minority republics are given preferential treatment over Russian-majority ones. But how does Dzhaliil' fit into this? At the 2009 Tatar writers' workshop, the poet Razil Valiev described the connection clearly: recalling a conversation with an official in Moscow about an award he had received, Valiev inquired why the prize, which had previously been dedicated to both the pre-Revolutionary Tatar poet Gabdulla Tukay and to Musa Dzhaliil', now honored only Dzhaliil'. Valiev recalled that he was told "well, Dzhaliil' is more important."⁵⁴⁵ Indeed, for those outside of Tatarstan, Dzhaliil' is the most well-known Tatar cultural and political figure of the Soviet period, remaining a potent figure of supranational patriotism across former Soviet space. To lose Dzhaliil' would be to lose the symbol of Tatar sacrifice that has legitimized Tatars' political and cultural position within an otherwise Russian-dominated state.

⁵⁴⁵ Kashapova, "Musa Jalil."

Nevertheless, there are small spaces, visibly at the edges of official discourse, in which a more nuanced view of Dzhaliĭ has been articulated. One such space is the Russian-language blog *The Image of Tatars in Russian Literature*, operated through the popular blogging site *LiveJournal* by a Kazan-based user “byltyr” (“last year”). A post from 2 March 2013 entitled focuses on the recollections of Varlam Shalamov of the young Musa Dzhaliĭ in the late 1920s.⁵⁴⁶ A comment from that day by user “ufasipailovo” suggests that “all the Tatar intelligentsia were sent to the slaughter [while] the Russians remained – they all volunteered for the army, knowing that they would come back, but went to war just for show.”⁵⁴⁷ “Byltyr” responds with an anecdote: “two echelons ran into each other between Moscow and Kazan – Tatar writers were going to the front while the Muscovites were headed to the rear.” In January 2014 another poster, “alina kara” commented that “in general, the whole thing is rotten (*gadko*). Russians throw Tatars a bone by lifting up Dzhaliĭ” while leaving others only “formally rehabilitated” without comparable ceremony or glorification. The poster continues “the Tatar intelligentsia was satisfied [with Dzhaliĭ’s rehabilitation], even though there were others better than Zalilov in moral qualities. And that’s not even considering who survived to Victory and ended up in camps for their loyalty.”

This conversation emphasizes the fact that, while losing the Dzhaliĭ myth has the potential for very real political, social, and economic consequences, maintaining it also

⁵⁴⁶ Byltyr, “Student Musa Zalilov. (Shalamov V.)” *Obraz tatar v russkoi literature on LiveJournal*, posted 2 March, 2013, <https://tatar-rulit.livejournal.com/78003.html>. The text of the post is lifted from the online Shalamov archive (<https://shalamov.ru/library/26/8.html>), accessed 16 March, 2019.

⁵⁴⁷ Presumably, “ufasipailovo” is referring to the Great Patriotic War.

fosters its own type of loss. As “byltyr” admits in a response to “alina kara,” “the image of Musa Dzhaliġ’ is, of course, to some extent heroically mythologized by the Party. Each autonomous republic needed its own hero.” But as “alina kara” suggests, Dzhaliġ’s mythologization has effectively silenced those others who were executed with him, “not to mention the other Legionnaires,” who also have their own stories to tell. The user continues, saying that “on 25 August, the day of the execution, people gather near the Kazan monument for ‘Dzhaliġ’ Remembrance Day,’ and his grandson plays violin in front of the bas-relief of the ten [others] who were executed [along with Dzhaliġ] who no one wants to remember.... It’s unfair to [Dzhaliġ’], it’s not his fault that they tried to mold him into an icon, he was a hero... but why forget the others?” Indeed, in remembering Dzhaliġ’, in crafting a mythology around him as a singular symbol of Tatar heroism, other heroes have been marginalized. More importantly, however, perpetuating the glorification of a Soviet hero, Tatars lose the opportunity to commemorate those who served other political ideologies, or those who stood for different values and beliefs. Dzhaliġ’ has tied present-day Tatar culture and politics to the Soviet legacy, for better and for worse. Indeed, challenging Dzhaliġ’ would question the status quo of peaceful relations between Tatars and Russians in the Russian Federation.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the work of Tatar literary figures, political activists, film directors, and historians in order to explore Tatar cultural activities in the late-Soviet and post-Soviet periods. Unlike the various union republics of the Soviet Union, the Tatar Republic, now the Republic of Tatarstan, has remained a subject of the Russian

Federation since 1991. This situation elicited a distinct set of responses from Tatar cultural elites that distinguish the Tatar experience of the end of communism from the experiences of other major Soviet nationalities. Although the loosening of control over society under Gorbachev allowed for the growth of a Tatar national movement that channeled popular energy towards Tatar sovereignty in the 1990s, the continued dominance of the old Soviet elite combined with the continued status of Tatarstan as a multiethnic state within a multiethnic state complicated the move towards strictly “nationalist” goals. Since the mid-1990s, Tatar cultural elites have struggled to characterize Tatars’ present and historical relationship to Russia and Russians. I argue that, despite the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the internationalist ideology which justified its nationalities policy, Tatar cultural elites have remained profoundly “Soviet” in their promotion of Tatar cultural symbols. This tendency has given direction to the works of various playwrights, historians, writers, and others while, at the same time, stymieing efforts to reconceptualize Tatars’ relationship to the Soviet and pre-Soviet past.

CONCLUSION

In November 1957, in anticipation of a speech by Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev, the Tatar composer Dzhaudat Faizi delivered a report to the Tatar Union of Composers recounting that institution's shortcomings.⁵⁴⁸ Faizi first addressed the failure of the Union to forge adequate ties between Tatar and non-Tatar artists both within the Tatar Republic and in the Russian SFSR as a whole. The lack of progress on this front, Faizi argued, spoke to the difficulty of integrating Tatar national culture into its internationalist Soviet counterpart. Secondly, Faizi articulated his fear that Tatar youths were becoming corrupted in their artistic tastes by the growth of cosmopolitan or bourgeois art forms such as jazz. To solve this, Faizi asserted, it was necessary to steer audiences towards official cultural institutions such as the Tatar State Theater of Opera and Ballet, the Tatar State Philharmonic, and the Tatar State Academic Theater. It was in these spaces, Faizi claimed, that Soviet citizens could enjoy authentic and socialist understandings of Tatar national culture. Faizi's 1957 report is one of numerous examples in which Tatar cultural elites – composers, poets, playwrights, and artistic administrators – asserted that the expression of Tatar national culture went hand-in-hand with participation in Soviet cultural institutions and the adoption of Soviet cultural forms.

Debates concerning the nature and development of Tatar national culture through the Soviet period illustrate the extent to which the practice of Soviet nationalities policy reversed Lenin's maxim of "national in form, socialist in content." From the 1930s onwards, Tatar national culture was to be developed along Soviet socialist lines. This

⁵⁴⁸ Natsionalnyi Arkhiv Respubliki Tatarstan (NART), f. R-7057 (Tatar Union of Composers), o. 1, d. 134.

process followed directly from Stalin's desire to unify Soviet society through the creation of a shared cultural canon and the export of "more developed" art forms to the country's Eastern peoples.⁵⁴⁹ The first generation of Soviet-trained Tatar cultural elites inherited their jadid predecessors' devotion to the cultural and economic development of the Tatar nation, but understood it in conjunction with the advancement of Soviet socialism. As such, Nazib Zhiganov, Musa Dzhaliil', and others gravitated towards Moscow in the early to mid-1930s for education and training under mostly-Russian composers and writers, returning to Kazan at the end of the decade to assume leadership of newly-established Tatar State musical and theatrical institutions and organizations. Over the next three decades, this group of local Tatar cultural elites shaped the contours of Tatar national identity within Soviet socialist parameters with limited interference from higher authorities in Moscow. Although this process was not always smooth, the result was the creation of a national discourse that championed Tatars as an integral group in the historical development and continued existence of the Imperial Russian, Soviet, and post-Soviet Russian states.

Soviet nationalities policy was a balancing act between the ideological imperatives and practical needs of the Bolshevik regime. On the one hand, Marxist doctrine indicated that nations, national identities, and nationalisms were fleeting historical phenomena that would not survive the transition to communism. On the other, Lenin and Stalin recognized that the new Bolshevik regime had inherited the tsarist

⁵⁴⁹ Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel*; Marina Frolova-Walker, "'National in Form, Socialist in Content': Musical Nation-Building in the Soviet Republics," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* vol. 51, no. 2 (Summer 1998): 331-371.

state's "imperial situation" and that they needed some way of preserving the country's territorial integrity.⁵⁵⁰ Was then Soviet nationalities policy simply a cynical ploy, designed with the singular goal of preserving Bolshevik power?⁵⁵¹ Or were Lenin and his colleagues actually naïve enough to believe that promotional, "affirmative action" policies could alleviate the historical inequalities of empire? When we consider the nature of Soviet nationalities policy from the perspective of the imperial metropole, as most studies have done, it is easy to discursively separate the making of policy with its implementation and outcome - the Bolshevik elite in Moscow designed policy towards the country's non-Russians that was to be put into practice "out there." Empire was a problem to be solved, whether for pragmatic or idealistic reasons, by central policy.

The benefit of approaching the study of Soviet nationalities policy from a local perspective, as I have done in this dissertation, is that it allows for a much more nuanced understanding of the way in which Soviet power worked. It was in Moscow (or Leningrad) that Nazib Zhiganov, Musa Dzhaliil', and Salikh Battalov received their varied educations, but their arrival in the Russophone capitals did not override their upbringing in Tatar families, their early years in mektebs and madrasas, or their literacy in Tatar cultural narratives, tropes, and themes. When they returned to Kazan, they did so with an appreciation of Soviet cultural forms, practices, and regimes, but also with a significant level of autonomy both institutionally and personally. Zhiganov had the final word in musical disputes in the Tatar Republic, championing adoption of opera for Tatar

⁵⁵⁰ Ilya Gerasimov, Sergey Glebov, Marina Mogilner, "The Postimperial Meets the Postcolonial: Russian Historical Experience and the Postcolonial Movement," *Ab Imperio* 2/2013, 111.

⁵⁵¹ Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*; Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*.

music while also disciplining fellow Tatars who resented non-Tatar participation in Tatar culture. After Dzhaliil's death in 1944, it was his former colleagues in the Tatar Writers' Union who successfully lobbied for the poet's rehabilitation over Moscow's earlier claims of treason and collaboration. Battalov used his connections in Moscow to avoid censorship in Kazan, but was later expelled from the Communist Party by the local Tatar administration out of fear that the poet's "anti-Russian" sentiments might bring down Moscow's ire. These examples illustrate how Tatar cultural elites played the leading role in configuring how Tatar culture would be developed within a Soviet framework. This meant not only that Tatars had control over importing cultural content from their ethnic heritage into their art, but also that they engaged in debates, practiced collaboration, and incited conflict both within the Tatar Republic and with Moscow.

The local Tatar perspective also gives scholars new insights into Tatar cultural elites' intentions in their work from 1934-1968. Moscow's "imperial situation" that encouraged Lenin to embrace the language of national self-determination was, in Kazan, primarily about national liberation and national development. Tatar Bolsheviks utilized Soviet institutions to pursue the sorts of programs already envisioned by jadids and secular Tatar reformers at the end of the nineteenth and into the early twentieth centuries.⁵⁵² Although these pre-Revolutionary projects were not directly adopted into Soviet policy, the language of Tatar national modernization and development remained a constant part of the Soviet Tatar cultural elites' discourse throughout the 1930s through the 1960s. Like in much of the global Third World, communism became a vehicle for

⁵⁵² Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform*; Tuna, *Imperial Russia's Muslims*.

Tatars to pursue activities dedicated towards national preservation, renewal, and development, albeit within Soviet confines. And yet the turn to Marxism was not necessarily situational or pragmatic. Zhiganov, Dzhaliil', and Battalov acted publicly as sincere, devout communists – even Battalov, who criticized the “chauvinist” nature of Soviet culture, couched his remarks in a defense of Soviet internationalist ideals. They were also, however, “nationalists,” or, at least, ethnic particularists, dedicated to the preservation of Tatar culture even while being committed to its further development utilizing the best institutions and resources available to them as Soviet citizens. Soviet Tatar cultural elites had learned to “speak Bolshevik” “with an accent,” tying together the possibilities of socialism and nation in their work.⁵⁵³

The Soviet Union experienced massive societal, economic, and ideological changes from the 1930s through the 1960s. And yet, most studies of Soviet nationalities policy have focused their attention almost solely on the first two decades of Soviet power, implicitly or explicitly assuming that the characteristics of nationalities policy that led to the collapse of the Soviet Union along national lines in 1991 must already have been in place by the outbreak of the Second World War. More recently, some studies have argued that the war itself became an important era which saw further progress in the pursuit of the Soviets' national goals, with somewhat fewer pointing to changes in the relationship between the union republics and central authorities under Khrushchev.

⁵⁵³ Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*; Ali F. Igmen, *Speaking Soviet With an Accent: Culture and Power in Kyrgyzstan* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012).

This dissertation is the first comprehensive attempt at a case study of a single Soviet nationality over this thirty-year period. As such, I have been able to track the way in which Soviet nation-building policies continued to evolve from the late thirties, through the war and High Stalinism, and into the period of Khrushchev's Thaw. This approach challenges those studies which have asserted that nationalities policy was downgraded or rendered moot by the late 1930s, adds weight to scholarship that has emphasized the profound impact of the war on non-Russian minorities, and provides a glimpse into how de-Stalinization impacted the cultural activities of the country's nationalities. Rather than treating any one of these periods in isolation, however, I assert that there was a continuous evolution of Soviet nationalities policy over this period that shaped Tatars' national identity and their relationship to Soviet society. I further argue that Tatar cultural elites led a robust program of cultural development that attempted to navigate the tension between Tatar national heritage and Soviet international ideology. In doing so, they did much to consolidate certain aspects of Tatar national identity in the face of assimilatory pressures, creating works, narratives, and symbols that remain an important part of the Tatar cultural canon in the post-Soviet era. To Soviet Tatar cultural elites, to be Tatar was to be communist; after all, it was Leninism which had broken the shackles of Russian imperialism and allowed for Tatars' liberation.

In recent years, there have been a plethora of studies focusing on Tatars, Kazan, or the Volga-Ural region more broadly. Taken collectively, this literature has helped to shift our focus of the Russian Empire away from the imperial metropolises and towards the ethnically and religiously diverse borderlands. Thanks to these significant contributions, our understandings of the role of Tatars as imperial interlocutors, of Kazan's status as a

“window on the East” in which imperial ideologies and national identities were forged and re-forged, and of the Volga-Ural region as space for the practice of imperial power have all been greatly increased. I came to this project in the hopes of extending these important historical narratives into the Soviet period. Despite the violence of the 1920s and 1930s, the Soviet period witnessed the steady growth of a partnership between Bolshevik authorities in Moscow and Tatar cultural elites in Kazan. These Tatar elites utilized Soviet institutional power to delineate the boundaries of Tatar national identity, making sure to conceptualize Tatarness within the multinational context of the Soviet Union. Much as in the Imperial period, the Tatar Republic occupied a unique role within the hierarchical “empire of nations” – the Tatar intelligentsia in 1917 was not as explicitly “national” as its counterparts in the Western borderlands, but neither did it need to be created from scratch, as was partially the case in Central Asia. Although the Tatar Republic never achieved union status, it secured significant funding and autonomy as the RSFSR’s largest minority republic and the opening of the Kazan State Conservatory in 1945 secured Tatars as the Volga-Ural region’s musical leaders.

Tatarstan’s continued presence within the Russian Federation invites the sort of investigations into Tatar history that this dissertation has attempted to open up. Unlike the various Soviet union republics, which since 1991 have existed as fully-independent nation-states, Tatarstan remains a part of Russia. Thus, Tatars’ unique historical experience both prior to and after the revolution offers a unique glimpse into the ways in which Soviet nationalities policy were localized within a single, exceptional, republic. At the same time, however, we can extrapolate from the Tatar case broader patterns of Soviet rule and of native integration into various cultural projects and activities across the

Soviet Union. This is especially true of the numerous ethnic minorities which still reside within the Russian Federation and have, therefore, not had the ability to completely divorce themselves from the Soviet legacy. Each of these peoples have thereby had to reconcile themselves to participation in a Russian-dominated multinational state. This dissertation represents an attempt to understand the process by which the Soviet Union succeeded, if only in limited ways, in encouraging non-Russian peoples to accept this situation.

The Tatar case provides scholars with the opportunity to begin to examine the relationship between communism and nationalism in the Soviet Union within a global context. Work on Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev and so-called “national communism” in the early phases of Bolshevik rule has already called scholarly attention to the idea of a native Marxist intelligentsia in the Middle Volga emerging as part of a broader anti-colonial moment. Adherence to Marxism among anti-colonial revolutionaries in Russia in the first two decades of the 1900s invites comparison with similar developments in Mexico, the Andean region of South America, and elsewhere. But even after the first generation of Tatar anti-colonial Marxists were executed or otherwise eliminated by the late 1930s, Tatar cultural elites retained a dual allegiance to the Tatar nation and to Marxism, now in its Soviet (Stalinist) form. The way in which these elites toed the line between loyalty to Marxist ideology and to their cultural heritage, and how their activities resembled or differed from that of their analogues in Marxist societies in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, are areas that further research can and should explore. Understanding the relationship between nationalism and communism within the Soviet Union, and not

just outside of it, will do much to advance the study not only of global communism, but of nations and nationalism in general.

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