

RUSSIAN EMPIRE -- TATAR THEATER
THE POLITICS OF CULTURE IN LATE IMPERIAL KAZAN

by

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To the Memory of My Mother

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Table of Contents

Dedication.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Chapter	
I. Introduction.....	1
II. Contextualizing Tatar Pre-Revolutionary Reform.....	14
III. Iashliar.....	35
IV. Performing Tatar Identity: New Cultural Spaces in Early 20 th -century Kazan	67
V. Two Versions of the Past: Gaiaz Iskhakyi's <i>Zoleiha</i> , 1917 and 1992.....	91
VI. Sufferings of Russian Censor, V.D. Smirnov.....	117
VII. Tatar Stage in Soviet-era Memoirs.....	138
VIII. Conclusion.....	164
Bibliography.....	172

Chapter I

Introduction

My dissertation is a study of the dynamics of Tatar cultural politics in Kazan at the turn of the 20th century. It explores issues of Tatar identity formation within the context of performance. I analyze the ways in which Tatar identities were formed in pre-revolutionary Kazan, a multi-ethnic city with distinct Russian and Tatar public cultural spheres. In my study, Tatar theater provides a particularly useful medium through which Tatar intellectuals articulated their notions of identity.¹ Theater was fundamental to intellectuals' claim to culturedness (*madeniat*) and modernization (*tarrakyat*) of Tatar society; they perceived theater and its growing popularity among initially reluctant Tatar spectators as a marker of change but also as an instrument for further change. Moreover, the emergence of theater meant the development of new physical spaces, where previously segregated sections of Tatar society met and interacted. I explore the ways in which these new physical spaces dramatically altered the structure of socialization among the classes and genders in urban Tatar society.

¹ I use the category of identity along the lines defined by Ronald Suny as a “provisional stabilization of sense of a self or group that is formed in actual historical time and space, in evolving economies, politics and cultures, as a contiguous search for some solidity in a constantly shifting world – but without closure, without forever naturalizing or essentializing the provisional identities arrived at,” in Ronald Grigor Suny, “Constructing Primordialism: Old Histories for New Nations,” *The Journal of Modern History* 73 (December 2001): 866 and also in other context in his “Provisional Stabilities: The Politics of Identities in Post-Soviet Eurasia,” *International Security*, 24, n. 3 (Winter 1999/2000): 4.

One way in which Tatar intellectuals' quest for Tatar identity revealed itself was the discourse on "Tatar nation" and what it meant to be "Tatar." However, what being and becoming "Tatar" meant was highly contested at the time, with different conceptions articulated by different social groups. In my study, I focus on the tensions between a new generation of Tatar reformers, the radical-minded *iashliar* and the rest of Tatar cultural elite, the *jadids* in particular. No previous work has adequately identified the second generation of reformers as a distinct new stage in the Tatar reform movement. I also examine the notions of Tatar nationhood and culture put forth by wealthy Tatar merchants—primary sponsors of Tatar educational and social reform, as well as of the broader public, among them small trade people and clerks, who frequently visited Tatar theater and whom Tatar literary critics called the "people," (i.e. *narod*, in Tatar, *khalyk*). Through my analysis of Tatar theatrical reviews, I attempt to reveal, albeit indirectly, through the eyes of Tatar critics, themselves part of the Tatar intellectual milieu, the ways in which the *iashliars'* project of reforming Tatar society resonated with the tastes and sensibilities of the "less cultured" public.²

Throughout, I build on important qualifications made by Adeeb Khalid in his *The Politics of Muslim Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia* in which he argues against the

² My discussion of audience reaction is limited, since I can only speak about the audience through my reading of reviews of Tatar critics, who themselves were an important part of Tatar cultural elite and thus, deeply implicated its project of modernizing Tatar society. Since a culture of keeping diaries and writing memoirs was absent among Tatars prior to October, my study is largely dependent on Tatar pre-revolutionary newspapers and published plays -- the public views of Tatar intellectuals. In this regard, I am particularly indebted to the work of a historian of Tatar theater, the late Khasan Gubaidullin, whose extensive bibliography provided an invaluable source in my research. Khasan Gubaidullin, "Tatarskii dorevolutsionnyi teatr" (Kandidatskaia dissertatsiia, Kazan State University, 1952): 407-420.

prevalent view of Russian Muslim reform as unified and monolithic.³ Hence, I look at the Tatar reform movement in terms of its particular position within the heart of the Russian Empire. This is not to ignore the connection of the Tatar reform movement to other Islamic and non-Islamic modernizing tendencies in the Russian Empire, as well as to the world-wide late-19th-century Islamic reform.⁴ Rather, in this study, I am interested in a deeper understanding of the internal cultural and social dynamics of Tatar society and will focus on Tatar reform within local context, i.e. pressure of assimilation, long-term history of state's conversion campaigns, the economic ambitions of the growing Tatar bourgeoisie in rapidly industrializing post-reform Russia and finally, the trappings of Russian culture to which Tatars were exposed for a much longer period and much more intimately than either Central Asians or Crimean Tatars.⁵

³ See Adeeb Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia* (Berkeley, 1998), 89-93.

⁴ In fact, in 1914, a member of the Tatar intellectual elite, Zhamal Validi, albeit retrospectively, argued that the Tatar reform, which according to him started with progressive cleric Shihabeddin Marjani in late 19th century, was part of the revolutionary change that orientated Islamic communities “away from the East to face the West.” It is striking the extent to which Validi buys into the Western cultural dichotomy between West (rational and developed) and East (inferior), since turning to the West, for him, clearly means turning toward “progress” and “modernization.” The broader context of Islamic reform, especially in Egypt and Ottoman Turkey is particularly important since a number of Tatar intellectuals were educated in centers of Islamic reformist thought such as Cairo, Medina and Istanbul. In the future, I plan to explore these connections.

⁵ Previous Western studies of the internal dynamics of Kazan Tatar society have tended toward one or another extreme in their vision of the Tatars. For instance, Aisha Rorlich in her *The Volga Tatars: Profile in National Resilience* (Stanford, 1986) provides a broad and inclusive discussion of socio-political and cultural changes experienced by Tatar society in the early 20th century, as well as earlier and later periods. At the same time, her approach defines Tatar interaction with the Russian state and society primarily in terms of resistance, domination and exclusion. This stand does not leave room for a more integrative and dynamic picture of the Tatars' place in the Russian Empire. One particularly provocative article by Galina Yemelianova, “The National Identity of the Volga Tatars at the Turn of the Century: Tatarism, Turkism, and Islam,” *Central Asian Survey* 16 n. 4 (1997): 543-586 is careful to point out the multiplicity of the Kazan Tatars' self-identification. Yemelianova's article, however, sometimes does not distinguish between various layers of the Tatar identity, clumping together such opposing affiliations as Tatarism and Bulgarism and often projects an imperial view of the inherent “inertia” of Tatar society.

My study intersects a broad range of Western scholarship on the history of Russian empire and the non-Russian peripheries, which has become particularly prolific in the last twenty years.⁶ While engaging and modifying a constructivist approach to such concepts as nation and nationality, these works pay particular attention to the discursive practices and the meaning of culture in the construction of identity.⁷ In the context of Western scholarly studies on pre-revolutionary Central Asia, particular attention has been paid to *Jadidism*, the Russian Muslims' reformist movement of the late 19th early 20th centuries. However, *Jadidism* has been mostly presented as unified and often singularly associated with Crimean reformer Ismail Gaspirali (1851-1914), who first introduced *usul-i-jadid* to his school in the Crimea.⁸ Moreover, much attention has

⁶The following is a far from complete list of studies which deal with identity politics in non-Russian peripheries, as well as the center: Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of Georgian Nation* [1988], 2nd ed. (Bloomington, 1994), Yuri Slezkine, *The Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North* (Ithaca, 1994), Daniel R. Brower and Edward Lazzerini, eds., *Russia's Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700-1917* (Bloomington, 1997), Alaina Lemon, *Between Two Fires: Gypsy Performance and Romani Memory From Pushkin to Postcolonialism* (Durham, 2000), Matthew Payne, *Stalin's Railroad: Turksib and the Building of Socialism* (Pittsburgh: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), Robert Geraci, *A Window on the East: National and Imperial Identities in Tsarist Russia*, (Ithaca, 2001), Paul Werth, *At the Margins of Orthodoxy: Mission, Governance, and Confessional Politics at Russia's Volga-Kama Region, 1827-1905* (Ithaca, 2002), Douglas Northrop, *Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia*, (Ithaca, 2004).

⁷ In relation to a modified "constructivist" approach, I have in mind here particularly an essay by Daniel E. Schafer, "Local Politics and the Birth of the Republic of Bashkortostan, 1919-1925" in *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin*, eds. Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin (Oxford, 2001), 165-190 in which the author challenges the prevalent idea of a carefully planned Bolshevik policy of *divide et impera* in regard to the creation of the Republics of Bashkortostan and Tatarstan during the Russian Civil War. Importantly, he argues that the concept of "Bashkir nationality" was not a Soviet invention and that there were other subtle markers of Bashkir identity not based on linguistic and religious components but rather on its particularistic relationship to the Russian state.

⁸See, for example, Edward Lazzerini, *Ismail Bey Gasprinskii and Muslim Modernism in Russia, 1878-1914* (Ph. D. diss., University of Washington, 1973), 24-29 and his "Beyond the Renewal: The Jadid Response to Pressure for Change in the Modern Age," in *Muslims in Central Asia: Expressions of Identity and Change*, ed. Jo-Ann Gross (Durham, 1992), 151-167, Alan Fisher, *The Crimean Tatars* (Stanford, 1978), 100-104, and an earlier study by Serge Zenkovsky, *Pan*

been paid to the *Jadids*' efforts to redefine and refocus the role of Islam as a cultural force, to modernize education, to reverse the economic stagnation and to de-marginalize women. In my study, I hope to show that when looked at in the context of Tatar intellectual milieu in Kazan, at the time of First Russian Revolution of 1905, *Jadidism* had already splintered into several factions, going beyond the education and theological reform as a primary means for change and into the field of cultural discourse and articulation of Tatar nationhood.

A smaller, but still significant part of my dissertation deals with the post-imperial period and explores the ways in which following the October Revolution, the processes of “performing identity” and of intellectual pondering on the meaning of being Tatar became constrained by Soviet ideological tropes and codified into a rigid narrative of heroism and suffering, as well as teleological progress. However, despite the fixed markers of nationality that Tatars came to bear in the seventy years of the Soviet Union's existence, the post-Soviet 1990s demonstrated that the exploration of Tatar identity and the historical dilemma of Tatar society's relationship to Islamic and European cultures and political and cultural place within multi-ethnic Russia have remained central to the contemporary Tatar intellectual discourse. Today, the official Tatar view puts forward the idea of “Evroislam,” or European Islam, which sees Tatar society as unique in its conciliation of a longstanding Islamic heritage and European culture both by virtue of being a part of Europe, and because of the openness of the Tatar pre-revolutionary elite to

Turkism and Islam in Russia (Cambridge, 1967), 24-36. The name *usul-i-jadid* referred to the new phonetic method of teaching Arabic. Across various Muslim groups of Russian empire, proponents of *usul-i-jadid*, commonly referred to as *Jadidism*, shared several key goals, such as the introduction of modern sciences into Muslim schools and development of modern forms of literature and theater. The name *Jadidism* came to refer to this broader program.

Russian culture and civic notions of empire.⁹ Also, the turn of the 20th century has been seen as a Tatar cultural Renaissance by contemporary Tatar intellectuals, as well as by socially and culturally engaged Tatar youth circles in Kazan (especially those who created a Tatar youth club, named after its pre-revolutionary predecessor, *Sharyk*). Tatar youth, in particular, see the kinds of Tatar cultural sensibilities that directly preceded the October Revolution as particularly appealing and “genteel.”¹⁰

Chapter Structure

In chapter 2 of my thesis, I define a historical background for discussion of the *jadid* and *iashliar* social groups in early 20th century Tatar society. Here, I focus on the role of the Tatar bourgeoisie in the Tatar reform movement and provide a broader social and cultural context of late 19th early 20th century Kazan, a multicultural and divided city with European Russian infrastructure and a distinctly Islamic Tatar portion of the city.

It is in chapter 3 that I argue that the aftermath of the Russian Revolution of 1905 saw the emergence of a new generation of Tatar reformers, the *iashliar*. Educated in the Jadid Tatar *medresehs*, the *iashliar* set themselves in opposition to the older Jadids, whom they criticized for social and political conservatism. By looking at their plays, written between 1905 and 1917, I discuss the ways in which they conceived the changes in their society and the new social types of Tatars they imagined. Though the content of Tatar plays reflected the unease with which Tatar intellectuals related to Russian society

⁹ See for example, an essay by Rafael Khakim, *Gde nasha Mecca?* (Where is our Mecca?), (Kazan, 2003). Khakim is an advisor to the Tatarstan’s President, Mintimer Shaimiev,

¹⁰ As was told to me by the members of the club during my visits to the club in December-January 2002-2003.

and culture, the latter's conscious appropriation of Russian and European literary and theatrical forms points to the fact that cultural borrowing was conceived of as inherent to the process of modernization. However, the *iashliar*'s initial pugilistic rejection of the traditional mores of Tatar society, which particularly in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution of 1905, they conceptualized as a conflict of "fathers and sons," was significantly toned down as the manifestations of what they defined as "progress" and "culturedness," i.e. new social sensibilities and patterns of social behavior, which they advocated took root in Tatar society.¹¹

In chapter 4, I argue that Tatar theater was instrumental in the *iashliar*'s claims to modernness (*tarakyyiat*) and culturedness (*madeniiat*), the two concepts most often used by intellectuals to define a Tatar place in the Russian Empire. Theater became an important new cultural venue, around which Tatar society's debates on the notions of nationhood, new cultural values and sensibilities were crystallized.

Through my examination of Tatar theatrical repertoire and the Tatar audience's reaction to stage performances (by way of Tatar critics' reviews) I attempt to establish the Tatar public's tastes and the specific concerns that determined their reactions. Yearly Tatar critical reviews decried the poor selection of plays that were offered to the Tatar spectator. If the Tatar cultured public, especially Tatar critics, demanded original Tatar plays that would incorporate "national," "historical," "ancient," "real" or "Tatar folkloric" elements, Tatar audiences often got and liked vaudevilles and melodrama.

¹¹ For the related discussion of the ways in which intellectuals were implicated in the process of modern nation-making, see *Intellectuals and the Articulation of the Nation*, eds. Ronald Grigor Suny and Michael D. Kennedy (Ann Arbor, 1999). For a view, challenging the "constructivist" school of theory on formation of national identity, (i.e. Benedict Anderson and others) see Alexander J. Motyl "Inventing Invention: The Limits of National Identity Formation," in *ibid.*, 57-75.

Plays that were written by *iashliar* authors such as Amirhan, Iskhakyi, Tinchurin and Kamal and that usually satisfied critical demands of being grounded in “Tatar reality” were popular with audiences as well. However, when the *iashliar*’s plays combined elegant modern European theatrical forms with particularly salient articulation of the Tatar nationhood, or explored the elements and ambiguities of Tatar identity through historically painful events (like forceful conversion campaigns against Tatars on the part of the Russian State and Church)¹² both the public and the intellectuals reacted with great passion.

The role of Tatar critics is central to my study, since I reconstruct Tatar pre-revolutionary performances through their writings. As intellectuals, they had preconceived notions of the appropriate themes and settings for Tatar theater. Moreover, some were well-connected with wealthy Tatar entrepreneurs, who financed Tatar theater and owned the publishing houses which regularly printed the *iashliar*’s plays as well as the journals in which critics published their reviews of performances. In other words, Tatar critics, in effect, mediated the tension between the radical-minded *iashliar*, the Tatar intellectual and social elite, and the broader Tatar public.

In Tatar theater, there existed a mode of cultural borrowing. The Russian authors, such as Ostrovskii and Gogol, were translated by Tatar intellectuals and performed on Tatar stage. Though the critics always found such classics “important for educating our people in the best of the Russian literary tradition,” their reviews hint at the fact that the audience remained largely deaf to such cultural translations.

¹² Conversion campaigns were not discussed in the Tatar periodical press prior to the abolishment of censorship in February of 1917. I can only make my judgment about the extent to which conversions were “historically painful” to Tatars through my preliminary examination of the Tatar periodical press in the aftermath of the February Revolution.

It was in the Tatar theater -- a physical and emotional, collective space -- that Kazan Tatar audiences were to be “schooled” in what it meant to be Tatar and a “cultured” individual. As theatrical reviews reflect, a spectator was expected to behave in a certain refined way and was expected to learn “refined manners” and “pure” Tatar language from both the theater as stage and theater as a public space. Even the architecture of theater signaled the criteria for low and high cultural behavior defined by intellectual discourse.

A large portion of fourth chapter also concerns the first and only pre-revolutionary Tatar cultural club, *Sharyk kluby*. Organized in 1906 by a group of Tatar merchants and bureaucrats, it was intended to promote a “respectable means of entertainment” among the city’s progressive bourgeoisie. It became home to the first Tatar theatrical troupe *Sayar* and a place of meeting for young Tatar reformers. By examining archival documents on the history of the club, the club’s financial records and newspaper articles, as well as published post-revolutionary memoirs by a frequent visitor of the club, I analyze the elements of the modern lifestyle that *iashliar* hoped to promote in their society, such as the staging of theatrical performances, organizing of musical and literary evenings, dancing, piano and violin concerts, games (but not card games), and reading of contemporary Tatar newspapers and journals. Participation in this new social behavior, along with creation of a new secular literature, theater and music, signified for Tatar intellectuals the beginning of a new cultural age in their society. Documents pertaining to *Sharyk kluby*’s history also give clues as to the composition of Tatar theatrical audiences. The club was visited by both men and women, representatives of the Tatar cultural elite, mercantile middle class—the financial sponsors and founders of

the club, as well as clerks (*prikazshchiki*) and students. I also look at the organizational side of Tatar theater, primarily the history of Kazan's theatrical troupe *Sayar*, the only troupe in Kazan at that time. Finally, I discuss the question of social change among the Tatar public in Kazan and the ways in which new public spaces such as theater and *Sharyk kluby* fostered new social interactions—changes which were reflected in such *iashtiar* plays as Amirhan's *Tigetzsezliar* and Iskhakyyi's *Mogallima*.

After the February Revolution, when primary dramatic censorship was abolished, the Tatar stage saw the performance of an unprecedented work of Tatar drama, Gayaz Iskhakyyi's *Zoleiha*. *Zoleiha*, in which Iskhakyyi portrays Kriashen (baptized) Tatars' long-standing loyalty to Islam, was seen by Iskhakyyi's contemporaries—the critics and other *iashtiar* playwrights, such as Amirhan, as implicating the history of Tatar community at large. It was said to have a cathartic effect on the Tatar audience, -- spectators participated in Islamic prayer on stage. Critics called it a “breathtaking document of our [Tatar] history.” In Chapter 5, I discuss Iskhakyyi's structuring of the Tatar historical past by analyzing both the plot and the original 1917 performance of *Zoleiha*. Then, I juxtapose the plot and the pre-revolutionary performance of the play with the 1992 performance of *Zoleiha* in the context of post-Soviet Tatarstani nation-building. For Iskhakyyi and his contemporaries, the history of Kriashen conversion and apostasies were still a palpable recent past and a painful historical moment which they could not publicly discuss in Imperial Russia. The ambiguity of Kriashen identity in Iskhakyyi's original serves as a metaphor through which the author articulates the “fluidity” and incoherence of Tatar identity in pre-revolutionary Russia. For many Tatars in the post-Soviet period, Kriashens were often seen as an annoying phenomenon, “traitors” of sorts to the true and

primordial Tatar Islamic identity.¹³ The post-Soviet production of *Zoleiha*, by cutting out the ambiguous parts of the play, “corrected” the historical narrative constructed by the author, excluded Kriashens from the membership in the Tatar nation, assumed Islamic by default, and represented this nation as a victim, a hero and a martyr. Both the original and the 1992 reflect issues of Tatar identity formations, but the focus of 1992 production is Tatar identity as if it was an “immutable...single unitary identity, not multiplicity of self-understandings, embedded in a long history and attached to specific territory.”¹⁴

While the bulk of my study concerns subaltern voices, Chapter 6 deals with the Russian Imperial censor’s views of Tatar theater and by extension of Tatar society.¹⁵ The primary sources are the unpublished reviews of the St. Petersburg censor, Turkic linguist V.D. Smirnov, dated from 1905 through the end of dramatic censorship in February, 1917. Single-handedly, he thwarted or delayed by a number of years the staging of the best Tatar plays, greatly inhibiting the Tatar repertoire. I argue that Tatar intellectuals discourse on Tatar identity was partially contingent on the perspectives on and validations of Tatar culture set forth by Russian officials such as Smirnov. Smirnov’s view of Tatar society was deeply vested in the Orientalist dichotomy between “enlightened” and “rational” West and “dark” and “barbarian” East, which some scholars

¹³ A practicing Muslim Tatar woman in her twenties told me that she could not understand why Kriashen still stubbornly cling to Orthodoxy and do not want to go back to their Islamic roots, when “everyone” knows what Russians did to them, Kazan, March 2002. On problems of Kriashen identity see Paul Werth, “The Limits of Religious Ascription: Baptized Tatars and the Revision of ‘Apostasy,’ 1840s-1905,” *Russian Review* 59 no. 4 (2000): 493-511.

¹⁴ Ronald Grigor Suny, “Constructing Primordialism,” 895.

¹⁵ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Gary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana, 1988), 271-313.

argued was common to many in Russian governmental and Church structures.¹⁶

Importantly, as evident in the language of some Tatar critics, Tatar intellectuals' criticism of their society internalized the dichotomies, set forth by people like Smirnov, at the same time as they, the intellectuals and the *iashliar*, struggled against such dichotomies. In the future, I plan to extend my discussion by juxtaposing Smirnov's view of Tatar society and, more broadly, of the way in which Tatars can or cannot be integrated in the Russian Empire with other competing civic, ecumenical notions of multi-ethnic empire, set forth by Russian liberals, such as the members the Constitutional Democratic party (which, perhaps, not at all incidentally was very popular among Tatar *jadids*) or the class based identifications argued for by Social Democrats.

After the turmoil of the Civil War, Kazan Tatar theatrical life was renewed once again. Many of *Sayar*'s actors and actresses became members of the Soviet State Tatar Theater, established in 1926. Their memoirs, written from the late 1920s through the 1950s, give a linear teleology of Tatar cultural reform, culminating in the Soviet period. In Chapter 6, I contrast the post-revolutionary memoirs of Tatar actors, which reveal the constraints of Soviet ideology, with the memoirs of Rabyga Gabitova, a member of a well known Tatar aristocratic reformist family. The latter's memoirs, collected by Tatar State Museum in 1952 but never published (at least to my knowledge), are particularly valuable in that they, firstly, are devoid of Soviet ideological tropes and thus, unique among post-1917 Soviet sources. Secondly, when juxtaposed with the reminiscences of Tatar actors Gabitova's memoirs underscore the extent to which differences in class and education played a role Tatar pre-revolutionary society, even among the various social

¹⁶ Robert Geraci, "Russian Orientalism at Impasse," in *Russia's Orient*, 138-161.

groups working in the common field of creating new in Tatar cultural values.¹⁷ Finally, I discuss some key works on the history of pre-revolutionary Tatar theater and literature published in the late 1920s, in light of Soviet codification of the history of Tatar cultural “development.”

The *Iashliar*'s discourse on “progress,” “culturedness” and on various issues concerning Tatar identities which I explore within the context of theatrical performance, reflected their strong belief that Tatar society was in need of and going through a tremendous socio-cultural transformation. The necessity of such transformation was agreed upon by the Tatar intellectuals, those who can be broadly defined as *jadids*, as well as the Tatar bourgeoisie, and was thought to be fundamental to Tatar society's efforts to retain its ethnic and religious particularity and yet to take part in the economic and cultural modernization of Russia and the West. By singling out Kazan, which the *iashliar* envisioned as the center of their struggle, and by focusing on theatrical performance, which was fundamental to their notion of the modernizing self, this work hopes to open up a richer perspective on the ways in which one non-Russian people reacted to the demands of modernization, and envisioned themselves as a part of the Russian Imperial structure.¹⁸

¹⁷ The fact that Gabitova's memoirs were collected by the Tatar State Museum points to the fact that the client of the memoirs was the state. The fact that they were not published indicates that the state rejected them. The reasons are obvious when one read her work in the context of the prevailing ideological framework and considers the unfortunate fate of many prominent Tatar cultural figures she mentions in her work. For the discussion of Soviet project of transforming “bourgeois” pre-revolutionary sensibilities into new Soviet modes of behavior and social relations and the variegated response of the Soviet urban youth to this project, see Ann Gorsuch, *Youth in Revolutionary Russia: Enthusiasts, Bohemians, Delinquents* (Bloomington, 2000).

Chapter II

Contextualizing Tatar Pre-Revolutionary Reform

In this chapter, I will address the emergence of the first Tatar reformers, who can justly be called the pioneers of a Tatar “national” movement, and their instrumental role in laying the social and cultural foundations for the following generations of Tatar reformers, the *jadids* and the *iashliar*.¹ Throughout, I will also address the salient role that Tatar bourgeoisie played in the foundation of the Tatar reform movement, and the political, economic and socio-cultural circumstances that shaped their choices and their identities.

The late 19th-early 20th century witnessed growing economic ambitions of the new Tatar bourgeoisie in the context of industrializing post-reform Russia. In Kazan, the late 19th century witnessed a large influx of Tatar agriculturalists from the outlying regions. They engaged in trading and became a new generation of Tatar entrepreneurs, as the

¹ For a helpful framework in the discussion of various stages of national movements, particularly in the context of non-dominant groups in Eastern and Central European imperial structures, see Miroslav Hroch, “From National Movement to the Fully Fledged Nation: The Nation-Building Process in Europe,” in *Becoming National: A Reader*, eds. Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny (Oxford, 1996), 60-79. Importantly, Hroch differentiates “nationalist” from “national” where the former is focused around the program “which gives absolute priority to the values of the nation over all other values and interests.” The goals of “national movement,” which, according to Hroch, took place in Eastern Europe as early as the 1800s, were focused on “(1) the development of national culture based on the local language, and its normal use in education, administration and economic life; (2) the achievement of civil rights and political self-administration, initially in the form of autonomy and ultimately (usually quite late, as an express demand) of independence; (3) the creation of a complete social structure from out of ethnic group, including educated elites and officialdom and an entrepreneurial class” (62).

power of the old Tatar merchant elite started to wane.² This new, socially mobile generation of Tatar entrepreneurs was particularly receptive to the idea of improving the traditional Muslim education system—the first step in the *jadid's* vision of modernization, not least because it would make them more competitive in relation to their Russian counterparts.³ At the same time, the assimilation policies of the Russian state, particularly in the last few decades of the 19th century, prepared the ground for the Tatar mercantile elite's receptivity to Tatar intellectual discourse on “modernization” and “progress.” Moreover, in the last decade of the 19th century, the first attempts to demarcate “Tatarness” were made by progressive Tatar theologians, folklorists and educators.

Before addressing in more detail these developments, which directly preceded the emergence of the Tatar reform movements which are the main focus of this study, I will briefly discuss some more distant historical landmarks in the Tatar past. These are selected on the basis of their importance in the Tatar pre-revolutionary and contemporary intellectual discourses on the meaning of Tatar identity.

The Historic Issue of Tatar Identity

To this day, the word “Tatar” makes some people of Tatar nationality cringe. An official denomination for the Muslim Turkic group of the Middle Volga, inscribed on the fifth line of Soviet and currently, Russian passports, it has been for centuries associated

² Radik Salikhov, *Tatarskaia burzhuazia Kazani i natsional'nye reformy vtoroi poloviny XIX-nachala XX vekov* (Kazan, 2001), 29.

³ On short-comings of the traditional Russian Muslim educational system dominated by theological works of the Bukhara's clerics see Zhamal Validi, *Ocherk istorii obrazovannosti i literatury volzhskikh tatar* (Moscow-Petrograd, 1923), 21-32.

with the “Tatar-Mongol yoke” – the two centuries of Genghis-khan’s descendents’ dominion over Kievan Rus’, which ostensibly ended at the battle of Kulikovo, when the armies of Dmitri Donskoi set to flight the army of Mamai, the ruler of the Golden Horde.⁴

In Soviet textbooks and Russian folk mentality, as well as in both Russian and Soviet scholarship on this topic (with the important exception of a history by a Russian native of Kazan, Mikhail Khudiakov), Tatars are fused with the nomadic Mongol invaders of the 13th century.⁵ Ironically, for many people who came to bear the ethnicon “Tatar” it also signifies the “barbaric Mongol horde.” Moreover, to them it signifies the attempt by the Russian state to invalidate Tatar claims to the Middle and Lower Volga (*Idel* in Tatar), which they consider their historical homeland. While many Tatars for centuries have been uncomfortable with name Tatar and with what it signified, they also stuck with it or it stuck with them.

⁴ See Janet Martin, *Medieval Russia, 980-1584* (Cambridge, 1995) for a very useful analysis of Kievan princes relations with the rulers of the Golden Horde. Mamai, notably, was not a Chingizid; he was of local Turkic origin. The Golden Horde or *ulus-i-Dzhuchi* (land of Dzhuchi, Genghis-khan’s eldest son) was a vast territory formed shortly after Mongol conquest in the early 13th century and included the territory of the contemporary Republic of Tatarstan.

⁵ Mikhail Khudiakov wrote his *Ocherki po istorii Kazanskogo khanstva* in 1926. He was a graduate of Kazan University. In his work Khudiakov argued that the main population of the Kazan khanate, a successor-state to the Golden Horde “consisted of the descendants of Bulgars, an old, sedentary people of Turkic roots, who long before the formation of the Kazan khanate, established a state in the Middle Volga area. Their main occupation was trade, and they long have been part of the Muslim culture. Interestingly, Khudiakov himself saw his work as a reaction to “anti-Tatar conceptions” in Russian and Soviet historiography. His work was criticized by the Soviet academic establishment, in particular by the famous Russian historian of Orient, editor of the important pre-revolutionary journal *Mir Islama*, V.V. Bartol’d, who noted that “unlike many other studies that deny the presence of culture among Tatars, this work presents another extremity, which helps scientific knowledge just as little as the others.” Mikhail Khudiakov, *Ocherki po istorii Kazanskogo khanstva* (1923, reprint, Moscow, 1991), 8.

In the contemporary Tatar intellectual discourse on identity, the most popular conception is one of organic connection between the ancient Bulgar khanate (925-1236), the khanate of Kazan (1438-1552) and the contemporary “Tatar nation.” According to this conception, elaborated by the 19th century Tatar historiographer Shihabeddin Marjani, the bulk of contemporary Kazan Tatars were Bulgar Turks whose claim to the land of Middle Volga was as old as the Russians’ claim to the territory of the Kievan Rus’.⁶ Bulgars converted to Islam in the 10th century. They were gifted craftsmen and traded with both the Rus’ principalities and the Islamic world, thus serving as Kievan Rus’ liaison with the East. According to the proponents of Marjani’s theory, when the armies of Genghis-khan invaded Bulgar in the 13th century, the Mongol elite converted to Islam and assimilated into the local Bulgar Turkic-speaking population, thus eventually, after the fall of the Chingizid empire, giving birth to the Khanate of Kazan.⁷

Janet Martin, in her *Medieval Russia, 980-1584*, treats the Golden Horde as a conglomerate which “gave birth” to both the khanate of Kazan and the principality of Moscow, ruled by an illegitimate offshoot of the Riurikid dynasty, the Danilovichi. Such

⁶ The 19th century reformers Shihabeddin Marjani and Kaium Nasyri were both strong proponents of the word “Tatar”. However, well into the beginning of the 20th century Tatars referred to themselves by various names such as *Tatars*, *Turko-Tatars*, *Russian Muslims* or *Muslim people*. Significantly, in Tatar pre-revolutionary periodicals, only those Tatars refer to themselves as Bulgars, who actively opposed the presence Golden horde (i.e. Mongol) element in the formation of Tatar people. Such were the pre-revolutionary Tatar historians Gainutdin Axmarov (see more on him in the chapter), and Gabdullah Battal, as well as the late 19th century Tatar Sufi sect, the Vaisites, who consisted mainly of peasants and craftsmen and who claimed to be the only true descendents of the Bulgar state. On the Vaisites, see Aisha Rorlich, *Volga Tatars: A Profile in National Resilience* (Stanford, 1986), 61-63.

⁷ There has been a long-standing controversy in Russian and Tatar historiography as to who were actually the descendants of the Bulgars. The Chuvash, a Turkic-speaking people who practice Orthodox Christianity and whose language is most closely related to Bulgar Turkic, also claim to be the descendants of the Bulgar state. For the discussion of Russian historiography on the topic see Geraci, *Window on the East: National and Imperial Identities in Tsarist Russia*, (Ithaca, 2001), 182-19.

treatment, although somewhat sensationalist, underscores the dynamics of rivalry between a fledgling Muscovy and the Khanate of Kazan, one of the several Muslim Turkic states that appeared after the collapse of the immense Chingizid conglomerate. Indeed, the Danilovichi's ascendance was in large part determined by the Muscovy princes' ability to politic at the court in Sarai, the capital of the Golden Horde, located on lower Volga, near Astrakhan.⁸ Eventually, the Kazan khanate fell, victim to internal strife and succession politics as well as the Muscovy's growing ambition for expansion.⁹ However, the memory of independent statehood became an important cultural symbol in the pre-revolutionary formulations of Tatar identity.

In fact, Ivan the Terrible's 1552 conquest of the khanate which marked the beginning of Muscovite territorial expansion, was documented by Muscovite Church chroniclers as a mission dedicated to taking back the lands of Rus' from the hands of the heathen.¹⁰ Shortly, after the conquest, an extensive conversion campaign started, carried out through promises of material benefits and by force. The Tatars were forbidden to build mosques, Tatar trade was restricted and they were forced outside the city walls, where they resettled and founded the *Tatarskaia sloboda*. The city, as well as the region itself, was resettled by Russians. Many members of the Tatar nobility were integrated into the Muscovite state, eventually converting to Orthodoxy and marrying Orthodox nobility. The 17th century saw little conversion activity, partially because it was a traumatic century for Muscovy, witnessing the cessation of the Rurikid dynasty and the

⁸ Martin, *Medieval Russia*, 169-174.

⁹ Khudiakov, *Ocherki*, 174-79.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 79.

Times of Troubles which followed. Peter the Great's reign brought another aggressive conversion campaign. Peter's policies put an end to the Tatar nobility by prohibiting non-baptized masters from having Orthodox servants, thus facilitating the complete impoverishment of the Tatar nobility, who lost their serfs and lands as a result.¹¹ It has been argued that the majority of conversions of Tatars during Peter's reign were insincere and involuntary, a theory supported by the fact that the *novokreshchennye* (newly baptized) Tatars apostatized *en masse* during the 19th century.¹²

The age of Catherine the Great is known as a time of great tolerance toward Tatars (*period veroterpimosti*). Motivated by pragmatic considerations as well as by humanistic ideas of Enlightenment, Catherine stopped the conversion campaign, allowed the Tatars to build mosques and encouraged Tatar trade, as well as Tatar missionary activities in the Kazakh steppe.¹³ Catherine's tolerance to other religions and cultures, however, was accompanied by a striving toward centralization and administrative order in the empire. She created the Muslim Spiritual Board (*Dukhovnoe Upravlenie Musul'man*) in 1788, with a mufti at its head. Located in Ufa and for a short period in Orenburg, it has been primarily a bureaucratic office regulating matters of Islamic education, book publishing, mosque building. It has traditionally been very loyal to the state. Catherine's pragmatic policies encouraged the flourishing of Tatar trade and

¹¹ Gaziz Gubaidullin, "Iz proshlogo Tatar," *Materialy po izucheniu Tatarstana: sbornik statei* (1925; reprint, Kazan, 2002), 156-57.

¹² On Tatar apostasies see Paul W. Werth, *At the Margins of Orthodoxy: Mission, Governance, and Confessional Politics in Russia's Volga-Kama Region, 1827-1905* (Ithaca, 2002) and Agnes Kefeli, "Constructing an Islamic identity: The case of Elyshevo Village in the Nineteenth Century," in *Russia's Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700-1917*, eds. Daniel Brower and Edward Lazzarini (Bloomington, 1997), 271-292.

¹³ Robert Geraci, *Window on the East*, 21-22.

formation of the Tatar merchant estate (*gildeiskoe kupechestvo*) by the end of 18th century.¹⁴

Sponsoring the Reform Tatar Bourgeoisie in late 19th early 20 century Kazan

Some Tatarstani scholars , most prominent among them Radik Salikhov for example, view the Tatar bourgeoisie (formed on the basis of the 18th century Tatar *gildeiskoe kupechesvo*, as well as newcomers from villages)¹⁵ as the main force behind the Tatar reform movement at the turn of the 20th century. He argues that the Russian state’s anti-Muslim policies and Church pressure in mid-19th century led the Tatar bourgeoisie to respond in several ways. One was political mobilization, which is clearly visible in the activities of Tatar councilors in the Kazan City Duma in the second half of the 19th and early 20th century. Tatar urban traders were also motivated by the more pragmatic concern of broadening their economic base in the conditions of post-reform Russia. Finally, and most importantly for my study, the Tatar bourgeoisie was said to have attempted to reorganize the “old patriarchal mores” of their society.¹⁶ Archival documents on the creation of the first Tatar culture club *Sharyk* as well as Tatar pre-revolutionary newspapers, also demonstrate the paramount role of the Tatar bourgeoisie in supporting the reformist movement in Tatar society.¹⁷

¹⁴ Salikhov, *Tatarskaia burzhuazii*, 16.

¹⁵ In the second half of the 19th century, Tatar merchant capital becomes tightly connected with metallurgical, leather, soap, and textile industry, see *Tatarskii Entsiklopedicheskii slovar'* (Kazan, 1999), 309.

¹⁶ Salikhov, *Tatarskaia burzhuazii*, 21 and Damir Iskhakov, *Problemy stanovleniia i transformatsii tatarskoi natsii* (Kazan, 1997), 28-42.

¹⁷ See below, especially Chapter IV.

The political mobilization of the Tatar bourgeoisie in the second half of the 19th century is most visible in response to the state educational policies of the 1870s, which were targeted at bringing the traditional Muslim confessional education system under state control.¹⁸ In reality, these policies reflected the state's goal of integrating Muslims through education and Russian language, especially after the mass apostasies of Tatars in the 1860s showed the ambiguous results of the conversion campaign. The plan, introduced by the Ministry of People's Enlightenment (Ministersvo Narodnogo Prosveshcheniia) consisted in the creation of state-financed schools for Tatar children with the primary goal of teaching Russian language, as well as the introduction of Tatar-financed Russian classes attached to Tatar *mektebs* (primary schools) and *medreseh* (institutions of higher Islamic learning). A new *medreseh* or *mekteb* could be opened only if it had a teacher of Russian, paid by the Tatar community.¹⁹ Moreover, in 1874, a tsarist decree put all Muslim confessional schools under the jurisdiction of the MNP. These regulations provoked an outburst of suspicion and protest among Tatars, who saw in MNP policies an attempt at Christianization. In 1879, the wealthiest Tatars in Kazan, Iunusov, Apanaev, Azimov, Galeev and Utiamyshev, requested an audience with the Minister of Internal Affairs. Among their demands were the freeing of Muslim clerics and Muslim confessional schools from MNP control, the right to choose their own mufti, freeing of Muslim *shakirds* (*medreseh* students) from military service and the right to not work on Muslim holidays. What particularly struck the governor was that the petitioners were among the most loyal to the Russian government, those who usually sought

¹⁸ I.K. Zagidullin, *Tatarskaia shkola i rusifikatorskaia politika tsarisma vo vtoroi polovine 19v.: narodnoe prosveshcheniie u tatar v dooktiabr'skii period* (Kazan, 1992), 64.

¹⁹ Geraci, *Window on the East*, 138-139.

opportunities to show their allegiance to the state. This political action did not result in actual changes in the state's policy toward Tatars. However, the complete disregard of authorities for the opinion of the Tatar bourgeoisie prompted its further political mobilization and the formation of an active political stand against government Russification policies and the missionary activities of the Church.²⁰

Robert Geraci, in his *Window on the East: National and Imperial Identities in Late Tsarist Russia*, argued on the basis of his study of Russian sources that, though relations between Russians and Tatars in Kazan were not openly hostile, there was a good deal of spiritual estrangement and tension. My study of Tatar sources also points to the fact that, in Kazan at the turn of the 19th century, there existed two discrete societies, Russian and Tatar. In fact, the very geography of the city reinforced the segregation of Tatar and Russian communities. Ivan the Terrible's order to expel all Tatars beyond the walls of the city led to the formation of the *Tatarskaia sloboda* right outside the city walls. As Kazan grew, *Tatarskaia sloboda* was absorbed into the city limits. It, however, never became enfranchised into the Russian infrastructure of Kazan. In effect, in the midst of typically Russian city there existed another, structured in ways typical of an Islamic city.

The Tatar part of Kazan was sectioned into neighborhoods – *makhalla*, with a *mosque* at the center of each *makhalla*. Adjoining to the mosque there was a *mekteb* and *medreseh*. The needs of the *makhalla* were supported by Islamic tax (*zakiat*) and charitable donation (*sadaka*). The Tatar guild merchant estate, a socially powerful group

²⁰ Salikhov, *Tatarskaia burzhuaziia*, 21-23.

in Kazan Tatar society, strictly followed *Sharia* law, which prescribed yearly collection of charitable donation for building and reconstruction of mosques, *medreseh* and *mektebs*. In order to provide for the further functioning of mosques and schools, Tatars traditionally used another Islamic institution, the *vakf*, a transfer of capital and property into unlimited use by the community. For example, “Marzhani” mosque in Kazan for a century benefited from the profits from a store donated in the early 19th century by the merchant Iunusov. Furthermore, in 1916 “Marzhani” mosque received a gift from the merchants Galikeev, consisting of a large rental house with profits of up to 20,000 rubles.²¹

Financing the needs of the *makhalla* gave the patrons – wealthy Tatar merchants - enormous power within the Tatar community. In Kazan, one of the most powerful early 19th-century merchant families were the Iunusovs, who donated large amounts of money for the building of mosques and schools, a traditional form of Muslim patronage. Importantly, however, the Iunusovs also sponsored the founding of a first Muslim orphanage in Kazan, as well as of a first Muslim charitable society.²² These projects demonstrate a new approach on the part of the Tatar bourgeoisie to the social ills of their community. Whereas, traditionally, Tatar orphans were placed into the care of adopted families and charity was done through collection of *zakiat* and *sadaka* for use by private individuals, the orphanage and the charitable society represented a distinctly European civic response to poverty.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 59.

²² *Ibid.*, 62-63.

At the same time, the activity of Tatar councillors at the Kazan City Duma also demonstrates the growing desire of the Tatar urban middle class to participate in city politics and demand state allocation of resources to the Tatar community. Typically, the Kazan City Duma paid little attention to the Tatar part of the city. As late as the early teens of the 20th century, when the central part of the city where the Russian population lived already had electricity, the Tatar part of the city, with more than 20,000 people, did not even have oil street lamps. Yet, in 1908 and 1911, the Tatar representatives were able to get the city to pay for the planting of trees and laying of asphalt in several sections of *Tatarskaia sloboda*.²³ Likewise, when, in 1902, “Russian Kazan” commemorated the 50th anniversary of Nikolai Gogol’s death, the City Duma’s Tatar representative Saidgarei Alkin proposed to sponsor a Tatar translation of *Inspector General*, to which Duma agreed and allocated 150 rubles. Also, out of 15 Russo-Tatar schools of Kazan, six were financed directly by the Duma.²⁴ Finally, after the Muslim Charitable Society was established, the Tatar “fraction” of the Kazan City Duma argued for allocation of money to the organization that was not a part of Russian Imperial Charitable Society. To this the Duma agreed again, regularly allocating considerable (up to 1000 ruble) subsidies.²⁵

On the other hand, when it came to reconciling the daily life of the Muslim Tatar part of Kazan with the influences of its Russian half, the Tatar entrepreneurs showed

²³ *Ibid.*, 42.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 45. See also Chapter 5 of my thesis for the Russian Imperial censor V.D. Smirnov’s reaction to the history of this translation and Tatar theatrical troupe’s *Sayar* attempt to stage *Inspector General* on the Tatar stage.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 68.

strongly their desire to preserve the Islamic structure of the *Tatarskaia sloboda* intact. Hence there were numerous protests by the City Duma's Tatar fraction against the lowering of the *traktir* (bar) tax, as a measure that would encourage alcohol and lobbying to include the Tatar part of the city into the registry of streets where drinking alcohol was prohibited.²⁶

One of the most heated questions in Kazan City Duma was related to holiday observance by Russian and Tatar traders. This issue demonstrated the ability of local Kazan Russians and Tatars to come to a reasonable agreement among themselves, whereas it showed the Imperial center's complete rejection of such grass-root integration.

By the end of the 19th century, Tatar trade activity in Kazan had expanded so greatly that Tatar merchants started their expansion into the Russian part of the city. Both Russian and Tatar businesses managed to get along fairly well with the exception of the differences in holiday observance. Orthodox businesses naturally were closed on Sundays, whereas Tatar ones remained open. The latter were closed on Fridays. In April 1904, after lengthy debate between the Duma's Muslim and Orthodox representatives, the majority of whom were merchants, the Duma passed a law which would prohibit Muslims from trading on Sunday, with a half-an-hour exception, in all areas of Kazan except *Novotatarskaia sloboda*. However, shortly after the law was passed, in the aftermath of the First Russian Revolution, the Kazan City Duma passed the new law which pronounced it undemocratic to prohibit Tatars to trade on Sundays and other Orthodox holidays, as if "to oblige them to commemorate the holidays that are not part of their religion." This law was passed upon the agreement of both Russian traders and

²⁶ *Ibid.*

Tatars and was quite outstanding in terms of religious and ethnic tolerance. However, the governor of Kazan and, later, the St. Petersburg Senate found the decision of the Kazan City Duma “not corresponding to the spirit” of the October Manifesto of 1905. The Senate’s response in August 1912 stated that, “since the number of Christian holidays is significantly greater than that commemorated by Muslims, the Christian businesses will be at a great disadvantage when compared to those owned by the Mohammadians.”²⁷

This rather insensitive decision and complete ignoring of local agreements between the Tatar and Russian communities in Kazan shows the extent to which the center was deaf to the dynamics of interethnic relations in its provinces. The decision became a source of tension for many years to come.²⁸

The role of the Tatar bourgeoisie in sponsoring *jadid* educational and cultural reforms in Tatar society was also immense. A family of factory owners, the Akchurins, for example, not only sponsored and built new schools in Simbirsk *gubernia* for both Tatar boys and girls, but also financed the education of children in need.²⁹ The Akchurins also helped finance the Russo-Tatar school in the same region. In the aftermath of the 1905 Revolution, when Tatars finally received permission to publish their own periodicals, Tatar entrepreneurs sponsored the main *jadid* newspapers, such as *Vakyt* (Time) in Orenburg (financed by the Ramiev family of the gold-mine owners,) or the cultural journal *Ang* (Consciousness), owned by Kazan merchant Ahmed-Garei Khasani, a good friend of the prominent Tatar theatrical critic Gabdrahman Karam. New

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 47.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 46-48.

²⁹ Nail Tagirov, *Akchuriny* (Kazan, 2002), 119-143.

bourgeois sensibilities expressed in European and Russian cultural terms were emerging. Following the October Manifesto of 1905 that guaranteed freedom of religion and civic rights to the Empire's inhabitants, these sensibilities gained a legal foundation for their expression. In 1906, a group of well-established Tatar merchants and bureaucrats asked and received permission from the Kazan governor to establish the first Tatar cultural club, *Sharyk* (from the Arabic *sharyk*, i.e. East). The main purpose of the club, as stated by the petitioners, was to provide a "respectable means of entertainment for the members of the club, their families and friends."³⁰ This included staging performances of modern Tatar, Russian and European plays, organizing musical evenings where traditional Tatar folk songs were played on European instruments such as piano or violin or listening to various lectures. The themes ranged from lectures on precious metals to the history of Bulgar. This club was to become a new public space, where the visitors engaged in European-style social interactions and immersed themselves into a new cultural milieu. I analyze the club's significance in detail in Chapter IV.

First Religious Reformers, Ethnographers and Linguists

The Tatar bourgeoisie, despite their considerable power in city politics and their influence on their community, were not, however, the ideologues of the reform. The Tatar version of *Jadidism* like its counterpart elsewhere among the Muslim Turks of the Russian Empire, had at its roots a vision of Islam as a teaching not only compatible with modernity, but also capable of providing an impetus for change. *Jadidism* was said to have been partially a reaction against the scholasticism of Central Asian centers of

³⁰ Narodnyi Arkhiv Respubliki Tatarstan, NART, f. 2 op.3 d. 3251, l.5.

Muslim thinking and the perceived technological stagnation of the East. In Tatar context, Shihabeddin Marjani (1818-1889) has been credited with “initiating the reform” by challenging the principles of traditional Islamic theology. Already, as early as 1916, Tatar social thinker and literary critic Zhamal Validi, in his article, published in *Ang* exclaimed with pathos, “look at us, who is at the head of our reform? A turban-headed, Shihabetdin-khazret,” using this as validation of his refutation of what he saw as the Western notion of Islam as incompatible with change..³¹

A member of the Tatar *ulema* (Muslim religious elite, the possessors of Islamic knowledge), Shihabeddin Marjani, after spending eleven years in Bukhara and Samarkand, traditional centers of Muslim education dominated by extreme scholasticism, became an advocate of *ijtihad*, creative individual interpretation of the tenets of the faith, and rejected the uncritical acceptance of Islamic dogma and the precedents established by *ulema*. Marjani also called for the need to become acquainted with modern science via Russia, thus arguing for the necessity of learning the Russian language and becoming familiarized with Russian culture.³² Marjani’s historiographic and ethnographic work on the Bulgar and Kazan khanates, the above mentioned *Mostafad al-akhbar fi akhvali Kazan va Bulgar* (published in Kazan in 1885 and 1900), can be seen as the first attempt to conceptualize “Tatarness” on the basis of common historical roots and present Tatars

³¹ Zhamal Validi, “Sharyktan Garbka,” *Ang* 2 (1916). *Khazret* -- a term of respect to Islamic religious and spiritual leaders, the *rukhanilar*.

³² Rorlich, *The Volga Tatars*, 50-52.

with a continuum of historical identities.³³ In the book Marjani recounts the history of the Bulgar and Kazan khanate, using Arab, Persian and some Russian sources, as well as on the basis of own archeological research of old historical monuments and sites in Kazan and the outlying regions.³⁴ Unlike all his other works, historiographical and theological, *Mostafad al-akhbar* is not written in Arabic, but rather in what became the foundation of modern literary Tatar, a vernacular Tatar with heavy interspersions of Arabic and Persian lexicon.³⁵ Clearly, this was an attempt (on his part) to present Tatars with a “national” history in their own language. In the introduction to his book, Marjani complains that many of his co-nationals are embarrassed to be called “Tatars” and prefer to be called “Russian Muslims,” or “Turko-Tatars.” He then emphatically exclaims, “Pity on you! If not a Tatar, and not an Arab, Nogai, Tajik, Chinese, Russian, French or German, then who are you? Would you want to be called Cheremish or Moksha [Mordva] instead?”³⁶

At the same time, Marjani’s search for the historical attributes of “Tatarness” competed with counterclaims of the Bulgarists, such as a later ethnographer and a historiographer-autodidact, Gainutdin Axmarev (1864-1911). For him, the city of

³³ On Märjäni’s thesis on Bulgar-Golden Horde-Kazan Tatar continuity, see Uli Schamiloglu, “The Formation of a Tatar Historical Consciousness: Sihabäddin Märçani and the Image of the Golden Horde,” *Central Asian Survey* 9, no. 2 (1990): 39-49.

³⁴ See, for example, Marjani’s discussion of the old gravestones found in Kazan, *Möstäfäd al-äkhbar fi äkhväli Kazan vä Bulgar* (1900, reprint, Kazan, 1989), 208. Marjani did not know Russian, but apparently was assisted by his former student Khusain Feizkhanov (see below) and was well-acquainted with the Russian-German Turkologist, academic V.V.Radlov, who, at the time, worked in Kazan as an inspector of the Russo-Tatar Teachers School. See Validi, *Ocherki istorii obrazovannosti*, 39-40.

³⁵ Marjani, *Mostafad al-akhbar*, 3. See also Validi, *Ocherk istorri obrazovannosti*, 39.

³⁶ Marjani, *Mostafad al-akhbar*, 44.

Bulgar, located northwest of Kazan, with its vast architectural ensemble, was a relic of the Tatar historical past which extended the Tatars historical claim to the land of the Middle Volga region, while omitting the presence of Mongol element in Tatar historical heritage. This refuted Russian historical claims that Tatars were newcomers to the Middle Volga region. Through this exclusionary association with a pre-Mongol Turkic state, Axmarov made a statement about Tatar primacy in the region. Axmarov rejected the Russian nationalists' claim that Bulgars were predecessors of the neighboring Chuvash, noted that Tatar peasants from the Kazan province had for centuries honored ancient Bulgar graves, thus demonstrating popular understanding and commemoration of their national history.³⁷

Independently of Marjani, but roughly in the same time period, worked Tatar folklorist and linguist Kaium Nasyri (1825-1902). Nasyri is credited with creating the Tatar literary language based on the Tatar vernacular, spoken in Kazan. At a time, when Tatar scholars, mostly theologians, wrote in Arabic and Turki (an old Tatar literary language, similar to Ottoman, with strong Arabic and Persian influence), Nasyri wrote a first dictionary of the Tatar language, as well as a textbook of Tatar stylistics. Nasyri also wrote several books which deal with elements of Tatar folklore, such as folk beliefs, stories, legends and celebrations.³⁸ Finally, Khusain Feizhanov (1821-1886), Marjani's student, was a lecturer of Arabic and Tatar at the Saint-Petersburg University. He saw

³⁷ See the following quote from Axmarov's article: "Among these Muslims [of Kazan] the stories of the former glory of Bulgar pass from grandparents to fathers and from fathers to sons... It is the people of Kazan who preserve the old graveyards and tombstones of Bulgar. It is the folk from Kazan and its surroundings that make pilgrimage to the graveyards of Bulgar," *Yulduz* n.11, 1906. On Axmarov, see Gaziz Gubaidullin, "Razvitie istoricheskoi literatury u tiurko-tatarskikh narodov" (lecture presented at *Pervyi Vsesoiuznyi Tiurkologicheskii S'ezd*, Baku, 1926, published in *Gaziz Gubaidullin* [Kazan, 2002]), 119.

³⁸ Validi, *Ocherk istorii obrazovannosti*, 42-43.

the greatest social ill in the absence of modern education in Tatar society and promulgated the introduction of secular sciences in Tatar *medresehs*.³⁹

The efforts of these earlier reformers were directed to the scholarly study and formulation of common historical, linguistic and cultural attributes that marked Tatar ethnicity and differentiated it from others.⁴⁰ These reformers also realized the need to modernize the traditional Muslim educational system. Thus, in the 1880s, when Ismail Gaspirali, a Russian educated Crimean notable argued for the introduction of secular subjects into Muslim schools and introduced his *usul-i-jadid*, it gained eventual recognition in Tatar society.⁴¹ In Kazan, one of the most famous *jadid* medresehs was *Mohammadia*, founded in 1881 by the Tatar theologian, Galimzhan Barudi. Many *iashliar* such as Amrihan, Tukhtarov and Tinchurin were the students of *Mohammadia*. There the students, in addition to devoting considerable time to religious subjects and reading of the Qur'an, learned Arab grammar and stylistics (from European textbooks!), studied geography, mathematics, Turkish and Persian literature.⁴²

Still, *Jadidism* signified much more than a new, more efficient method of learning how to read the Qur'an or the introduction of secular sciences into Muslim confessional schools. As in case of the Central Asian *Jadids*, proponents of *Jadidism* among Tatars

³⁹ Rorlich, *The Volga Tatars*, 65-69.

⁴⁰ In Hroch's examination of national movements in Europe, this is phase A, when a small group of progressive individuals attempted to define various social, cultural, linguistic and sometimes historical attributes of the "non-dominant groups," but "without pressing national demands," in *Becoming National*, 63.

⁴¹ On Gasprinski, see Edward Lazzerini, "Ismail bey Gasprinski (Gaspirali): The Discourse of Modernism and the Russians," in *Tatars of Crimea: Their Struggle for Survival*, ed. Edward Allworth (Durham, 1988).

⁴² Validi, *Ocherk istorii obrazovannosti*, 49, 55-57.

saw themselves as modernizers of their society. However, the Tatar reform movement was far from monolithic. Traditional, *kadimist* (old method) opposition to *Jadidism*, so visible in Central Asia and the object of established scholarly discourse,⁴³ was not as salient among Tatars. In Soviet literature and post-revolutionary memoirs of Tatar actors the initial religious “fanatics” opposition to theater has been all too common a trope.⁴⁴ However, even these ideologically influenced sources demonstrate that, at least in Kazan, the opposition was rather short-lived. Importantly, by the turn of the 20th century, almost all *medresehs* in Kazan were reformed, offering their students a wide variety of secular subjects such as natural sciences, physics, geography, chemistry and logic, as well as Russian and Tatar languages, in addition to the usual Arabic.⁴⁵

One significant split within the Tatar *jadid* movement and one that needs more investigation is a palpable rivalry between Kazan and Orenburg, which considered itself another Tatar cultural center. My preliminary findings show that while, at turn of the 20th century, Kazan was the center for the *iashliar*, who were greatly influenced by the Romantic notion of nationalism, as well as Russian culture, Orenburg became the center of Islamic-centered reform among Tatars. Note that important Tatar *jadid* reformers from Orenburg such as Rizaetdin Fahreddin, a social thinker, historian of the Muslim world and an editor of one of the most prominent Tatar periodicals, *Shura*, or the writer Fatih Karimi, an editor of *Vakt*, took more conservative political and social stands.

⁴³ See, for example, Adeeb Khalid’s discussion of Uzbek *jadids* struggle with Uzbek *kadimists* for possession of knowledge in *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia* (Berkeley, 1998), 114-154.

⁴⁴ For instance, the first pre-revolutionary Tatar actress, Sahibzhamal Gyizatullina-Vozhskaia, in her Soviet-era memoirs, describes the opposition of Muslim people (*musul’man khalky*) to Tatar theater. On her memoirs, see Chapter 7.

⁴⁵ Rorlich, *The Volga Tatars*, 92-93.

If one is to look at the periodicals published in Kazan after the Manifesto of 1905 when Tatars were allowed to have a press in their own language, Orenburg's *Shura* and *Vakt*, although clearly *jadid*, were written in a language much closer to Turki (more densely interspersed by Arabic and Persian lexicon) than to colloquial Tatar, the model that Kazan's *Yolduz*, *Koiash* and *Ang* strived for. In fact, an author of a critical letter to *Shura* noted in 1912, "I wonder if the language of *Shura* is written only for Musa Bigiev or Zya? Or do they think that all readers think like Bukharians?" The author refers to early 20th century religious reformers Musa Bigiev and Zya Kamali (both educated in centers of Islamic learning in Cairo and Medina) and to Bukhara (the latter in Tatar *jadid* discourse was a byword for extreme scholasticism and backwardness.)⁴⁶ In *Shura* and *Vakt* also much more space was dedicated to Islamic history and culture than in Kazan's chatty *Yolduz and Koiash* or the overtly secular, literary-scientific *Ang*.⁴⁷ This rivalry proved to be significant, in that the Kazan *ishliar* restricted the entrance of Orenburg writers and actors into their cultural market (see Chapter III). Further analysis of the cultural and social environment in Orenburg is necessary in order to present the full picture of the dynamics.

In sum, the ethnographic, linguistic and theological works of the earliest Tatar reformers such as Marjani, Nasyri and Feizkhanov combined with the growing economic ambitions of the Tatar entrepreneurs and the intensification of state policies of assimilation helped to foster the successful dissemination of *usul-i-jadid* among the Volga Tatars, particularly in Kazan, but also in other large cities such as Orenburg, Ufa

⁴⁶ Raif Mardanov, *Shura zhurnaly: 1908-1917* (Kazan, 2001), 32.

and Viatka. Importantly, the scholarly writings of Marjani and Nasyri became a harbinger of to the idea of a particular Tatar identity, based on common language and history, as opposed to existing supra-national modes of identification (Islam) or strictly local identities (people of Kazan).

The focus of the *jadids*, the first generation of Tatar reformers, who were the followers of Marjani's *ijtihad* and Gaspirali's *usul-i-jadid*, centered on challenging the postulates of the *kadimists*, reforming the Tatar educational system and setting forth Islam as a major cultural force capable of change. The *iashliar*, on whom I focus in my next chapter, were born in the late 1870s and 1880s and already had the benefit of studying in the Jadid *medresehs* (Muslim secondary education schools). They had the luxury of focusing their energies and attention elsewhere, such as reforming the cultural life of Tatar society. An important force in Tatar society, both cultural and political, the *iashliar* (literally, young people), pondered the meaning of Tatar identity by developing the ethnographic and historical inquiries of Marjani and Nasyri into an explicitly secular, European notion of nationhood.

Chapter III

Iashliar

In 1915, Tatar social thinker and critic, Zhamal Validi, in his review of *Mogallima*, a new popular play by his contemporary Gayaz Iskhaky, stated that Tatar society had recently gone “through revolutionary upheaval in social life, social thought and literature.” The main force behind these changes, according to Validi, was “*our iashliar*,” Tatar men and women, who took it upon themselves to redefine the social relations and cultural norms of the Tatar society.¹

As you will recall from the introduction, Adeb Khalid in his *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform* was the first to contest the prevalent scholarly view of “Jadidism” as a unified reform movement of the Russian Muslim communities at the turn of the 20th century. Khalid argues for a multiplicity of “Jadidisms,” each motivated and determined in part by specificities of the locality in which it emerged.² My observations on the discourse and cultural production of the *iashliar* allow me to take Khalid’s argument one step further, demonstrating that, at least in Tatar society, the reform movement splintered not only geographically, but also chronologically. For, in Kazan,

¹ Zhamal Validi “Mogallima, *Vakyt*, 10 January, 1915.

² See Adeb Khalid *The Politics of Muslim Reform*, 89-93. Khalid also challenges the scholarly view of Volga Tatars as primary movers of *Jadid* reform in Central Asia, as in an article by Helene Carrere d’Encausse “The Stirring of National Feeling,” in *Central Asia: A Century of Russian Rule*, ed. Edward Allworth (New York, 1967), 178-91.

there emerged a distinct second generation of reformers, who distanced themselves both from the older reformist Jadids and from the traditionalist *kadimists*. In the Tatar periodic press of early teens, they were called *iashliar* (literally, young people).³

The *iashliar* were the main producers of secular Tatar literature and drama in early 20th century Kazan, which they envisioned a center of Tatar society's "progress" and "culturedness," twin goals of their reforms. The meaning of "progress" (*tarrakyyat*) in the discourse of the *iashliar* and the rest of Tatar intellectual elite was conflated with "Westernization," much like in the works of Ismail Gasprinskii, the founder of the *usul-i-jadid*. "Culture" or "culturedness" (*madeniat*), on the other hand, possessed a plurality of meanings. It was, for one, a reference to the Tatar historical past, reflecting the intellectuals' pride in possessing an "ancient written culture" and belonging to one of the world's three monotheistic religions. But in the *iashliar*'s discourse of remaking the cultural and social norms of traditional Tatar society, "culture" or "culturedness" also meant a set of new, refined, secular European-like sensibilities and patterns of social interaction. In this chapter, I will give a portrait of the *iashliar* as a social group discussing several individual key figures and their work and writings. I will argue that, while the artistic forms they adopted in theater and drama were explicitly European, the *iashliar*'s self-conception was hybrid and multicultural, drawing both on Islamic and Eastern heritage and on Western and Russian cultural achievements. I will also discuss new aesthetic criteria they established and the vocabulary of cultural difference they

³ Even as I differentiate the *iashliar* from the earlier generation of Tatar reformers, the second generation were themselves socially and ideologically diverse. On groups such as *islahisty* (the *medreseh* students' movement), the *tangisty* (the Tatar Social Revolutionaries) see Zhamal Validi, *Ocherk istorii obrazovannosti volzhskikh Tatar do revoliutsii 1917 goda* (Moscow-Petrograd, 1923), 55-62, 84-85.

employed to delineate themselves from the outsiders who did not fit their criteria. In sum, I hope to show the ways in which *iashliar* brought wider concepts of “modernity” and “development” into Tatar society through their writings and drama.

***Iashliar* as a Social Group**

The earlier generation of Tatar reformers, had devoted much of their efforts to reform Muslim educational system and to introduce along with the study of Islam a whole array of secular subjects. The *iashliar*, who were born in the late 1870s and 1880s, had the benefit of studying in the Jadid *medresehs* (Muslim secondary education schools). They had the luxury of focusing their energies and attention elsewhere. Some of them studied in the Russo-Tatar Teachers School established by the Imperial Decree of 1876 as part of Il'minskii's program of assimilating the *inorodsy*, thereby going against the prevalent negative perception of the School as a tool of Russification and Christianization of Tatars. Some, like Tatar historian Gaziz Gubaidullin, studied in the Russian Universities.⁴ In fact, *jadids*, in their polemics with *iashliar*, often referred to them as “malchishki-sharlatany” (charlatans-urchins and “ucheniki Pinegina” (Pinegin's students)).⁵ They came from relatively similar social backgrounds, and unlike many of

⁴ Gubaidullin got his degree in history at the Kazan State University.

⁵ Validi, *Ocherk istorii obrazovannosti*, 46. Mikhail Pinegin was a local Kazan censor of Tatar periodicals and was appointed a director of the Russo-Tatar Teachers School in 1900, after the former director, a Tatar, Axmerov, passed away. He was thought to be extremely sympathetic to the Tatars and himself lived in a common-law marriage with a Tatar woman. See Robert Geraci, *Window on the East: National and Imperial Identities in Tsarist Russia* (Ithaca, 2001), 154 on Pinegin and Russo-Tatar Teachers School.

the *jadids* often did not belong to the well-established Tatar families.⁶ Most were born in Kazan or outlying villages into the families of mullahs or agriculturalists. In their early political careers *iashliar* were at the far left of the spectrum of Tatar society, especially in the aftermath of the Revolution of 1905 and demonstrated the strong influence of the ideas of socialism. Thus, Gayaz Iskhakyi and his friend Fuad Tukhtarov, the author of a biting book on the Muslim delegates to the Russian Dumas, were members of the Socialist Revolutionary Party, while Fatih Amirhan was the member of socialist Muslim student organization, *al-Islah*.⁷ Zhamal Validi in his *Ocherk istorii obrazovannosti volzhskikh tatar*, noted that, in their political and social radicalism some of the *iashliar* such as Iskhakyi for instance, were closer to the *kadimists*, the conservative Muslim clergy, – the proponents of scholasticism, staunch antagonists of any kind of openness to the West, but also most loyal to the imperial state, rather than to the *jadids*.⁸ It was precisely the *jadids*' political and social centrism, that the *iashliar* found distasteful.

Iashliar's project of remaking Tatar society was explicitly secular, and as such contrasts with the work of the *jadids*. Some scholars argued that after the Revolution of 1905, when Tatars were able to mobilize politically, the society's desire to live in accordance with Islamic principles became more evident if not stronger.⁹ The key issues

⁶ As for example, Sadri and Hadi Maksudi, the owners of an important political and cultural Tatar newspaper *Yulduz*, or Galimzhan Barudi, the founder of Kazan's famous *jadid medreseh Mohammadia*.

⁷ Galimzhan Ibragimov, *Tatary v Revolutsii 1905 goda* (Kazan, 1926), 184.

⁸ Validi, *Ocherk istorii obrazovannosti*, 45.

⁹ Naganava, Norihiro "Tatarskaia intelligentsia novogo tipa v Povolzh'e i Priural'e: rassuzhdeniia o poniatii 'natsiia,' milliat posle pervoi rossiiskoi revoliutsii," offprint from *Slavic Studies*, 50 (n.p., 2003), 60-61. See also Diliara Usmanova, *Musul'manskaia fraktsiia i problemy svobody sovesti v Gosudarstvennoi Dume Rossii: 1906-1917* (Kazan, 1991).

for the Muslim fraction made up mainly of Tatar and Azeri *jadids* in the four Russian State Dumas (1906-1917) was “freedom of conscience” and freedom to live according to Islamic principles.”¹⁰ The earlier Tatar reformers such as Riza Fahreddin were influenced by the 19th century religious reformers of such Islamic centers of learning as Cairo and Medina. For them, as well as for the majority of the Tatar bourgeoisie and Tatar religious elite, or *rukhanilar*, who possessed a considerable influence among the Tatar folk, it was Islam that was the binding force in Tatar society. One of the *jadids* main goals was reconciling Islam with contemporary culture. The founder of Kazan’s famous *jadid medreseh*, Mohammadia, Galimzhan Barudi, saw Islam and Islamic practice as very important factor in the *medreseh*’s curriculum. Barudi was also a founding member of the first Muslim Tatar party *Ittifak –i-Muslimin* which Iskhakyi and Tukhtarov criticized for its political conservatism.¹¹ Riza Fahreddin, the editor of Orenburg’s prominent reformist cultural, historiographic and theological journal *Shura* was a respected historian of the Islamic world, *jadid* social thinker and a writer. His literary works, *Esma* and *Selima*, idealize the image of new Muslim women who are liberated, strong, have their careers but are different from European women in their lack of forwardness and more modest behavior. Fahreddin warned his reader of the outward allure and spiritual abandonment of Western culture.¹² Fatih Karimi, the editor of Orenburg’s influential *jadid* newspaper *Vakyt*, whose literary didactic writings reveal the persistence of the traditional Islamic genre of traveler’s account, was frequently attacked

¹⁰ Usmanova, *Musul’manskaia fraktsia*, 81-115.

¹¹ Validi, *Ocherk istorii obrazovannosti*, 55. Also see Aisha Rorlich, *The Volga Tatars: A Profile in National Resilience* (Stanford, 1986), 104-24.

¹² Validi, *Ocherk*, 87-88.

by *iashliar* for his political conservatism and haughtiness.¹³ Some young reformers such as Zya Kamali and Abdullah Bobi, the founder of the famous Bobi *medreseh* in Viatka gubernia, still from the *jadid* mold argued that the seeds of modernization were contained in Islamic culture.¹⁴ Still, Validi argues that, for Bobi and Kamali, Islam was completely subjugated to European norms and demands and, that they completely disregarded Islamic praxis, something that such thinkers as Barudi and Fahreddin saw as essential to being a Muslim.

For *jadid* reformers, such as Fahreddin, the word *milliat* (nation) had the same meaning as *umma*, i. e. the community of believers, with broad supranational identification. For politically active *jadids* such as Yosuf Akchura, a philosopher of Pan-Turkism and one of the founders of the “Young Turk” movement in Ottoman Turkey or Karimi, one of the founders of the first Muslim political party, *Ittifak al-Muslimin*, *milliat* translated into “Russian Muslims” (*Rossia Musul'manlary*), and reflected their view of Islam as a fundamental uniting force in the political mobilization of Empire’s Turkic/Muslim peoples.¹⁵

The *Iashliar* operated on different principles. For the *iashliar*, the main driving force behind Tatar progress was *milliat* in European Romantic sense of the word—signifying common history, language and race. Islam was still important to their self-identification, but as some of the *iashliar*’s plays reveal, Islamic praxis and public

¹³ Ibragimov, *Tatary*, 212-213.

¹⁴ Valdi, *Ocherk*, 76 -77.

¹⁵ Naganava, “Tatarskaia intelligentsia,” 60-62; *Fatih Karimi: Nauchno-biographiceskii sbornik* (Kazan, 2002); *Rizaetdin Fahretdin* (Kazan 2003).

religiosity were secondary in importance to privately held belief and internal moral purity.

Gaziz Gubaidullin (1887-1937) and Zhamal Validi (1887-1932).

Gaziz Gubaidullin, the future Soviet historian of the Turkic world was born into a Kazan Tatar middle-class merchant family. After completing *medreseh*, he eventually gained his father's acquiescence to study history at the Kazan University under the renowned Turkologist Nikolai Katanov.¹⁶ In his work published in 1916 as a collection of articles in Tatar influential socio-cultural and scientific journal *Ang* and then republished in 1917 as a separate edition Gubaidullin puts forward the modern 19th century European concept of the nation based on common history, language and race. He argued for a unification of all Turkic people as a real possibility, which eventually would translate into a cultural autonomy within Russian Empire.¹⁷

Zhamal Validi in his essay *Milliat ve Milliat* (Nation and Nationality, 1914) saw in the contemporary Turkic world processes of unification and division. "Unity of blood and religion...similarity of language," brought Turkic people together. Yet, he criticized the idea of "one Turkic nation" as an idealistic dream first promulgated by Ismail Gasprinski. First and foremost, differences in language which he saw among "Sarts (Uzbeks), Turks, Caucasian and Tatars," for example, were enough to separate them. "We cannot write our literary and theatrical works in Sart or Turkish." The particular

¹⁶ See Robert Geraci's *Window on the East*, 309-43, on the analysis of Katanov's work and relationship with Russian society.

¹⁷ Gaziz Gubaidullin, *Milletehelekneng bagaz asaslari* (Principles of Nationalism) (Kazan, 1918), 3-4.

cultural life and the differing social and political conditions of each region, *vatan* (homeland in Validi's words), where one "Turkic tribe" lived were bound to separate them into different nations.¹⁸ Validi traced the beginning of new Tatar history, its "national period," to the Russian revolution of 1905.

When the discourse on "Tatar nation" with all its inherent ambiguities reached the cultural milieu of Tatar youth circles in early 20th century Kazan, it often entailed sacrificing one's personal interests as well as challenging the old traditional norms and gender roles of Tatar society. Stepping away from inhibitions for the "sake of nation," became one of the favorite trope's of educated Tatar youth at the beginning of early 20th century. Thus, a noble Tatar woman in her 20s, Zahida Axmerova, was asked by Gabduallah Kariev, a director of Kazan's theatrical troupe's *Sayar*, to substitute for a sick actress in a performance. Female acting was prohibited by Islamic clerics, Tatar were no exception. While, modern Tatar theater was first among Muslim Turks to sport female actresses, the profession of acting was hardly suitable for a well-bred Tatar girl, attracting mostly the economically disadvantaged. Though she initially protested, Kariev was able to convince her to act by asking her to do it "for the sake of our nation" (*milliat uchen*). She became a second-string actress and worked for six years.¹⁹ In an interview with the contemporary Tatar playwright Rabit Batulla, Axmerova, (later Tinchurina,) noted that

¹⁸ Validi, *Milliat ve Milliyat* (The Nation and the National), (Kazan, 1914), 30-35. Validi also noted that regional and linguistic similarities among Bashkirs and Mishars were strong enough to have them considered part of the Tatar nation.

¹⁹ *Karim Tinchurin*, (Kazan, 2003), 44.

thinking in terms of “milliat uchen” was quite fashionable among the Kazan Tatar youth at the time.²⁰

In the following discussion of few selected plays by *iashliar*, I will demonstrate the ways in which their discourse was abstracted into drama and theater. The political and social changes experienced by Tatar society in the period of *iashliar* ‘s most active intellectual engagement (i.e. the aftermath of the First Russian Revolution up to the beginning of the Civil War), were conceived as the struggle between old and new life (*ianga tormysh/iske tormysh*). The old was oppressive, dark (*karangy*), backward and full of hypocrisy. The new with which they both simultaneously identified and conceived as a part of their project of reforming Tatar society was progressive and pure. Many of *iashliar*’s earliest plays were didactic in their nature, resembling very much the main tropes of the *jadids*’ writings across the Turkic world. They warned against Muslim scholasticism, protested arranged marriages and made fun the most obvious inhibitors of “progress,” the method, *kadimist* Muslim clergy, rich, uneducated merchants and their greedy, cruel wives.²¹ At the same time, in some of their most influential plays the *iashliar* articulate various conceptions of Tatar identity while subtly juxtaposing themselves to the already established political and cultural leaders of Tatar society, the *jadids per se*.

Fatih Amirhan (1886-1926)

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ See for example, Iskhakiy’s *Aldym-Birdem*, *Kyamet*, *Och khatyn birlen tormysh*; Galiaskar Kamal’s *Bezneng sheherebez serliary*, *Bulek ochen*, *Uinash*; Idris Bogdanov’s *Pomada Meselesi*, etc.

Fatih Amirhan was one of the most prominent representatives of the *iashliar*. When two of his most influential plays were written, Amirhan was a young man in his early twenties. Fatih Amirhan was born in Kazan in 1886 to the family of a *mahalla* (neighborhood) mullah, who was a proponent of the new method. After attending mandatory *maktab* (Muslim elementary school, Amirhan was educated in Kazan's *jadid medreseh* Mohammadia. Like the majority of Tatar intellectuals, he had a good knowledge of classical Persian, Arabic and Turkish literatures. Also, like many *iashliar*, he developed a great interest in Russian literature and culture, an interest that brought tension to his relationship with his parents.²² In 1904, Amirhan made few month-long trip to Samara, to immerse himself in a Russian-speaking environment and study Russian classics, particularly Turgenev and Tolstoi.

Like many young Tatars, Amirhan was deeply interested in theater, seeing it both as a didactic tool and as the perfect place for the new type of socialization and of refinement of Tatar cultural behavior. In his 1904 letter to his friend in Ufa, he mentions that he participated in the staging of two plays in his *medreseh*, both Tatar adaptations of Turkish Sentimentalist plays, *Kyzganych bala* and *Gashyk belesi*. When in Kazan, he took an active part in the first home theatrical performances organized in 1906 by the *Shimbecheliar*, a group of *shakirds* (*medreseh* students) and Tatar students of the Russian gymnasium. These Saturdays (*shimbe* in Tatar means Saturday) attracted many Kazan youth. Unlike traditional socialization among Tatars, these gatherings were gender-mixed. They continued well into the 1910s, as places of informal association for Tatar

²² In his letter to a friend, Rizvan Alushi, in 1904 Amirhan states that his father was very much against his going to Samara and Moscow to study Russian, in Fatih Amirhan, *Eserler* vol. 5 (Kazan, 1986), 225. Likewise, the Tatar historian Gaziz Gubaidullin's father was against his study and interest in Russian. See *Gaziz Gubaidullin* (Kazan, 2002), 38.

youth.²³ I analyze their significance in detail in the next chapter. In 1907 Amirhan travels to Moscow to work for the first Tatar children's illustrated journal, *Tarbia etfal*. Upon Amirhan's return to Kazan four months later, after the journal was closed, he was stricken with polio and remained paralyzed from the waist down for the rest of his life.²⁴

In his first play, appropriately titled *Iashliar*, Amirhan conceptualized his generation's search for ways to better Tatar society as a conflict between the "fathers" and "sons." Amirhan's heroes read Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* and compare themselves to Turgenev's heroes, Bazarov and Rudins as well as Russian narodniki.²⁵ "They [Russian narodniki] carried to the people the idea that the old has to be destroyed and that the future generations will build the new...and our historical purpose is the same," states Ziya, one of the play's heroes.²⁶ As Gabdrahman Karam, a well-know Tatar theatrical critic of the time stated in his 1916 review of the production of the play, after it was finally allowed to be staged by the St. Petersburg censor, V.D. Smirnov, "the play was written under the influence of the First Russian Revolution on our lives. It is part of our history."²⁷ Another critic noted that "the struggle between different understandings of the world reflected on in the play still continues."²⁸

²³ Zahida Axmerova-Tinchurina talks about *shimbe* evenings a good deal in her interviews with the Kazan writer, Batulla in 1983. *Karim Tinchurin*, 36-77. I will discuss the *shimbe* evenings in detail in Chapter IV.

²⁴ Mohammat Gainullin, *Tatar edipleri* (Kazan, 1978), 94.

²⁵ Fatih Amirhan, *Iashliar: Eserler* vol. 2 (Kazan, 1985), 265.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 296.

²⁷ Gabdrahman Karam, "Iashliar," *Ang* 22 (1916): 227.

²⁸ Nurkin, "Iashliar," *Koiash*, 13 November 1916.

In the play, Gaziz, son to a conservative Tatar merchant family, dedicates his life to the service of the Tatar nation. To be in service to the nation called for sacrifice and implied transgressing the old social norms of Tatar society. For example, learning Russian and studying Russian was one of way “serving the nation.” To dedicate your life solely to professions such as secular writers, poets, actors, musicians and painters, all of which lacked social status in traditional Tatar Muslim society, was another.²⁹ The idea of serving the Tatar nation was one of the principles on which the progressive Tatar youth drew their sense of coherence as a group. Another principle was outright defiance of public religiosity and Islamic praxis and a notion of personal moral purity. The intertwining of these two elements is particularly interesting because it shares elements with both European, post-Reformation notions of “private religion” as well as with traditional Islamic movements for religious renewal.³⁰ Amirhan’s hero, Gaziz, religious identity is based on private Islam and is juxtaposed to the hypocritical public religiosity of older generation. In the first act of the play, Gaziz’s father accuses his son of “not performing the ritual prayer, studying Russian to get into Russian university, dressing like a European, and socializing with Russian women.”³¹ The father complains that Gaziz is trying to be someone else, “not Tatar.” Gaziz makes fun of the father’s “real Tatar” friends, who are known to visit the brothels, have Russian lovers, drink alcohol and have very little scholarly knowledge about Islam. “And where is your Islam? What does *your* Islam and your abstinence mean to me if you do not even pray...” states his

²⁹ Acting, painting and playing music are considered problematic occupations in orthodox Islam.

³⁰ For the relevant discussion, see Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore, 1993).

³¹ Amirhan, *Iashliar*, 266.

father. “My Islam is here,” answers Gaziz pointing to his heart.³² To his father, the daily ritual prayer, refusal to learn Russian, a veto on European fashion and public mingling with Russian women are necessary demarcation of otherness in a multicultural, multireligious city. Visiting brothels and drinking were human sins that could be forgiven, but the desire to learn Russian culture and study in a Russian university was translated as the desire to become part of an essentially foreign and hostile society. As a young man, Amirhan was outspoken in his choice of clothes. His a-la *narodnik kosovorotka* (a traditional Russian peasant shirt) with blue embroidery in the form of rabbits must have looked outlandish to the majority of Tatars in Kazan, who even if dressed in the European fashion, adopted the more conservative Turkish “European” style which seemed to have prevailed among Tatar *jadids*.³³ He was also explicitly anti-Semitic in his personal correspondence, something that was very uncommon among Tatar intellectuals at the time, and perhaps was consciously adopted by Amirhan as part of his flirtation with Russian cultural symbols.³⁴

For Gaziz and a group of his friends, young Tatar men and women brought together by the idea of betterment of their society, the very meaning of “Tatar” is subject to change. To them learning Russian and European cultural ways did not mean

³² *Ibid.* See Damir Iskhakov, *Problemy stanovlenia i transformatsii tatarskoi natsii* (Kazan, 1997), 23 in which he mentions that Tatar religiosity was becoming more private in the early 20th century. He exaggerates this, however, by claiming that this was happening to Tatar society at large.

³³ Amirhan’s *kosovorotka* was held in the Tatar State Museum archive and was to me by the Museum’s employee, Ramzia Abzalina in March 2003. The Turkish “European” style consisted of a formal suit, a tie and a fez, see, *Tatarskii natsional’nyi kostium* (Kazan, 2000).

³⁴ See for example his diaries from 1921-1926, Fatih Amirhan, *Eserler* vol.4 (Kazan, 1986), 189-91. Cf. this with his V.D. Smirnov’s review of Amirhan’s *Iashliar*. The phrases that the censor found unsuitable for the stage included such as “studenty ni boga ni tsaria ne priznaiut. Vse sovershenno zhidami stali,” RGIA, f. 776. op.26, d.85, l.24.

assimilation, rather it meant overcoming their society's backwardness. The *iashliar* in the play intersperse their Tatar with Russian (maybe too much, as the critic remarked)³⁵ and they describe themselves and their conflict with the rest of Tatar society in Russian cultural and political terms, modeling themselves on Turgenev's "sons" and *narodniki*. However, the characters' relation to the Russian society in the play is a monologue, not a dialogue, and there is no actual interaction in the play with the Russians. Perhaps, the absence of Russian characters points to the uncertainty of Amirhan's position vis-à-vis Russian society, in which even Russian intellectuals' interests implied hierarchy of culture. Hence, the physical barrier between the two worlds remains unbroken. The father's accusation that Gaziz was seen with Russian females proves, after all, to be false. Actually, Gaziz is romantically involved with a young Tatar woman who does study in a Russian gymnasium (a fairly common practice among a small stratum of Tatar bureaucrats), but who is dedicated to the service of the Tatar nation.

At the end of the play, Gaziz is forced to leave his house because of his father's fear that his ideas which the father sees as subversive of Tatar social and cultural norms would infect the rest of his children. One of the father's accusations is the charge that Gaziz plans to study in the Russian university. As some of the *iashliar*'s writings show, this was a real dilemma for the Tatar youth. Gaziz Gubaidullin, whom I mentioned above and who may have been the prototype for Amirhan's Gaziz,³⁶ wrote in 1917 that the cultural flourishing and modernization of the Tatar nation are impossible without higher education. Higher education in the Russian Empire, however, meant Russian

³⁵ Karam, "Iashliar," *Ang* 22 (1916): 227.

³⁶ According to the Gubaidullin's son, his father mentioned that Amirhan asked him about the mores and relationships in Gubaidullin's family when writing his *Iashliar*. See *Gaziz Gubaidullin*, 60.

universities. The majority of Tatar students would not attend them, partly because they did not have the body of knowledge necessary to study there, and partly out of fear of losing touch with Tatar society and becoming Russified.³⁷ While Gaziz is able to stand up to his father and pursue his own path, his younger sister, receptive to Gaziz's ideas remains in her father house and acquiesces to marry a person she does not love.³⁸ The absence of closure in the play indicates to the reader that the struggle between the "old" and the "new" continues.

There were few plays in the history of pre-revolutionary Tatar theater that enjoyed such popularity among both the Tatar public and critics as Amirhan's *Tigetzsezliar*, written in 1914. It was especially appreciated for positive portrayal of a new Tatar life and proud proclamation of Tatar culture's value. If in *Iahsliar* written in 1909, "the new" is just appearing and is in the conflict with "the old," in *Tigetzsezliar*, written in 1914, there is an attempt to show that "the new" has already taken deep roots. In the play, change is measured against the background of Western as well Eastern cultural achievements, while the genre of the play reflect Amirhan's appropriation of European/Russian cultural forms.

Tigetzsezliar (Mismatched) has a subtitle, *Iana kesheliar* (The new people). The first refers to a romantic twist that takes place in the play, the second to the fact that the author here portrays the life of new Tatars, with new convictions and sensibilities, people, who will effect cultural and social change in Tatar society. Safyi Nasybullin, the head of

³⁷ Gubaidullin, *Milletehelekneng bagaz asalar*, 4.

³⁸ The traditional Tatar practice of arranging marriages was seen as backward and diminutive of women in particular, by both the *jadids* and the *iasliar* and was one of the focal points on which both groups agreed.

the family, is a middle-class Tatar merchant, who is influenced by the *jadid* ideas. He is dressed in European fashion, although as the remarks state, “in the old-fashioned European fashion.” His house has paintings on the walls, a real piano and the portraits of Russian and Tatar writers. (Both paintings and music were scorned by *kadimists* as sinful). The portraits of writers are headed by a large portrait of Gabdullah Tukai (1890-1913), an extremely popular early 20th century Tatar poet and a defender of the use of Tatar colloquial language. Tukai was closely associated with Amirhan and other *iashtiar*. By the time the play was published, he had already passed away of consumption at the age of 23, and it was as much his early demise as his fine poetry that was romanticized in the Tatar society.

According to Amirhan’s contemporary, the theatrical critic Gabdrahman Karam, the play presents a number of types that are new to Tatar society. (For Karam, “type” means both literary image and character taken from “Tatar reality.”)³⁹ Gumer, Safyi’s son, continues his father’s business. He is studious, practical and knowledgeable. He wants to open a big firm, selling optical goods, something that the father finds risky, but which other “new” characters in the play find smart. Gumer encourages a Tatar youth to become an apprentice in his optics shop. “Our Tatar youngsters are occupying themselves with meaningless things like selling salt and galoshes at the Pechen bazaar. I only see Jews and Germans in truly worthwhile trades. I have one Russian and one Polish tradesman in my shop, but I really want to teach this trade to a Tatar lad.”⁴⁰

³⁹ See Aigul Salikhova, “Literaturno-kriticheskoi nasledie Gabdrahman Karama,” (Avtoreferat kandidatskoi dissertatsii, Kazan State University, 1998). Karam, the most prominent theatrical critic at the time was also closely associated with progressive Tatar youth.

⁴⁰ Fatih Amirhan, *Tigezsezliar: Eserler* vol. 2 (Kazan, 1985), 336. Pechen bazar or Sennyi bazar was the main marketplace in Kazan. It was infamous in Kazan, for its of “fanatical” petty

In the play, Amirhan constructs a very positive image of the Tatar middle class. Hence, Karam lauded Gumer's character as "an honorable example to our youth."⁴¹ If Gumer is a representative of the new Tatar bourgeoisie, Soleiman, a writer in his mid-thirties, is a Tatar *zyaly*, a member of Tatar intelligentsia. He received a Jadid education and studied Russian language and literature on his own. Karam calls him "blagorodnyi" (Russian, noble) and "a likeable nationalist." It is during Soleiman's retort to Gabdulla, a Moscow-educated Tatar student, that the play reached one of its highest points. The author's portrayal of Gabdulla's character is highly negative. The young man cannot even write grammatically in Tatar. Karam notes that there are nowadays such "studentishki among our Tatar youth... who view Russian culture and Russian literature as an absolute model...despising our own."⁴²

Gabdullah reminds Soleiman of Fonvizin's Ivanushka who held Russian culture inferior to European.

Well, did it stop Russian culture from flourishing and the Russian people from gaining strength?...Whatever these Abdulkas-Ivanushkas think, I will not dismiss the thousand-year-old history of my people, the fact that they were able to preserve their religion, traditions, writing, literature, songs and music, the fact that they, for centuries, studied in *maktabs* and *medreseh*...in no aspects they were ever were inferior to others. I can not throw out all of this!"

The tone of this statement is quite different from the idea of "destruction of the old," that permeated *Iashliar*. Four years later, Amirhan's pugilistic youth has much more respect for Tatar society and Tatar national perseverance.

merchants, and the so-called "kiafir pochmagy" the "unbelievers' corner," where a group of petty sellers badmouthed the reformed Tatar press, new jadid schools and theater.

⁴¹ Karam, "Tigezsezliar," *Ang* 4 (1915): 88

⁴² *Ibid*, 87. Note the dismissive dominative from Russian word for students-*studentishki*.

“Likeable nationalist,” as one critic called him or “narrow-minded nationalist,” as another critic, Shahid Axmediev named him, Soleiman’s statement on the value of Tatar culture elicited an unprecedented reaction from the Tatar audience during the play’s first performance in 1915 by *Sayar* troupe. The public applauded enthusiastically in the middle of performance, cheering the fact that “Gabdulka-Ivanushka” was “put in his place by the proud nationalist.”⁴³

Another character, the extravagant Rokya, Nasybullin’s youngest daughter, who is in love with Soleiman, reminded Soviet Tatar critics of Chekhov’s *The Seagull*. The habit of comparing Tatar writers, playwrights and poets to their Russian brethren was common both among pre-revolutionary Tatar intellectuals and, to a much greater extent among Soviet Tatar literary critics. Amirhan, Tukay and Iskhaky themselves talked about the influence of Russian and European drama on their plays. However, there is an important difference in what these references signified and sought to accomplish in Soviet times and in the early 20th century. In 1914, at the time of Tukai’s death, the same Zahida Akhmerova, a Tatar student of a Russian gymnasium and the future wife of the playwright Karim Tinchurin, asked to leave class because “Tukai, our Tatar Pushkin has just passed away,” receiving the school mistress’ immediate permission.⁴⁴ What Akhmerova wanted to communicate was that the importance of Tukai’ poetry to Tatars and the Tatar language was equal to that of Pushkin for the Russians. During Soviet times, reference to Russian literary figures became the way of legitimizing the value of the Tatar literature, and there was an inherent inequality in such comparisons. In the

⁴³ *Ibid.* Also Shahid Axmediev, “Tigezsezliar p’esasy,” *Yulduz* (Kazan) February 12, 1915, and Bikkulov, “Tigezsezliar,” *Koiash*, February 13, 1915.

⁴⁴ See *Karim Tinchurin*, 54.

case of Amirhan, Soviet Tatar literary critics often compared his plays to those of Chekhov, Gorkii and Turgenev as an implicit seal of approving. In *Iashliar*, the author himself is flashing the reference.

For my purposes it is not so much the similarity of Rokya's character to that of Nina Zarechnaia that is significant.⁴⁵ What is important is that the genre of the play points to Amirhan's appropriation of the very Chekhovian quality of a dissonance and disconnect among the characters. The name of the play *Tigetzsezliar* (The Mismatched) points to this. Rokya and Soleiman do not understand Gabdulla, Gabdulla does not understand them but is in love with Rokya. Salima, the older daughter, is in love with Gabdulla but cannot tell him about it and ends up marrying a man she does not love. Rokya and Soleiman love each other but their union is impossible because of Soleiman's fear that he is not an equal match for her.

Also, three out of the play's four acts take place on the *dacha*, not a usual setting for Tatar plays. When one looks at the few photographs of the actual 1915 performance by *Sayar*, the choice of costumes for both male and female actors is striking. It is quite possible that Russian summer suites and hats were coming into fashion among Tatar men, but the absence of a ubiquitous *kalfak*, a female form of skullcap, as well as of typical mixture of traditional European and Tatar cloth, ubiquitous in early twenty century Tatar photographs, is telling. It is as if Kariev, the producer of *Sayar*, wanted to bring out the Chekhovian elements of the play's form. .

Amirhan in *Tigetzsezliar* and Kariev in his production of the play might have consciously appropriated Russian cultural influence. Yet, the Chekhovian twist in the

play was subjugated to one very important element of the Tatar *iashliar's* discourse. The new type of Tatar businessman, Gumer, writer Soleiman, tragic Salima, artistic Rokya, even Russified Gabdulla, all these dissonant characters have one larger goal in life, to work for betterment of the Tatar nation.

The heroes of the play allow judicious appreciation of Russian culture, as long as it does not mean deprecation of their own. Amirhan's borrowing of Russian literary forms was conscious, but perhaps he also saw this as a necessary element of modernization. After all, as his hero Soleiman puts it, cultural borrowing also has been part of Russian cultural growth. Among a Tatar audience tired of watching "banal and unsophisticated plays" and hearing that Tatars are "dead and useless people"⁴⁶ the play was one of the most popular and was performed as late as 1920.

Amirhan's characters in *Iashliar*, written in 1909, use Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* to navigate social and cultural changes in Tatar society. Validi in his *Milliat ve Milliat*, 1914 noted that, after the First Russian Revolution, "our *iashliar* fashioned themselves after the Russian nation in their social actions."⁴⁷ *Tigessezliar* was written in 1914, a time of Russian reaction when state policies of civic integration were halted and the pressure on Tatars to assimilate had increased. As far as the content of the play is concerned, it shows a growth of Tatar nationalistic feelings. In Karim Tichurin's plays *Shomly Adym* (Dangerous Step) staged by *Sayar* in 1916, the barrier between Tatars and Russians is breached, the two societies remained in conflict.

⁴⁶ Karam, "Tigessezliar," *Ang* 4 (1915): 88 and Bikkulov, "Tigessezliar," *Koiash*, February 13 1915.

⁴⁷ Validi, *Milliat ve Milliyat*, 4.

Karim Tinchurin (1887-1937)

Karim Tinchurin was born to a strong peasant family of Penza region in 1887 and went to study in Kazan's *Mohammadia medreseh* against his father will.⁴⁸ In 1906, he was forced to leave *Mohammadia* as a participant of the Tatar student movement. He worked as a forester and a teacher in village school until 1911, when he was invited as an apprentice by *Sayar's* director, Gabdulla Kariev. A few years later, Tinchurin was one of the leading actors and stage director of the troupe.

Tinchurin's first play, *Shomly Adym*, aroused a heated discussion in the Tatar press when it was staged by *Sayar* in 1916, with Tinchurin himself playing the lead character. In the play, the son of the village mullah, Salim, refuses to take up his father's profession and goes to the city to study Russian and become a teacher. There he meets Maria, a young, educated Russian woman. Salim and Maria fall in love with each other and start living in the common-law marriage. This is done despite the protests of Maria's mother and Salim's best friend, Nakhib, who calls this decision a "dangerous step."

Seven years pass between acts and, in the second act, Maria and Salim are profoundly unhappy. Maria decides to give their two children to her mother, the implication being that the grandmother will baptize them in the Orthodox faith and raise them as Russians. Salim is overcome with grief at losing his children. Throughout the years he was with Maria, he shunned other Tatars. In act three, Salim, in search of consolation, goes to a Tatar culture club and meets his friend Nakhib, the one who warned him of the dangers of marrying a Russian. Nakhib tries to console him, but Salim, listening to the sound of Tatar language and hearing Tatar music, is heart-broken

⁴⁸ *Karim Tinchurin*, 60.

in his realization that he will not be able to “pass his Tatariness” on to his children. The play ends with Salim running away from the city, giving up Maria and his children completely.

As Karam noted in his review of the play, the public loved the play, especially the third, final act, touched by Salim’s (Tinchurin) speech about “loosing his children forever.” Apparently, Kariev’s (Nakhib) acting was so masterfull, that even Nakhib’s otherwise “excessively pathos-ridden proclamation,” “you must live and die a Tatar!” went over well.⁴⁹

Where critics showed the most interest was the theme of marrying a non-Tatar, especially a Russian. One critic turned his review of the play into the discussion of mixed marriages. He saw the main purpose of the play as a didactic warning to those Tatars “who think it is fashionable to marry girls of other nations and religions.”⁵⁰ “Caucasian Muslims...those hot-blooded southerners, started practicing such marriages. We, the cool-minded Tatars should step back and think of the consequences of such unions.”⁵¹ “Maria, despite her humanistic education was convinced that to be a real person one must be Russian and Orthodox...when she started pushing this, Salim’s ‘Tatariness’ and ‘Muslimness’ awoke.”⁵²

Karam noted that, while the relationship between a Tatar and a Russian is not so much of a problem in and of itself, it becomes a paramount issue when it comes to

⁴⁹ Karam, “Shomly adym,” *Ang* 21 (1916): 230.

⁵⁰ “Shomly adym,” *Yulduz*, 22 November 1916.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

children. “The children cannot belong to both societies at once.”⁵³ The implication from Tinchurin’s play then is that they will eventually become Orthodox and will be Russified.

Tinchurin’s play is structured around conflict either between Russian and Tatar societies. In Gayaz Iskhakyi, *Mogallima*, the conflict is internal to the main heroine.

Gaiaz Iskhakyi (1878-1954)

According to Zhamal Validi, Gayaz Iskhakyi was a “mighty power” of modern Tatar secular literature and drama.⁵⁴ Iskhakyi was born in 1878 in the family of a village mullah in the Chistai region of Tatarstan. In 1898, shortly after completing his education in one of Kazan’s *medresehs*, Iskhakyi enters the Kazan Russian-Tatar Teachers School which at the turn of the century became a sore in the eye of the Russian government and the Church, attracting a huge number of progressive Tatar youth.⁵⁵ Politically, in the beginning of his career, he was one of the most radical members of the *iashtiar*, an organizer of the *tangisty* group which leaned toward leftist SR stance. By 1917, especially after the February Revolution his political views changed dramatically.⁵⁶

Iskhakyi’s first literary works were didactic stories, in which he, like many Tatar reformers, discussed the evils of old-style schooling, which inhibited learning and progress. His early works also quite passionately spoke about the social position of women in Tatar society. The women’s question was always important in his works. He

⁵³ Karam, “Shomly adym,” *Ang* 21 (1916): 229.

⁵⁴ Validi, *Ocherk*, 89.

⁵⁵ Flun Musin, *Gaiaz Iskhakyi* (Kazan, 1998), 4.

⁵⁶ See more on his activities when in exile as well as on his place in the contemporary Tatar intellectual discourse in Chapter 7.

drew, of course, on the substantial body of Tatar literature on that question. Earlier Tatar jadid writers such as Iliasi, Karimi, Fahreddin and Ak'eget wrote novels in which women are portrayed as victims of male domination and societal pressure. Iskakiy, however, moved away from the genre of the sentimental novel, borrowed largely from 19th century Turkish works, to create original images of Tatar works. His *Mogallima* (Female Teacher), written in 1913, brought new complexity to the idea of serving the nation by showing an internally conflicted heroine.

Mogallima, written at the end of 1913 and performed by *Sayar* in 1914 in the same theatrical season as Amirhan's *Tigzsezliar*, is set in a Siberian village. The first act portrays a gathering of Tatar teacher Gabdulla's friends to celebrate his birthday. As Iskakiy's contemporary, the critic Shahid Axmediev noted, "In the play, there is no usual separation of the sexes. Here the conversation is not only about beards, mustache, khizhab,⁵⁷ and food. Here Tatar women without hesitation praise Tatar men's heroic service to the nation. Here Tatar men pay due respect to Tatar women, our nation's mothers, who sacrifice themselves and leave their homeland."⁵⁸

In the play, this group of progressive Tatar teachers left "Idel," the Volga region, to educate Tatar children in Siberia. For these Tatar teachers, Siberia is a "dark, cold place with exotic wild beasts and barbaric people," to which they bring enlightenment. The picture of Siberia as the outermost frontier which needs to be civilized is remarkably

⁵⁷ *Khizhab*, *paranzha* or *chador* -- a veil, covering a woman's face and head. Tatars never wore *khizhab* and the use of the word here denotes extreme backwardness.

⁵⁸ Shahid Axmediev, "Mogallima," *Yulduz* 3 October 1914.

similar to the conception held by many Russian intellectuals, such as Herzen.⁵⁹

However, in the play, the enlightenment is brought by Tatars to Tatars.

The main heroine of the play, a Tatar woman Fatyma, a participant in the party, is supposed to embody the new ideal of the Tatar woman. A powerful and independent-minded woman, she has decided to dedicate herself fully to the teaching of Tatar children. Yet, the reader finds out that she also dreams of personal happiness and a family. To complicate matters further what really drove her to Siberia is her unrequited love for someone left back home.

What some critics found most problematic in the play is the distance of Fatyma's depiction to "Tatar reality." Galimzhan Ibragimov, for example, criticized Iskhakyi for completely ignoring the conditions in which Tatar female teachers live and work. If male teachers, according to Ibragimov, had earned some recognition in Tatar society and have official institutions that support their existence, such as the Dukhovnoe Sobranie Musul'man, Tatar female teachers were not recognized by anyone and had no place where they could study formally.

"They take summer courses in places like Bobi medreseh, and then have to look for a job. They are treated with disrespect by their families, husbands and the folk... They need to look for a job every year, and the job pays them a miserly salary. Here is the letter from one such teacher. "The room was tiny, eighty students, huge rats on the floor, nests of insects, kids don't fit into the room. One mother told me, you only want your money, my daughter's dress was torn when she came from school. Another said, 'you gave my girl a painting.' [Conservative Tatar Islam considered painting sinful]." And this is true for female teachers all over Tatarstan. We don't see anything like that in Iskhaky's work. There is nothing that would make the reader think about the conditions in which female teachers live, no connection to reality of their existence.

⁵⁹ In reality Tobol'sk is not much colder than Kazan in the winter.

Fatyma's tragedy, even if it exists in the real world, is not typical for Tatar female teachers.⁶⁰

Ibragimov (1887-1938)⁶¹, was a Left SR and his views of Tatar society were class based. So was his understanding of literature and its purpose. Iskhakyyi's artistic creativity and various themes he discussed in his works such as the struggle of old and new in Tatar society, morality versus immorality, the position of women, poor versus rich as well as themes of nostalgia for the recent past seemed to Ibragimov a reflection of Iskhakyyi's constantly changing chameleon-like political and social position.⁶² The Bobi summer courses for women-teachers which Ibragimov mentions gained widespread recognition in Tatar society, although they were short-lived, as the school was closed in 1911 on the accusation of Pan-Turkist propaganda. The memoirs of one Orenburg woman mention that importantly, "after receiving permission from their husbands, Fatyma binte Ibragim and Mahrui binte Gumer along with their children, including nursing babies, went to Bobi. They supported themselves by adorning the headdresses of richer students...in the end they came back having received excellent education."⁶³ Certainly, at least these Tatar women were not scorned by their families and came back home after studying and, at least, in Bobi medreseh, the student body varied in terms of economic position.

⁶⁰ Galimzhan Ibragimov, "Mogallimanyng Ufada uinalue monosabate belian." *Tormysh* 26, 27 February, 1915.

⁶¹ He was repressed as the member of an alleged Right-Trotskyist Nationalistic Organization.

⁶² Ibragimov even accused Iskhakyyi of writing "pornography... much like nowadays popular in Russia Artsybashev and Verbitskaia," for which he was spurned by one Biktashev, who in turn accused Ibragimov of "lacking knowledge of the Tatar literature" and "misrepresenting Artsybashev and Verbitskaia, a Russian female writer who addressed women's problems, to the Tatar reader," Ibragimov, "Mogallimanyng."

⁶³ See *Izh-Bobi Medreseh* (Kazan, 2003), 7.

Nevertheless, Ibragimov's views on literature represented the fairly common Tatar *iashliar* idea that the primary purpose of drama was to reflect reality, to awaken compassion in the hearts of people and make them want to change things. *Mogallima* and the way it portrays Tatar life, "lulls one to sleep, rather than calls for an action."⁶⁴ For the Tatar woman journalist, Emina Mohetdinia, however, it was precisely Iskhaky's portrayal of internal conflict rather than "Tatar dramaturgy's usual natsional'no-bytovaia p'esa (she uses the Russian phrase)" that was of particular worth to Tatar literature.

Zhamal Validi posed the problem in yet another way. When Iskhakyi portrays Fatyma's self-sacrifice in the name of people, he employs elements of *narodnichestvo*, notes Validi, equating the latter with idealism and romanticism. However, Validi thinks that Tatar society will benefit from such literary images. According to him, *Mogallima's* creative force was precisely in that it gave the reader an impulse to strive for the new Tatar existence that will come soon.⁶⁵ Either in constructing romantic images of new national heroes and heroines or searching for and affirming the historical foundation of Tatar culture or in appropriating Russian theatrical traditions and forms, *iashliar* spoke the cultural language that seemed to be mutually accepted and understood and which they hoped would be understood by the Tatar society at large. However, the case of Orenburg's playwright Iarullah Vali demonstrates the exclusiveness and specificity of *iashliar's* cultural milieu located primarily in Kazan.

⁶⁴ Ibragimov, "Mogallimanyng."

⁶⁵ Zhamaletdin Validov [Zhamal Validi], "Mogallima," *Vakyt* 10 January 1915. As I already mentioned, Iskhaky was a leader of Tatar SRs—*Tangchylar* in the years immediately following 1905. His class approach to politics was criticized by Validi in his 1914 *Milliat and Milliyat*. Here Validi uses the term *narodnichestvo* with one qualification. He notes that the separation between *narod* and the rest of society was particular to Russian intellectual thought and had neither a socio-economic, nor deep philosophical foundation among Tatars. Among Tatars intellectuals, the idea of serving the people and serving the Tatar nation was interchangeable..

The Case of Iarullah Vali (1879-1937) and *Achlyk kushty*

Iarullah Vali's (1860-1938) was a native of Orenburg province, and a close associate and college of Fatih Karimi and Riza Fahreddin with whom he worked in *Vakt*.⁶⁶ One of his several plays, titled *Achlyk kushty*, (Forced by Famine), published in 1908, portrayed the fate of a Tatar peasant girl, Mausulu, who was sold to a visiting Turkmen merchant by her famine-ridden, desperate parents. Rakhima, her mother, repents of her deed in a couple of years, and sets out on a journey into the "wide Turkmen desert," in search of her daughter. She finds her only to see her die. The girl, however, who was sold to several Turkmen, forgives her mother, understanding that it was famine that made her commit such cruelty. The play apparently reflects on a fairly common practice among Tatar peasants at the turn of the century to give their daughters away to the visiting Turkmen traders. A book published in Orenburg in 1911 dealt specifically with this practice.⁶⁷ The implication was that the parents were paid a certain sum of money and that the girls would actually become the wives of these traders. Although a practice it was condoned by Tatar society at large, and, for the *jadids* it was proof of their society's oppression of women.

When *Sayar* staged the play in 1913 in Kazan, it gained quick popularity among the Kazan public. It was performed yearly, and, when staged at the Alafuzov's factory in Kazan before a group Tatar workers, the reaction among the spectators was very emotional: "cries and whispers were heard at the sight of the parents who sell their

⁶⁶ See Raif Mardanov, *Shura zhurnaly*, 15.

⁶⁷ Beker, "Achlyk kushty," *Vakyt*, December 19 1916.

daughter to a foreigner.”⁶⁸ For the Kazan’s critics, *Achlyk kushty*, as well as Vali’s other play, *Oiat iaki kuz iashe* (Shame or Tears) became the embodiment of unsophisticated sentimentalism.⁶⁹ Fatih Amirhan, in his review of *Achlyk kushty* notes that while famine is a worthy theme, one needs to study and address its social causes, something which Vali failed to do.⁷⁰ Another anonymous reviewer, who signed his review as “Apollon,” stated that Vali simply cannot write, that his language is bad and that he is not educated. “The plot is fantasy...not sophisticated, sentimental. How can a simple village woman Rakhima, the mother, be a Tatar nationalist, and say, that she ‘feels herself truly Tatar?’”⁷¹ “Apollon” was apparently a pseudonym for Gabdullah Battal, Kazan young historian and one of *iashliar*. According to him, Vali uncritically projects an idea of “the Tatar nation” onto Tatar villagers, who would most like identify themselves differently. A critic from Orenburg, Kabir Beker, writing three years later in 1916, states, however, “Why wouldn’t someone feel “Tatar” after spending several years in Turkmen dessert?”⁷² In other words, it is Battal, who is projecting the *iashliar* idea of “Tatar nation” onto Vali’s heroine for whom “Tatar” is simply one way to differentiate herself from other Turks.

⁶⁸ As recounted by an eyewitness to the Tatar theatrical scholar Khasan Gubaidullin, “Tatarskii dorevolutsionnyi teatr.” (Kandidaskaia dissertatsiia, Kazan State University, 1952), 152.

⁶⁹ Karam, for example notes that if more plays were like Amirhan’s *Iashliar* the Tatar spectator would not be subjected to play like *Oiat iaki kuz iashe* by Vali, see Karam, “Iashliar,” *Ang* 22 (1916): 227

⁷⁰ Damella, “Achlyk kushty,” *Al’-Islah*, n.36, 1908.

⁷¹ Appolon, “Achlyk kushty,” *Yulduz*, 5 November 1913.

⁷² Beker, “Achlyk kushty,” *Vakyt*, 19 December 1916.

Vali's response to "Apollon" demonstrates his critique of cultural symbols used by *iashliar*. "I was not educated in Egypt...and, yes, I do not like using Russian in my play." Vali notes that the value of the play is demonstrated by the public's reaction to performance. "The play is very popular, and people love it. Only they, not some Apollon, can measure the value of the play."⁷³

Vali's reply is directed as much against the new criteria of *madeniat*, "culturedness," which the *iashliar* were attempting to inculcate in the Tatar society, and which he subverts by appealing to the ultimate authority, the spectator, as against Battal, who uses Russian in his article, as did many young Tatar intellectuals, and who studied in Egypt, one of the centers of Muslim reformist thought.

Beker, who is also from Orenburg, and is writing on the play's 1916 performance in Ufa, commented on its continuous popularity and importance among Tatars, despite the fact that it suffered "merciless criticism by Kazan writers."⁷⁴ Beker also defers to the authority of many European playwrights, Bernard Shaw among them, to defend Vali's sentimentalism. Beker, critical of *iashliar*'s self-perceived domination of Tatar cultural life, fights them with their own weapon. As far as the social roots of the event that took place in *Achlyk kushty*, there were plenty, according to Beker. "You just need to visit Tatar villages," he points sarcastically. "There is dark barbarity, extreme poverty and houses full of children."⁷⁵ Beker and Vali's response to the *iashliar*'s critique of Vali's play, demonstrates their rejection of the *iashliar*'s claim for cultural hegemony. Beker's

⁷³ Vali, "Achlyk kushty," *Yulduz*, 17 November 1913.

⁷⁴ Beker was a journalist in Orenburg's famous *Shura*, edited by Rizaetdin Fahreddin, see Raif Mardanov, *Shura zhurnaly: 1908 -1917* (Kazan, 2001), 44.

⁷⁵ Beker, "Achlyk kushty," *Vakyt*, 19 December 1916.

pointed remarks regarding the “Kazan authors” also point to the existence of strong regional loyalties and, in this case, a rivalry between Orenburg, a city with a well-entrenched *jadid* community of writers, publicists and reform-minded Islamic theologians and, more radical and secular, Tatar *svetskaia* culture of Kazan.⁷⁶

Conclusion

In this chapter, I explored the ways in which the *iashliar* introduced the new concepts of modernity in the Tatar society through their writings and drama. I also showed the ways in which the *iashliar* used European literary forms to press their agenda, as well as reflected on their own appropriation. Educated in the Jadid Tatar *medresehs*, these reformers often set themselves in opposition to the older *jadids*, whom they criticized for social and political conservatism. However, their collective social identity was not founded upon the mutually antagonistic worldviews that divided *jadids* and *kadimists*, and therefore was not as clearly demarcated. Their political radicalism started to wane, especially in 1917-20, with real opportunities for self-determination that briefly emerged following the February and October Revolutions of 1917, when the *iashliar* worked closely with *jadids*, participating in the All-Russian Congresses and in further reforming Islamic education.⁷⁷ In their definition of a secular concept of “Tatar nation,” the *iashliar* still had to reconcile what they saw as the onset of modernity and inevitable (and often desirable) influence of Russian culture with collective Islamic identity of Tatar society. The sphere in which their cultural and social influence as a

⁷⁶ In terms of scholars of the reformist Islamic thought, I have in mind Riza Fahreddin (1859-1936), a prominent scholar of Islamic history, a theologian and a *jadid* publicist.

⁷⁷ See Rorlich, *The Volga Tatars*, 112-117.

group was most salient was the Tatar secular literature, drama and theater. Theater, the focus of my next chapter, was central to the *iashliar*'s endeavor as the marker of progress and the physical place in which the various conceptions of nationhood and identity were articulated for a broader public.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ “*Articulation* is our keyword [...] a noun that implies expression, something intellectuals are obliged to do to fill their role, it also implies a measure of fit between a cultural product and the social environment that enables this production and makes that product consequential” in *Intellectuals and the Articulation of the Nation*, eds. Michael Kennedy and Ronald Gregor Suny (Ann Arbor, 1999), 5, authors’ emphasis.

Chapter IV
Performing Tatar Identity
New Cultural Spaces in Early 20th-century Kazan

In this chapter, I will explore the ways in which the first Tatar culture club and theater became important cultural venues in which the *iashliars'* conceptions of Tatar identity were actively performed. I will also show the extent to which these conceptions resonated with the broader Tatar public. Central throughout this chapter is the role of Tatar critics. For one, the pre-revolutionary “cultural presentations” of “Tatar-ness” and other conceptions such as belonging to empire, are reconstructed here on the basis of the reviews of Tatar critics. Themselves a part of Tatar intellectual milieu, the critics clearly were heavily invested in the notions of “modernization,” “nation,” and “cuturedness.” Yet, as will be evident later, they held themselves distant from the *iashliar*, whose cultural products they evaluated. Moreover, some of the critics were well-connected with wealthy Tatar entrepreneurs, the financial sponsors of the Tatar theater. In this chapter, I hope to investigate more deeply the relationship between the aesthetics and ideological agenda the *iashliar*, the demands of Tatar intellectuals as well as the entrepreneurs, and finally the tastes of the broader Tatar public in Kazan. Finally, I offer a preliminary sociological picture of the Tatar theatrical audience and the visitors to the club.

Sharyik kluby, founded in 1906 in Kazan by a group of wealthy Tatar merchants, was the first Tatar culture club. Its purpose, according to the founders, was to provide “respectful and meaningful” forms of entertainment for Kazan’s merchant families. The founders of the club were mostly members of a nascent Tatar middle class: merchants, teachers and Tatar bureaucrats in the service of Russian government.¹ The club lived a short life; it was rented out to the city government to be turned into a hospital for the wounded in the first year of the World War I.² Nevertheless, its importance in pre-revolutionary Kazan Tatar cultural life is paramount. It was home to Tatar theater, hosted important cultural events and was a place to socialize for various Tatar social groups in Kazan.

The club was in principle open to all estates, and according to archival documents, was frequented by Tatar clerks and middle-hand merchants. Some Tatar intellectuals found the club’s inclusiveness aggravating. Hence, Shahid Axmadiev remarked in a 1914 article that the club resembled a stable, where only “traders and clerks go” and which the “cultured ones” do not want to attend anymore.³ His opinion, however, stands out among the multitude of those who supported the existence precisely because it fostered a sense of Tatarness and a concept of nationhood which was to cut across old estate/class identities and which was becoming take root in the minds of the young generation of Tatars.

¹ NART, f.2 op.3 d.3251 l.5. The name *Sharyik kluby* comes from an Arabic *Sharyk* for East and a Turkic form of possessive noun from Russian *klub* (club).

² “*Sharyik kluby*,” *Yulduz*, 9 March 1915.

³ Shahid Axmadiev, “Bezde sanaig nefise,” *Yulduz*, 3 July 1914.

The *iashliar*, in terms of their goals, consciously modeled themselves on the Russian *narodniki* of the 1860s. They believed that in order for Tatar society to experience positive change and come out of its economical and intellectual stupor, they, the intellectuals, the cultural leaders, should educate the “people.” However, unlike, *narodniki*, *iashliar* did not romanticize peasants as an estate. As discussed in Chapter III, *iashliar* romanticized the idea of “Tatar nationhood,” in which the identification was horizontal, based on common language, ethnicity and religion. Yet, the *iashliar* in their discourse “Tatarness” were ambiguous about and often in conflict with the traditional values of Tatar society and mercantile mentality of the nascent Tatar bourgeoisie. In this, they differed from the rest of Tatar intellectuals, primarily their predecessors, *jadids*, who preferred to “go with the current” and work with rather than against the old social and cultural norms of Tatar society, which upheld Islam and *Sharia*’ as a primary source of the Tatar system of moral values and actions as well as the primary mode of identification.

The romantic notion of “the nation” came to full bloom during the Stolypin years, when many Russian state and churchmen became increasingly doubtful in the loyalty of its Muslims subjects, not the least because of the growing socio-cultural and political activities of Russian Muslims, Tatar in particular.⁴ To propagate a concept of the “nation” one needed certain venues, and *Sharyk kluby* was utilized as one by *iashliar*. The club’s cultural affairs were an uneasy symbiosis of politically and culturally more

⁴ Tatar “modernization” and greater openness to Russian social life and institutions were seen by some Russian statesmen as threatening to the integrity of the Russian Empire. On Stolypin’s views of Tatars as propagators of Pan-Turkism and Pan-Islamism see Robert Geraci, “Russian Orientalism at Impasse,” in *Russia’s Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700-1917*, eds. Daniel R. Brower and Edward Lazzarini (Bloomington, 1997), esp. 142-143. See also Serge Zenkovsky, *Pan-Turkism and Islamism in Russia* (Cambridge, 1967), 116.

conservative Tatar merchants and romantic, left-leaning *iashliar*. The union was uneasy, because much like radical Russian intelligentsia, *iashliar* had qualms about the virtues of a mercantile mentality. However, in no way this anti-mercantilism was as deeply philosophically and religiously rooted in their mentality as in that of their Russian counterparts. In fact, as already mentioned in the previous chapter, there has always been a place in Tatar literature and drama for the positive portrayal of the middle, the cultured, well-educated, sensible Tatar merchant serving the romantic idea of nationhood. The financial support that many Tatar entrepreneurs provided to the *iashliars*' project, perhaps in part helps to explain the positive portrayal of a Tatar merchant as well as the choice of themes and setting that deal with Tatar bourgeoisie in the *iashliars*' plays. Along with financing the club, which hosted the *Sayar* troupe for a number of years, wealthy Tatar merchants such as Ahmad Garai Khasani, for instance, financed the publishing of the *iashliars*' plays and of the journals such as *Ang* in which Tatar critic, Gabdrahman Karam, published a good portion of his theatrical reviews.⁵ On the opposite side of the spectrum, the arrogant attitude of some Tatar merchants toward theater, literature and music betray a failure to accept intellectual and artistic professions as socially legitimate and respectable.⁶

For all its tensions, the merchant-intellectual project produced a vivacious cultural and public space, where Tatars of various estates and both genders were engaged in

⁵More investigation is needed in regard to what individuals sponsored the productions of Tatar plays. Karam in his 1913 article states that *Sharyk kluby* provided *Sayar* troupe with a stage. See his "*Sharyk klubyda teatr ve musika musmineng iakune (1912-1913)*," *Ang* 11 (1913). On Khasani, see Radik Salikhov, *Tatarskaia burzhuazia Kazani i natsional'nye reformy vtoroi poloviny XIX-nachala XX vekov* (Kazan, 2001), 92-93.

⁶Iskhakyyi apparently was an owner of a tavern at some point in his life!

pleasant and new social interactions, as well as in the important social and cultural project of building a “Tatar nation” and creating a new type of Tatar. New social public spaces like *Sharyik kluby* were to foster a sense of Tatariness by providing new forms of entertainment such as theatrical performances, and, as already discussed, many *iashliar* wrote plays. *Shomly Adym*, a well-known play by Karim Tinchurin, focuses on *Sharyik kluby* as a purely Tatar cultural space, to which the main hero Salim comes in search of spiritual solace and the national soul after being abandoned by his Russian wife and having his children taken away and baptized by his Orthodox mother-in-law.⁷ “Hearing Tatar speech and Tatar music brought tears into his eyes; he understood that his children will grow up estranged from him and that he will never be able to share his Tatar essence with them.”⁸

Visitors to the club were stimulated intellectually and culturally and this, in the eyes of *iashliar*, served the goal of Enlightenment and Nationhood. Along with providing a place for theatrical performances, *Sharyik kluby* established a standing library, with Tatar theatrical critic Gabdrahman Karam, as the head. The library had at its disposal an array of Tatar, Russian, Azeri and Turkish periodicals and literature.⁹ Also, it regularly offered lectures on various topics such as ancient Tatar history, Tatar village folklore, the history of Bulgar (the ancient Turkic state from which Kazan Tatars claim to be descended), geology, etc. Finally it allowed Tatar urban musicians and singers to display their talents in a much more palatable setting than the usual brothels, restaurants

⁷ See my discussion in Chapter 3.

⁸ Karam, “Shomly Adym” *Ang* 21 (1916): 230.

⁹ Karam, “Sharyik klubynda berenche spektakl,” *Yuldyz*, 22 December 1911,

and taverns. Hence, the famous Tatar poet Gabdullah Tukai notes that during one particular evening at *Sharyik kluby* “our *iashliar* turned to our national songs to which nobody else pays attention. Along with the usual accordion they played *national* tunes (italics are mine, MG) on mandolin. On behalf of our nation, we must not forget to thank Kazan’s *Sharyik kluby* for this service.”¹⁰ Here again one can see how Romantic ideas of nationhood pervade the words of the most beloved Tatar poet.

One particular article shows the prominence which *Sharyik kluby* occupied in Tatar life of the time. It is written in 1914 in the tradition of the traveler’s account. The traveler, a sea captain who was absent from Kazan for 25 years is struck by the changes that have taken place in his home town. “There is now cultural life in Kazan. We have theater, literature, there are cultured ladies and gentlemen, there is *Sharyik kluby*.” The first place visited by the traveler was the club, and it is there that the traveler gets familiarized with the new Tatar culture. The club’s essence is also tightly intertwined with theater in the mind of the traveler and for him, a sophisticated and seasoned traveler, “the tiny stage of *Sharyik kluby* is dearer than the grand theaters of Europe and America.”¹¹ One element that struck the traveler as unpleasant, however, was the fact that the intellectuals, used “too many Russian words. Russians also used to speak French and that was a mark of culture, but those times are over. Why would not our *zyalylylar* use pure and beautiful Tatar just like our actors do on stage.”¹²

¹⁰ Iskandar Ramiev, *Istevlekler: Tatarcha Basma Suz* (Kazan, 1965), 25.

¹¹ Fatih Saifi, “Sharyik klubynda,” *Yulduz*, 1 February 1914.

¹² *Ibid.*

New social sensibilities and a European-like refinement of manner were important attributes of belonging to Tatar *milliat*, nation in the eyes of *iashliar*. *Sharyik kluby* became the place where Kazan Tatars, both men and women tried out radically new forms of social interaction. The traditional forms of social interaction in Tatar society involved separation of the sexes. Although Tatar women, unlike their Central Asian counterparts, were never secluded or veiled, they did not socialize with strange men in open public settings. Moreover, it was unthinkable for a married Tatar couple to go together to see a play or to go to a restaurant. The breaking of this taboo was the subject of Galiaskar Kamal's most popular comedy, *Berenche Teatr* (First Theater), in which the hero, a young Tatar merchant, talks his wife into going to see a play. She is embarrassed at first, saying that she will be in a place full of strange men. The husband notes that "the men will also be with their wives," adding, slyly, that she could show off her beauty and her new outfit to other women. The prospect of arousing other women's jealousy finally convinces the wife to go to the dismay of her father, who upon finding out where the couple went, runs to the governor (a Russian) to ask him to put a halt to "Tatar theater." In 1908, when *Berenche Teatr* was staged for the first time, it was still rather audacious for women and men to go to theater. By 1913, when prominent Tatar theatrical critic and close associate of *iashliar* sums up his wishes for the upcoming year, for both Tatar men and women going to theater became an ordinary event.

Our people have started to join in public cultural life... Aesthetic appreciation is growing among our people; there are changes in social interactions, in the way people dress. In place of former apathy about unculturedness and ill-breeding has come refinement.

Our women, seeing that they are not degraded, have started behaving with a sense of self-worth and freedom. Among our men, respect and deference toward women have also grown.¹³

A young Tatar woman of noble origin and a student of Russian gymnasium, Rabyga Gabitova in her memoir written in 1950s notes that in a few years after the first public Tatar theatrical performance in 1906, “even the backward elements, those who initially hoped to stop theater, started calmly visiting it together with their wives who previously never left their ‘chapan’ or ‘chadra.’”¹⁴

Tatar urban men had much more social freedom in their interaction and in terms of the public places they frequented. Besides places of employment, mosques and marketplaces, they were free to visit both Tatar and Russian restaurants, taverns, theaters, brothels, etc. Visits to brothels appeared to have been socially acceptable, although not by any means lauded phenomenon in Tatar society. I specify urban here, because in the villages, the rules of social interaction were more permissive due to the survival of strong pre-Islamic folkloric elements and agricultural work, which enabled socially acceptable forms of cross-gender interaction.¹⁵

One of the elements of the old Tatar society most berated by the *jadid* reformers was precisely the seedy part of Tatar male social interactions, and Tatar plays often

¹³ Karam, “Sharyik klubyda teatr ve musika musmineng iakune (1912-1913),” *Ang* 11 (1913).

¹⁴ Gosudarstvennyi. Muzei Respubliki Tatarstan, f. 119760, n.12.

¹⁵ *Tatary Srednego Povolzh'ia* (Moscow, 1967), 293-94.

feature men drinking and exhibiting other forms of morally unacceptable behavior.¹⁶ The female counterparts to this morally objectionable socialization pattern were gossiping, matchmaking and procurement of trysts, which were also venomously ridiculed in *jadid* literature. The negative sides of the female social world were seen by the *jadids* as particularly critical and destructive, since women primarily were responsible for childrearing and also for the education of young girls.

In the new public spaces utilized and/or organized by the *iashtiar*, one can observe a strong attempt to break up the old patterns of social interaction and legitimize cross-gender socialization. Places like *Sharyik kluby*, along with social gatherings of Tatar youth such as *Shimbe* evenings, which I will discuss below, served several purposes. For one, they allowed both genders to interact freely in public, offering a kind of cross-gender pressure valve previously unavailable in a Tatar urban setting.¹⁷ Moreover, unlike the previous types of socialization which were confined to Tatar *makhalla* (neighborhoods) and to either business or religious setting, the gatherings at *Sharyik kluby* were explicitly secular and devoted to entertainments.¹⁸ Dancing parties, lotto and other games were quite popular among Tatar youth visiting *Sharyik kluby*.

¹⁶ Also a recurring theme in Central Asian *jadid* literature, see Adeeb Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia* (Berkeley, 1998), 127-132 on Uzbek *jadid* theater and literature.

¹⁷ In Tatar villages, yearly rituals and holidays provided such a valve, with both sexes interacting in dance, song and games with sexual overtones to them, see *Tatary Srednego Povolzhia*, 298 and also from my private conversation with Elvira Fedorova about her own village in the lower Kama region, Tatarstan in January 2002).

¹⁸ See also Salikhov, *Tatarskaia burzhuaziia* (Kazan, 2001), 94.

Various holiday celebrations for both adults and children, such as the New Year and *Maulid*, the birthday of Mohammad were also held in *Sharyik kluby*.¹⁹

Shimbe kicheler

Prominent as it was, *Sharyik kluby* was not the only new public space where Kazan Tatars socialized. More informal, but no less important, were the so-called *Shimbe kicheler*, Saturday evening gatherings of progressive Tatar youth. In later, Soviet-era memoirs, as well as in pre-revolutionary articles, the *Shimbe kicheler* are credited with being the cradle of Tatar theater, where the first Tatar plays were staged, thanks to the collaborative efforts of Russian-gymnasium-educated Tatar youth and the *shakirds*, the students of the Tatar religious schools, the *medresehs*. In a 1916 article published to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the Tatar theater, the anonymous author notes that the (Tatar) students of (gymnasium) could not write and read Tatar very well and invited the *shakirds* to “tatarize the group.” The aforementioned Roza Gabitova, in her Soviet-era memoirs about Fatih Amirhan, a well-established Tatar writer and playwrights, refers to him as a frequent visitor of *Shimbe kicheler*.²⁰ Along with dramatic performances, these evenings offered informal discussion and criticism of Tatar plays. Iskhaky’s *Mogallima* was first read by the author himself at one such evening.²¹ Karim Tinchurin’s wife, Zahida Axmerova also remembers *Shimbe kicheler* as extremely dynamic gatherings of Tatar youth. They “play guitar, read poetry...flirt with each

¹⁹ “Balalar kichese,” *Koiash*, 28 January 1914,

²⁰ Gos. Muzei RT, f.119760, n.12.

²¹ Gysmeti, “Mogallima, Gaiaz Iskhakyi efendining ianga esere,” *Yulduz*, 28 January 1914.

other.” In fact, Axmerova herself, then a young student of a Russian gymnasium and the daughter of a Tatar nobleman in the service of the Russian government, met her future husband, the famous Tatar playwright, director and actor, Tinchurin at one such gathering. Like *Sharyik kluby*, *Shimbe kicherler* offered to young Kazan Tatar men and women a place where they could meet, interact romantically and find potential suitors, a radically new phenomenon in pre-revolutionary urban Tatar society.

The Critics, the Repertoire and the Audience

When *Sharyik kluby*, in 1909, took under its wing the prominent Kazan theatrical troupe, *Sayar*, it became, for the remaining four years of its existence, home to Tatar theater. The club’s involvement in Tatar theatrical life was quite active. There was a theatrical commission organized, of which both the Tatar critics Gabdrahman Karam and the entrepreneur Ahmad Garai Khasani were the members. The commission was responsible for advertising and often financing performances.²²

But performances of what? One of the requirements or expectations of the newborn Tatar theater among the intellectuals was that it should educate the masses. Repertoire, therefore was of primary importance, and, also, a prominent target for criticism by Tatar intellectuals and merchants—the heads of *Sharyik kluby*. Gabdrahman Karam, an Istanbul educated intellectual and one of the most visible and prolific theatrical critics, was one of the harshest voices when it came to Tatar theatrical repertoire.

²² *Kazan sheherende turuchy musul'manlar zhemgiate (Sharyik kluby)nyng te'esi, 1907-1908*, (Kazan, 1909), 4-5.

In 1914, on the pages of *Ang*, Karam writes that “our repertoire is very poor and repetitive while our audience is so enthusiastic about theater...they have grown quite sophisticated over the past few years.”²³ However, what Karam and other intellectuals considered a “poor” choice were often plays quite popular with the audience: vaudevilles translated from Russian or European melodramas such as *A Mistake in Judgment* or George Du Maurier’s popular and notoriously anti-Semitic *Tril’bi* (This element seemed to have been completely missed by Tatar critics.)²⁴ One critic begrudgingly noted that nowadays Tatars in Kazan have developed such an appetite for theater that “not only our brothers but the ladies come to see such plays as *An Unforgettable Evening* or *Half an Hour Under the Bed*.”²⁵ The French melodrama, *Mistake in Judgment*, was staged by *Sayar truppain* 1914 for an evening honoring the director of the troupe, Gabdullah Kariev. Karam dedicated three issues of *Koiash* to criticism of the play. Interestingly, two issues of the newspaper consisted of a detailed description of the play, much reminiscent of Alexander Duma’s famous *Count de Monte Cristo*, as if in an effort to entertain the reader. The third issue is where Karam finally expressed his opinion of the play and its worth for the Tatar stage. Yes, he found it exiting, but such excitement, he notes, “...will wane the minute the spectator leaves the theater. Theater should educate people, our audience come to our theater to seek answers to our complex reality, not to see murders and intrigues.” Then, in typical fashion, using Russian culture as a comparative paragon, Karam notes that, among Russians, French melodrama was popular

²³ Karam, “Khokemde khatalyk,” *Koiash*, 7-11 March 1914,

²⁴ For the play’s analysis, see Leonid Livak “Why Dracula is Afraid of Garlic,” *Stanford Slavic Studies* vol. 3, Part 1, (2007): 147-49.

²⁵ “Kariev benefisy,” *Yulduz*, 29 February 1915.

in 1870s and that “we should not descend to the level of Turkish theater, where playwrights entertain their audience with tales about barons and dukes.”²⁶

Tatar plays which critics considered unsophisticated were criticized as well. For example, articles published in *Yulduz* and *Ang* offered a merciless critique of Iarulla Vali’s play *Oiat, iaki koz iashe* and of Sibiriakov’s *Asray kyz*. One critic noted that the play showed the “ugly, nasty sides of our life: drinking, prostitution, etc.”²⁷ According to the critics, the reaction of many female spectators was much like his, they were shocked, upset and incensed. “Our hearts ached, this play was awful, it made us cry and spoiled our mood...on stage we saw the things that we do not see in real life,” the critic quoted one of the ladies.²⁸ Here the perception of theater as a place of cultural refinement clashes with the typical *iashliar*’s demands to stage or reenact “real life,” to be ‘socially realistic.’ “Is it so necessary to show the whorehouses on stage?” asked the incensed critic. At the same time, that the critic found it esthetically displeasing to see existing social ills on stage, deeming them especially harmful to the sensitive psyche of female audience, he also complained that the play was culturally unrealistic. “Why, where did the author see a Tatar girl who would kill herself?” he noted sardonically.²⁹

The intellectuals’ perception of what “real life” should mean on stage was quite selective. It had to be educational, it should address social ills but it should be done tastefully so that “cultured ones” are not offended in their sensibilities. Though, the ladies cried and the critics were annoyed, they did duly note that “the play was very

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Karam, “Iamsez tormysh,” *Ang* 2 (1915): 38

²⁸ “Teatr don’iasynda,” *Yulduz*, 19 January 1914.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

popular.” It was so popular that Kariev, the director of *Sayar* staged it for his own benefit-night, and the last performance of the play culminated in a longstanding ovation, albeit to Kariev’s talent, as the critic noted. Still the play must have had some appeal to elicit such a reaction from spectators.³⁰

Karam, in his critical review of Sagyid Ramiev’s play *Iashi Zobaida, iashim min* (Live, Zobaida, and I will live) mentions that one of his Russian friends once told him that “your plays only consist of eating and tea-drinking!”³¹ “My friend was right, our heroes eat when they are upset, eat when they are happy, they would eat when they are about to die! The Tatar spectator did not come to the theater to learn how to eat, but to seek meaning and ideas, further notes Karam, referring to his “Russian friend” – the Russian educated society writ large, as an ultimate authority.”³² Importantly, Karam’s words mirror the reviews of Russian censor, Smirnov, who often wrote about the “usual nonsense and philistinism” (*chepukha i poshlost’*) of Tatar plays and complained of the endless tea-drinking and seemingly disconnected banal talk. Smirnov, for whom a Western-educated Tatar was a greater evil, more than willingly permitted the production of such “banal plays.” Karam, an intellectual with an agenda of promoting “culturedness” finds these banalities an insult to the Tatar spectator who had become quite sophisticated over just few years. In regard to Ramiev’s’ work, Karam notes that the play with its simplistic philosophy and “trite talk about serving the nation, studying Russian and liberating women,” cannot capture its imagination anymore. In contrast, the

³⁰ “*Sharyik klubynda teatr ve muzika mausmening iakune, 1914-1915,*” *Ang* 11-12 (1915): 221.

³¹ Karam, “*Iashi Zobaida, iahsim min,*” *Ang* 21 (1914): 301.

³² *Ibid.*

same critic, when talking about Fatih Amirhan 's *Iashliar* staged in 1916 and written “under the influence of 1905,” called that play a “historical document,” despite a “somewhat outdated thematic.”³³ Ramiev, a “talented poet,” as Karam noted, unlike Amirhan could not bring anything “poetic” in his play. The negative heroes of Ramiev’s play are the representatives of the “old life” were Tatar religious scholars. When the play was first published, the Tatar religious elite were actively trying to stop the circulation and performance of the play. Although, Karam did not find anything insulting to Islam in the play, he did notice that “accusations against and making fun of the religious elite” had become a default element of many Tatar literary plays. “Can we just write about something else,” noted the critic in frustration.

The fact that *Sayar truppachose* to stage such plays *Iamsez tormysh* or *Iashi Zobaida*, *iashim min* over the years and that the popularity of theater was growing testifies to the fact that the Tatar audience enjoyed entertainment-oriented theater and that at least some *iashliar* and intellectuals such as Tinchurin, a playwright and the stage director of *Sayar* as well as Kariev, the troupe’s director were accepting of it.

Likewise, a concern with the poor repertoire was voiced by the *starshina* of *Sharyik kluby*, the lawyer Saidgarei Alkin in a 1916 interview with *Koiash*. Both *Koiash’s* correspondent and Alkin agreed that “the state of national theater was in decline,” despite the fact that the popularity of theater in Tatar society had been growing steadily.³⁴ The main reason for the decline, according to Alkin, is poor repertoire consisting mostly of “foreign plays which present us Tatars with a foreign language, a

³³ Karam, ”Iashliar,” *Ang* 22 (1916): 227.

³⁴ Alkin, “Milli Teatr,” *Koiash*, 29 January 1916.

foreign mode of thinking.” He points out that “theater is a school.” One could take this a little further and say that for him the main purpose of theater is “schooling the nation,” and he does not want to be educated in a foreign manner. “Our actors and playwrights complain that our life is poor in events...Why not turn to our glorious past, the history of our kings and our folklore for inspiration?”³⁵

However, when *Sayar* did stage original Tatar plays that displayed both national content and elegant form, the tastes of the intellectuals and the audience seemed to converge. Thus, in theatrical season of 1914-1915, Amirhan’s *Tigezsezliar* was staged by *Sayar*. During the parts of the play in which the talented Tatar writer and “proud nationalist” Soleiman puts down the Russified young Tatar Gabdullah, proclaiming the inherent value of Tatar culture “which has existed for thousands of years,” the audience, according to the critics, broke into long standing ovations.³⁶ Amirhan’s play, in addition to “meaningful” and “optimistic” content, also happened to have an elegant form, (perhaps ironically) overtly Chekhovian, as Karam noted, “perfect for the stage,” and new for the Tatar audience.

Perhaps nowhere was the forging of communal identity as evident as in the case of the famous Tatar playwright Gaiaz Iskhaky’s play, *Zoleiha*. The first Tatar musical drama, with a special score written by the talented young Tatar composer, Sultan Gabashi, Iskhakyi’s play portrayed the martyrdom of a Kriachen Tatar woman and was staged shortly after the fall of Romanovs. During the play, when *Zoleiha*, who considers herself Muslim, performs an Islamic prayer in Russian captivity, the audience was said to

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Karam, “Tigezsezliar,” *Ang* 4 (1915): 88.

have ascended the stage to join the actress in her prayer. The play's overt emotional appeal and theatricality, e.g. musical themes, folk dancing and fantastic elements, was said to have a cathartic effect on the Tatar audience. One should of course keep in mind that *Zoleiha* was staged after February Revolution, during a time of unprecedented political freedom and cultural expression for the Empire's citizens. Still, the aesthetic and artistic appeal of the play's form should not be underestimated.

An intriguing case that gives a more complex picture of Tatar identity and public taste was the staging of a translation of the Russian play *Sestra Miloserdia* (The Sister of Mercy) -- in Tatar, *Shefket tutashi*, in December 1914. This was during WWI, and, as critics mention, plays about war were in demand among Kazanians. *Sister of Mercy* was very popular among the Russian theatrical public, and *Sayar* "in a very timely fashion, seized the opportunity and staged a very successful performance."³⁷ The play was essentially a melodrama, but with a heroic twist. The last two acts of the play take place on the battlefield, where the main heroine, a young Russian woman, Liuba, disappointed in love, serves as a nurse. Much beloved by the soldiers for her kindness and self-sacrifice, she is buried with great honors after being struck down by enemy fire. The action of the play is set during "one of the Russo-Turkish wars." Interestingly, *Sayar* had no qualms about staging a play in which Turks were portrayed highly negatively. In fact, according to the critics, the play was extremely popular among the audience, and the last act in which Liuba is buried to the sound of the guns, elicited "long standing ovations," from the audience.³⁸ The play was performed during the next year's theatrical season,

³⁷ Karam, "Shefket tutashi," *Ang* 23 (1914): 420.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

and as one critic mentions, “so many people came to see it that there was no room and many had to go back.”³⁹ It brought huge returns, despite the fact that this time around “some excellent actors had left *Sayar* and many roles were performed by amateurs.”⁴⁰ The intellectuals found the popularity of the play temporary: “as soon as the war ends, it will no longer be of interest to our [Tatar] audience.”⁴¹ For the critics, the content of the play overshadowed the success of performance. The play was seen as essentially foreign; self-sacrifice and patriotism of a Russian woman did not strike them. When it came to self-sacrifice of a Tatar woman, such as the teacher Fatyma in Iskhakyi’s play *Mogallima*, the critics’ reaction was markedly different. One critic sarcastically notes that, when *Sister of Mercy* was performed in the Russian theater for the Russian audience, “many Russian ladies lost consciousness or became hysterical. Ours seem to have stronger nerves.”⁴² The critic however misses the point. *Sister of Mercy*’s success with the Tatar audience in Kazan demonstrated that the public appreciated entertainment and excitement as much as they did philosophical deliberations on Tatar identity and culture. Also, the play, where the main heroine dies a heroic death must have had a deeply emotionally satisfying effect on the audience, whether it is Tatar or Russian. Most importantly, the time of the performance of the play was the time of the war. Many Tatar men were recruited into the Russian army, while Tatar women did serve as nurses on the battlefield. (One of the wartime issues of the important Tatar socio-cultural journal *Ang* featured a photograph of Tatar nurses looking a lot like their Russian counterparts -- the

³⁹ Karam, “Shefket tutashi,” *Ang* 21-22 (1915): 390.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Karam, “Shefket tutashi,” *Ang* 23 (1914): 421.

⁴² Karam, “Shefket tutashi,” *Ang*, 21-22 (1915): 391.

only difference being a crescent moon instead of a red cross on their caps, signaling their Islamic identity). One may suppose, and indeed the rhetoric of some Tatar delegates in the State Duma affirms, that, at this historical moment, many Tatars felt themselves the citizens of the Empire. The popularity of the play, where the main heroine, a Russian nurse, is killed by the Turkish enemy, is telling in terms of the complexity of Tatar self-identification.

The Tatar critics' attitude toward Russian classics on Tatar stage betrays both an intimate knowledge of Russian literature and culture and highlights the audience's indifference. The Russian repertoire was much envied by the Tatar critics. Although, as critics noted, plenty of "racy vaudevilles" were staged on the Russian stage, the Russian classics, mainly Ostrovskii and Gogol, were deemed very important for the enlightenment of Tatar public. In 1914, *Sayar* staged Ostrovskii's famous *Groza*, a poignant drama portraying the patriarchal structure of Russian society in a provincial city along the Volga river, as well as the personal drama of the main heroine, Katerina and her rebellion against "tsardom of darkness." The play was translated by the well-known Tatar playwright Galiaskar Kamal in honor of the prima of Tatar stage, Gulsum Bolgarskaia, who played the role of Katerina. Karam's opinion of Bolgarskaia as Katerina was quite favorable. "She gave the role her own particular flavor, she was an angry Katerina," noted the critic.⁴³ On the other hand, an anonymous critic in *Koiash* noted that Bolgarskaia did not understand Katerina's character progression from a shy and introverted girl into a strong, passionate and tragic woman. "Bolgarskaia should see

⁴³ Karam, "Teatr ve muzykanyng mausmening iiakune, 1913-1914," *Ang* 10 (1914): 198.

a good Russian actress playing the role,” the critic stated.⁴⁴ Ostrovskii, further noted the critic, has a very important place in Russian literature and drama, and “it is beneficial for the Tatar public to be familiar with important Russian classics.”⁴⁵ On December 18, 1915 *Sayar* staged a Tatar translation of Ostrovskii’s classic *Bez viny vinovatye* (*Gonahsyz gaipliliar*). It was reported to be a good, successful performance with good returns. Karim Tinchurin’s performance as Grigorii Neznamov, the main hero was so touching that “it brought tears to the eyes of some spectators.”⁴⁶ When Ostrovskii’s play *Dokhodnoe mesto* (*Toshemle uryñ*) was performed in 1916, one of the critics noted that, although the play is about the mores of Russian bureaucrats (*chinovniki*) and “there is no such estate among us, Tatars, the play is close to us in terms of portrayal of general human greediness.”⁴⁷ I analyze the details of the production of the Tatar translation of Gogol’s *Inspector General* on the Tatar stage in the following chapter. It will suffice to say here that both critics and the audience (I can only judge their reaction through the critics’ eyes) liked the performance when it was finally allowed to be staged ten years after it was translated.

Sayar truppasy

Sayar’s troupe’s theatrical seasons varied in productivity. They started sometime in September, or even as late as November, and ended in April or May. In the summer, the troupe left Kazan and traveled extensively. The first place *Sayar* usually visited was

⁴⁴ Karam, “Groza,” *Koiash*, 30-31 March 1914.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Karam, “Gonahsyz gaipliliar,” *Ang* 23-24 (1915): 427.

⁴⁷ “Groza,” *Yulduz*, 17 October, 1 November 1916.

the Makariev fair in Nizhnyi Novgorod. It was a perfect place to let the Tatars from other cities and regions of Empire flavor a taste of Kazan cultural life. When *Sayar* staged Gaiaz Iskhakyyi *Mogallima* at the 1915 Makariev fair, a scandal erupted after the first performance. “The Siberians became profoundly insulted when the main character, Gabdullah, equated his unrequited love, Fatyma with *Allah*...during the break the spectators split into two parties, the Siberians argued that this sort of language was inappropriate and blasphemous, the Kazan folks did not see anything out of ordinary...”⁴⁸ As my sources suggest, Tatar intellectuals in Kazan conceptualized themselves and their city as the most cosmopolitan in the Turkic world of the Russian Empire, a “literary marketplace” and “Turkic Paris” as a hero of Iskhakyyi’s play, *Mogallim* proclaimed.⁴⁹ Therefore, reviews such as the one above, must be read with care, since Tatar critics in Kazan had a preconceived notion of non-Kazan Tatars’ backwardness. At the same time, the proliferation of secular literature and liberal Tatar periodicals in early 20th century Kazan, the growing popularity of Tatar theater, the only Turkic Muslim theater where women could act, represented by Kazan’s theatrical troupe *Sayar*, and the very fact that the conservative Islamic scholarship was coming from other Tatar-populated cities such as Orenburg and Ufa, make a good case for Kazan as a center of Turkic liberal thought and culture.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Lepeiski, “Makarzha kheberleri,” *Yulduz*, 21 August, 1914.

⁴⁹ Gaiaz Iskhakyyi, *Mogallim: Eserler*, vol. 4 (Kazan, 2003), 199.

⁵⁰ For example, the old-method (*kadimchi*) *Din ve Magyshat* journal was published in Orenburg. A *jadid* journal with strong religious overtones was *Shura* (1908-1917), published in Orenburg with Rizaetdin Fahreddin as an editor.

In Kazan, *Sayar* performed plays every Friday evening, thus establishing a kind of routine entertainment pattern for Tatar theater-goers. Despite the critics' complaint about the poor repertoire and absence of original plays, my research shows that the variety and complexity of *Sayar's* performances were growing steadily. The 1914-1915 theatrical season, for example, featured five new original plays, four of them Tatar—*Mogallima*, *Tigetzsezliar*, *Iashi Zobaida*, *iashim min* and *Iamsez tormysh* and one extremely popular translation from Russian, *Shefket Tutashi*. *Mogallima* and *Tigetzsezliar*, were two of the best plays of the Tatar pre-revolutionary theater, both lauded by critics and loved by the audience. Theatrical critics also noted that more and more people came to the theater and that it was finally earning “a status of citizenship” among Tatars. This all despite the beginning of the WWI, the fact that *Sharyik kluby* had to be turned into a hospital for the wounded and that a number of talented and beloved actors had to leave *Sayar*.⁵¹ In 1915-1916, *Sayar* staged mostly translations of Russian and European plays. Although it is precisely during the 1915-1916 season that the Tatar literary critics complained the most about shortage of repertoire, the staging of Russian classics deserves special consideration. Thus, in 1916, in his usual analysis of the past theatrical season, Karam is extremely critical of *Sayar*, noting that the group never went beyond its “narrow confines,” and that it did not develop in proportion to the “ever growing demands and cultural sophistication of our public.”⁵² “No European would tolerate such a state of affairs, but our soft-hearted Muslim brethren are fine with the current state of Tatar

⁵¹ The reason for the leave of actress Baikina and actors Baikin, Kamal and Baiazitskii were the internal struggle for power within the troupe, see Shahid Axmadiev, “Artistlar arasynda,” *Yulduz*, 26 October 1914.

⁵² Karam, “Kazanda Tatarcha teatr ve muzyka mausmening iakune, 1915-1916,” *Ang* 10 (1916): 179.

theater...in the past ten years of its existence, *Sayar* did not develop,” noted Karam, while the “Tatars now love going to theater and even those who thought they never would.”⁵³

Several things seemed to be happening in Tatar theatrical life at its ten-year mark. One is that the Tatar public in Kazan accepted and enjoyed theater as a mean of entertainment and as enjoyment. Occasionally, when the content of the plays as well as its artistic form and the performance were exceptional and perceived as “truly national,” the audience, at least according to critics, found the experience of being in Tatar theater binding and unifying in terms of national feelings. In the second place, the “truly national” i.e. culturally progressive, socially engaging and sophisticated Tatar plays were a scarcity. Thus, *Sayar*, the main and the only professional Tatar troupe in Kazan was staging Tatar translations of European and Russian classics, such as Schiller, Heine, Ostrovskii and Gogol’. They were also staging a multitude of Russian and European vaudevilles and melodramas. At the same time, strict imperial censorship kept the few complex and socially engaging plays locked up inside the State Department of Printed Works (Gosudarstvennoe otdelenie po delam pechati) in St.-Petersburg.⁵⁴ Still, during the much criticized 1915-1916 theatrical season, there were twenty-eight plays staged

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Among these were several plays by Gaiaz Iskhaky such as *Zhemgyat and Kyamat* which I discuss in Chapter V and which portray a less than flattering picture of Tatar mercantile circles’ mentality and a biting critique of Tatar religious establishment. A Tatar translation of Gorky’s *Meshchane* was also prohibited by censor Smirnov as unsuitable not only for Tatar *inorodcheskaia* (foreign) stage but also for the Russian stage, because it gave a “false and degrading picture of Russian life and mores.” RGIA, f.776, op.26, d.85, l. 62.

thirteen of which were Tatar. This surely is not an unproductive season, even if it did not satisfy the demands of intellectuals.⁵⁵

Conclusion

While, for Tatar intellectuals and the *iashtiar*, theater and culture clubs were places where romantic notions of Tatar nation could be propagated, for Tatar audiences these, in large part, proved to be philosophical abstractions. The growing popularity of theater, despite intellectuals' complaints about "poor" repertoire, demonstrated the fact that the Tatar public in Kazan was largely satisfied with more entertainment-focused performances. However, when the ideas of nationhood or Tatar identity were embodied artistically by someone as gifted as Iskhakyi in his *Zoleiha* or Amirhan in his *Tigzsezliar*, they could result in rare but powerful moments of public catharsis, as when the public joined the heroine in an act of Islamic prayer on stage or broke into standing ovations to the words of a Tatar nationalist proclaiming the resilience of Tatar nation and culture from time immemorial.

⁵⁵ The total earnings from the season were eighteen thousands rubles-not a small sum of money in pre-revolutionary Russia. During the 1913-1914 theatrical season forty-eight Tatar plays were staged. During the same season, *Sharyk kluby* hosted Russian theatrical troupes and fifty Russian plays were staged, as well as a few literary and child-oriented evenings, one concert and one ball and two New Year's celebrations. One New Year's celebration was held for the Tatar public while another was organized by Russians for the Russian public. During 1913-1914 the stage of *Sharyk kluby* was rented one hundred and five times, see Karam, "Teatr ve muzykanyng mausmening iakune, 1913-1914," *Ang* 10 (1914): 199.

Chapter V
Two Versions of the Past
Gayaz Iskhakyi's *Zoleiha*, 1917 and 1992

On March 17, 1917, shortly after the fall of Romanovs, the Russian (Bol'shoi) Theater in Kazan featured a stage performance of a Tatar play, Gaiaz Iskhakyi's *Zoleiha*, produced by the Kazan theatrical troupe, *Sayar*. The play, written between 1907 and 1912, remained unperformed and unpublished for a number of years, which is not in the least surprising, since in it Iskhakyi portrays the long-standing loyalty of Kriashen (baptized) Tatars to Islam and their brutal persecution at the hands of the Orthodox Church and Russian state. While, in the play, an active overcoming of the ambiguities of Kriashen identity is grounded in acts of remembrance of a true Islamic past, the narrative of Kriashen history emplotted by Iskhakyi was unequivocally perceived by his contemporaries (and not without some cause) as a metaphor for the Tatar experience in the Russian Empire at large. *Zoleiha* was the first Tatar historical drama, and early 20th-century Tatar theatrical critics called the play a “breathtaking document of our [Tatar] history” and “a truly national work.”¹

In his seminal two-volume work on the making of memory, heritage and history in Britain, *Theatres of Memory*, Rafael Samuel writes: “History is not the prerogative of

¹ Sh[ahid] A[xmadiev], “Zoleiha,” *Yulduz*, 22 March 1917; Karam, “Teatr va muzyka,” *Ang* 5 (1917): 7.

the historian, nor even, as postmodernism contends, a historian's 'invention.' It is, rather a social form of knowledge; the work, in any given instance, of a thousand different hands."² Historical knowledge and popular memory, according to Samuel, is fastened together in and expressed through a multitude of sources: autobiography, place-names, theatricals, artifacts, old photography, television, a ballad or a poem. History likewise has a multitude of practitioners – archeologists, musicologists and antiquarians, for that matter.³ This chapter sets out to look at a play, *Zoleiha*, as a source of social knowledge and a playwright, Gaiaz Iskhakyi, as a practitioner of history.

My analysis of the play is grounded in its twofold nature as historical document: it serves both as a constructive element in the formation of social memory and a repository of this memory. This concept of cultural artifact as archive of social memory draws upon the theoretical works of Pierre Nora and his *lieux de memoire*, which implies an active and conscious structuring of memory. The theater can become *lieu de memoire* extraordinaire – a collective, conscious, both physical and intellectual site, in which the community's memory can be structured, reinforced and renewed in performance after performance.

I will analyze *Zoleiha* as a site of memory, which through its performative nature, is open to constant refiguration. In effect, I will be examining two texts, Iskhakyi's drama understood as theater and a filmed 1992 theatrical production of *Zoleiha* which significantly reorganizes the "structure" that Iskhakyi has created. Through a comparison of these two "texts," I will examine the ways in which pre-revolutionary and

² Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory* (London, 1994), 8.

³ *Ibid.*, 10-21.

contemporary cultural actors responded to their times – both of which were periods of intense intellectual scrutiny of historical heritage and questing for “Tatar-ness” – to evoke different versions of the Tatar past and identity.

The plot of *Zoleiha* follows the canons of the Russian theater of realism of the late 19th early 20th century, while its form is rich with fantastic elements that underscore the author’s originality and connections to literary Modernism. *Zoleiha* and her relatives, while officially registered as baptized Tatars, still adhere to Islam and want to practice it freely without pressure from local Church and state officials. When *Zoleiha*’s father is buried as a Muslim, it brings the outrage of the local priest and the police. *Zoleiha* is sent to a monastery and then forcibly married to a Russian peasant, Pyotr. Her first husband Salimjan is sent to Siberia and their children are placed in a monastery. In the third act, one climax of the play, *Zoleiha* encounters Salimjan, who was able to escape from Siberia, and both decide to run away. After being caught by the Russian villagers, Salimjan is beaten to death at Petr’s instigation. *Zoleiha*, in despair, murders Petr and is imprisoned, leaving behind a baby boy whose tragic fate becomes the topic of the last act of the play. The fourth, intermediate act is made surreal by the appearance of angels who console *Zoleiha* on her deathbed and prepare her for entrance to paradise. The act also features the transformation of *Zoleiha*’s son by Petr, Zakhar, into her long-lost son by Salimjan, Ahmad. Zakhar, who initially is preparing to become an Orthodox priest, through a series of psychological shocks becomes a Muslim and remembers his “true” identity. In the fifth act of the play, he attempts to rescue *Zoleiha*’s coffin from the local

church. The attempt proves unsuccessful and Zakhar is caught by the village peasants. The play ends with Zakhar's murder at the hands of the villagers.

The themes of memory and identity permeate *Zoleiha*. Tatar history is configured both by Iskhakyyi and, internally, by characters of the play. For the inhabitants of the Kriashen village to which Iskhakyyi takes his audience, ethnic and religious identity is grounded in and maintained through the daily workings of memory. The first act opens up with Zoleiha's nine-and ten year-old daughters complaining about the fact that some Muslim friends call them Kriashen: "they say we were taken to a Russian village and thrown into the Church water." To the girls' question, "... are we not Muslims?" Zoleiha simply answers "We are, it is just that we are the 'recent' Muslims." Her dying father, Gyimadi, however, emphatically whispers "No, no, we are also 'old' Muslims, my father and my grandfather were Muslims. We were Muslims since the days of Mamai."⁴ He, significantly, refers to the ancient Tatar chief of the Golden Horde, thereby asserting his religious Islamic and ethnic Tatar roots.⁵

At the end of the second act, Zoleiha is taken away by the furious Russian authorities for having buried her father, Gyimadi according to Muslim ritual. She appears in the third act, dressed like a Russian woman, "her head covered by a black shawl" – a sign of Orthodox female piety. She is on the way from a Church service to her "Russian" house. Clearly, at least outwardly significant transformations have taken

⁴ Gaiaz Iskhakyyi, *Zoleiha: Zindan* (Kazan, 1991), 517.

⁵ It is important that Gyimadi is referring here to a rival non-Chingizid (non-Mongol) Tatar ruler of the Western regions of the Golden Horde, the region which encompassed the territory of contemporary Republic of Tatarstan. Gyimadi then is explicitly referring to his Tatar rather than Mongol roots. See Janet Martin, *Medieval Russia, 980-1584* (Cambridge, 1995), 202.

place in her life. However, once in the house, Iskhakyi has her put the icon-lamp out and tear the cross off her neck, signaling to the audience that she has neither forgotten nor betrayed her beliefs.

Then comes a long monologue during which she reminisces about her village and her lost family. But her memory, the key to her survival in Russian captivity, is not grounded in a specific locale – her village, or a specific people – her family. Rather it is fixed internally, through her self-identification as a Muslim. Moreover, she refers to God as the keeper of her memory and as an always remembering entity. Her prayers are reminiscent of an incantation. There is a poetic quality to them: “God sees everything, he knows what is good and what is bad, he does not forget anybody and he feels everyone’s heart. He won’t let anything out of his memory.”⁶

Remembrance and oblivion are intertwined in the fate of another important character of the play, Zoleiha’s son Zakhar. The audience first meets him in the fourth act of the play, in which the aged heroine is returned to the Russian village from her exile in Siberia. The reader also finds out that she lives with her son, whom she has not seen for more than twenty years. Zakhar, as everyone except his mother calls him, becomes an extremely problematic as well as crucial figure as the events of the play unfold.⁷ He considers himself the son of Petr, whom, as we know, the heroine poisoned at end of the third act. He rejects Zoleiha for her role in Petr’s death, while he is also tortured by his mother’s enmity toward him. Zakhar’s estrangement from his mother is intensified by

⁶ Iskhakyi, *Zoleiha*, 541.

⁷ Zöleiha says repeatedly that she has no son who is an “infidel” and never calls Zakhar by name.

his hopes to become an Orthodox priest and to marry Marusia, a daughter of the village priest.

The aura of ambiguity surrounding Zakhar's identity is foreshadowed in the first half of the play. When we first meet Zoleiha, she rocks a cradle holding a baby born of Salimjan, her son Ahmad, whose fate remains unknown from the very first scene. Then, in the third act, one sees the heroine next to a cradle in Petr's house. From Zoleiha's statements the audience infers that it is her son and that he is born of Petr. His name is never given and his fate is also unknown. Whether or not this baby is Zakhar is not clear. Zoleiha herself does not give even a hint as to whose son Zakhar really is. What is important is that he considers himself Orthodox, and, according to his mother's hints, suffers from amnesia. "This child, left without mother and father became a real *kara orys* (black Russian).⁸ Will he remain an enemy of the faith forever?"⁹

During one of her monologues, Zoleiha, in anticipation of her approaching death, laments her lost daughters and begs God to give her one last opportunity to see them. It is precisely at this moment that the fantastic elements in the play appear. As a heavenly response to the heroine's prayers, she is visited by angels, who bemoan her pain and comfort her in her last hour. A fantastic, divine music informing the viewer of their arrival is heard in this part of the act. Meanwhile, as a final consolation for Zoleiha's suffering, she is given an opportunity to see her two long-lost and now grown daughters.

⁸ In Tatar folk understanding, Tatars possess a special quality of "iaktyk," lightness or enlightenment, while Russians are often referred to as being "karangy" or "kara," the dark and unfriendly ones. From private conversation with Helen Faller, 2001.

⁹ Iskhakyyi, *Zoleiha*, 562.

The three of them, overwhelmed by their long-awaited reunion, talk about their lives in separation and grieve over their lost Ahmad.

At this point, Zakhar, who is a shaken witness to visits both by angels and by Zoleiha's daughters, finds himself in a state of psychological crisis: "What am I to do? I do not know who I am. I am not Zakhar Pyotrovich! I am Ahmad, Salimjan's son! Am I not Zakhar, who kept all the fasts and all the rules of the seminary? Am I not? I do not know!"¹⁰ Zoleiha's daughters are stunned by both Zakhar's alleged resemblance to Ahmad and his rejection of his mother and his people. "Is it really our brother Ahmad? Could a child of a father who sacrificed his life for his religion and a mother who spent twenty years in exile become an infidel?"¹¹ These lines foreshadow the culmination of the act, in which the riddle of Zakhar and Ahmad's identities becomes resolved, if not completely solved. Either transfigured by the miraculous, divine visitation or as a result of a conscious process, astonished and moved, Zakhar "remembers" himself as Ahmad, Zoleiha's lost son, accepts his mother and sisters and begins to consider Salimjan his true father: "I am with you, I am your son... I am your brother!"¹²

It seems that Iskhakyi deliberately leaves Zakhar's "real" identity in ambiguity. It is Zakhar's awakening from oblivion that determines his ultimate self-conception. Either through fantastic heavenly interference or through remembering he realizes that he is Ahmad and that he is Muslim.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 576.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 577.

¹² *Ibid.*, 577.

Iskhakyi's treatment of Zakhar, who is inherently passive, leaves no room for a Kriashen's choice to practice Christianity. The narrative embedded in *Zoleiha* overlooks the particularities of Kriashen identity. It is unclear when and how this particular family and village had been converted to Orthodoxy. Historically, the conversions were done through outright force, economic pressure and incentives. However, Paul Werth has argued, in the 19th century in particular, a large portion of Kriashens, despite the powerful and extensive presence of Islam in the Middle Volga regions, opted to remain Christians, and, for many, Orthodoxy allowed for spiritual and social advancement as well as for articulating their own particular Kriashen identity, separate from Tatar.¹³

Iskhakyi, however, structures his play in a way that takes for granted the fact that Zoleiha and her village had always been Muslim. The stage decorations specified by the author are telling in this respect. The furnishings of Zoleiha's house inform the spectators that its inhabitants are Kriashen: "in the corner, there is a triangular shelf to place an icon."¹⁴ However, there is no icon. Perhaps, this omission is deliberate, signaling the "true" identity of the inhabitants of the house. In contrast, in the third act, when Zoleiha is married to a Russian and lives in a "real" Orthodox house," Iskhakyi is careful to point out the presence of "a number of icons of various size, adorned with paper, and lighted by an icon-lamp."¹⁵

Zoleiha's family's adherence to Islam is salient in the words of Zoleiha's father, Gyimadi

¹³ See Paul Werth, "From 'Pagan' Muslims to 'Baptized' Communists: Religious Conversion and Ethnic Particularity in Russia's Eastern Provinces," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 42 n. 3 (July 2000): 497-523.

¹⁴ Iskhakyi, *Zoleiha*, 516.

There is not a single place to which I was not forced to go. They took me to the church on every holiday. On every important day, they took me to some monastery. The monks tried to cast a spell over me with all kind of crosses. But even when they baptized me Vasiliy, I did not cease to be a Muslim. A dog would die if it had to go through what I did... They drove us in chains from here to Kazan. During the trip, they beat us to the point where not only our clothes but our bodies were torn apart...¹⁶

Zoleiha's elderly mother teaches her granddaughter the words of a Muslim prayer. Her husband, Salimjan, and his friends make a long trip to a Russian official in the city, to ask for protection from the "pigheadedness and lawless behavior of the village priest," "who takes their children to monasteries and marries their daughters to Russians."

The themes of Kriashen "apostasy" and persecution at the hands of the imperial authorities, so strongly expressed in the play, resonated also in the critical reviews from 1917. Gabrdrahman Käräm, a well-known theatrical critic and publicist of the time, writes,

We have all heard about the 'mukreh' [forced]; that they lived under double names, how they secretly performed Muslim prayers, that the priests would come and forcefully convert their children...but we only knew about this, we did not see their [the baptized Tatars'] tragedy and terror with our own eyes, did not hear it with our own ears... Gaiaz äfändi with his sharp and beautiful pen brought their tragedy alive before our eyes and made an unforgettable impression."¹⁷

While the term *Kriashen*, from the Russian *kreshchennyi* [baptized], was commonly applied to Kriashens both by themselves and by Muslim Tatars, Käräm,

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 539.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 517.

¹⁷ Karam, "Gabdullah Kariev benefisy," *Ang* 3-4 (1917), reprinted in Gaiaz Iskhakyi, *Eserler*, vol. 8 (Kazan, 2001), 300.

importantly, refers to them using Arabic term *mukreh* [forced], which puts emphasizes Kriashen unwillingness to practice Christianity.¹⁸

Another critic notes that *Zoleiha*, from a point of view of “historical reality, depicts real Kriashen life.”¹⁹ Perhaps the critic recognized certain events or traditions portrayed in the play as specifically Kriashen rather than Tatar. Iskhakiy’s home-village, Iaushirma, formerly Kelei in the Chistai region of Tatarstan, was partly Kriashen. In the mid 19th century, the Kriashen of this village had fallen away from Orthodoxy. The author was thus intimately familiar with Kriashen traditions and lifestyle.

However, the very same critic states that *Zoleiha* is “is a breathtaking document of *our* history, which describes the life of *Tatars*, who, under torture, were converted by the Russian state and lived under fear for hundreds of years.”²⁰

While Iskhakiy’s play specifically addresses the problem of Kriashen identity, it also implicates the Tatar community at large. The time frame of the play is not clearly defined. *Zoleiha* is situated, according to the author, “in the sixties” most likely the 1860s, the time when a large number of Kriashen villages were swept by a wave of apostasy to Islam.²¹ The play, at the same time, chronologically does not belong to a specific epoch, and the realistic time markers so evident in Iskhakiy’s other plays through

¹⁸ Karam notes that Iskhakiy was able to present his audience with a “living” Kriashen experience, which according to Karam, majority of Muslim Tatars knew only through a hearsay. Karam’s statement underscores the extent to which Iskhakiy’s *Zoleiha* might have influenced Tatar spectators’ understanding of Kriashen history.

¹⁹ A[xmadiev], “Zoleiha.”

²⁰ *Ibid.*, emphasis mine.

²¹ See Agnes Kefeli, “Constructing an Islamic Identity,” in *Russia’s Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700-1917*, eds. Daniel R. Brower and Edward Lazzarini (Bloomington, 1997), 271-91.

decoration or hints such as reading of contemporary newspapers, are largely absent in *Zoleiha*. It is not the specific historical moment that is of importance to Iskhakyi, but rather the collective experience and memory of the Tatars as a community within Russia, of which the Kriashen experience, depicted in the play, becomes symbolic. In the period following the fall of the Russian monarchy, when Tatar intellectuals were in the heat of a debate about the “free” future of the Middle Volga Turks, Iskhakyi’s depiction of Kriashen history as a microcosm of the Tatar experience within Russian hegemony resonated in the words of Fatih Amirhan, who stated that *Zoleiha* “showed that our nation has strong and royal characters, who on the path to their sainthood, would not be stopped by any sacrifice.”²² Here the word “nation” [milliat] clearly refers to Tatars.

Zoleiha, in which Kriashen history is emplotted both for its own merit and as a symbolic representation of Tatar experience within the empire, is also explicitly supranational. After all, it is Islam that is a cornerstone of identity for the characters of the play. *Zoleiha* and her family, as well as other personae, never refer to themselves as Tatars, but rather as Muslims (with the important exception of the second act). When performed in 1917, the play was “marketed” as a work which could appeal to Muslims empire-wide. In fact, the leading Tatar theatrical troupe *Sayar* which successfully staged the play in Kazan in March, decided to perform it during the all-Russian Muslim Congress in Moscow in May of 1917: “Every Russian Muslim should see *Zoleiha*. It is a truly *national* work. The Congress was a perfect opportunity to see the play. The delegates enjoyed it very much ...”²³ Incidentally, the two plays that *Sayar* chose to

²² F[atih Amirhan], “*Zoleiha*,” *Koiash*, 19 March 1917.

²³ Karam, “Teatr va Muzika,” *Ang* 5 (1917).

perform at the Congress were Iskhakyi's *Zoleiha* and Karim Tinchurin's *Shomly Adym*, which both address the tensions between Tatar and Russian societies. Perhaps, the choice was guided by the brief historical moment where there seemed to exist an opportunity to separate themselves from the Empire in a meaningful way.

This strongly politicized reading *Zoleiha* could be explained by the specificity of the historical time it was performed, shortly after the February Revolution. All Tatar plays, even published ones, had to be sent to the dramatic censor in Saint-Petersburg, Russian linguist V.D. Smirnov, who was most unsympathetic to the Tatars.²⁴

A witness to *Zoleiha*'s 1917 performance in Kazan remembered that the hall in the Bolshoi theater (currently the Kachalov Russian Dramatic Theater) was filled with people, "...there was no room in the hall, people climbed up on the stage and sat on the window-sills. There was crying and weeping everywhere...as the forced baptism took place."²⁵ Another mentioned that some spectators jumped up onto the stage during the third act when *Zoleiha* is performing *namaz* in Petr's house, joining *Zoleiha* (played by the famous Tatar actress Gulsum Bulgarskaia) in her prayer.²⁶ The 1917 performance of *Zoleiha* had a catalyzing effect on the Kazan Tatar audience, as the barrier between the audience and the stage was broken, transforming the theatrical podium into a "real" public space where actors and spectators, joined in communal prayer. For Iskhakyi's contemporaries, literary critics and spectators the performance of *Zoleiha* signaled the

²⁴ *Zoleiha* was published for the first time in Moscow in 1918, in the Tatar *Sherek* publishing house where Iskhakyi was an editor.

²⁵ Lena Gainanova, Interview with Khazhi Sal'mushev, a 95-year-old retired teacher, (Kazan, February 10, 1993), cited in Gaiaz Iskhakyi, *Eserler*, vol. 4 (Kazan, 2003), 488.

²⁶ From a private conversation with contemporary Tatar playwright, Iunus Safiullin (Kazan, 2003). The eyewitness in this case was Tatar director and actor Khusain Urazikov, who told Safiullin about 1917 performance he witnessed in Kazan as a young man.

beginning of a new era of unprecedented civic freedom. As one critic stated, “the very fact that this play was allowed to be staged signifies the beginning of breathtaking events for Tatars...Do we not live in a free world?”²⁷

At the same time, Iskhakyyi’s structuring of the last act of the play complicated this perception of the play as a straightforward statement of Tatar religious stoicism. The outcome of Zoleiha’s son Zakhar’s decision to become Muslim remains uncertain and is in sharp contrast with the fate of his grandfather, Gyimadi, as well as with that of his mother.

The first act ends with the death of Zoleiha’s father Gyimadi – an event which becomes a beginning of all misfortunes that the characters of the drama endure. On his deathbed, when confronted by the village priest, he once more casts away his Orthodox identity and Russian name “Vasilii” and reaffirms his Islamic beliefs. For Gyimadi’s daughter, Zoleiha, her perseverance in Islam is the cause of her ill fortune. At the same time, she is rewarded, and at the end of the fourth act, the spectator sees her in “paradise, surrounded by flowers, men, women and the angels.”²⁸

The linearity of Gyimadi’s stoicism and Zoleiha’s fate as martyr, disappears in the case of her son Zakhar’s death. He is killed by local peasants, while attempting to rescue Zoleiha’s body from the church, so that she can be buried according to Muslim ritual.²⁹ Almost at the edge of the village, carrying Zoleiha’s coffin with his Kriashen companions, Zakhar is stopped by his beloved Marusia, daughter of the village priest.

²⁷ A[xmadiev], “Zoleiha.”

²⁸ Iskhakyyi, *Zoleiha*, 579.

²⁹ Burial is a cyclical motif of the play, since Zakhar’s grandfather Gyimadi’s insistence on being buried in the Muslim graveyard opens up the chain of tragic events of the plot.

While trying to persuade her to follow him, Zakhar is caught by the enraged villagers. The act ends with Marusia's words "You killed him, no I killed him." (There is no indication as to whom exactly this "you" refers. Most likely she is accusing the peasants. But could she be accusing Zakhar's Muslim fellow companions? His mother? The audience?). There is an obvious lack of closure in Zakhar's death. While Zakhar finds his family and "true" identity, he also loses Marusia and, ultimately, his life. His death lacks the aura of martyrdom that surrounds Zoleiha or Gyimadi. Rather it seems to express the tragic nature of his character, torn between his beloved, Marusia, a symbol of the Russian *milieu* in which he grew up and by which he was victimized in the end, and his dead mother, who represents the Tatar/Muslim part of his identity.

For many Tatar *iashliar* such as Gaiaz Iskhakyyi and the famous Tatar poet, Gabdullah Tukai, Tatar folk traditions and folk language were the most important trappings of Tatarness. Iskhakyyi made a particular point of writing in language closest to vernacular Tatar, i.e. virtually devoid of Arabic and Persian lexicon.³⁰

The language of most of the play is largely stripped of Arabic and in some cases, reminiscent of folkloric texts. Zoleiha's dream in the first act of the play – a premonition of the future misfortunes that take place within the plot, is built on the images of the forest, fire and wild beasts (bears and owls)– typical elements of Tatar folklore.

In my dream it is a day, a black day, blacker than the day when the buckwheat stays under water. I am alone in a big forest. In the forest there is a *toi* (festival) of forest fairies. Bears are roaring, a cat-headed owl is crying like a child. They are all looking for me, they are going to

³⁰ Iskhakyyi's adherence to vernacular was much commented on the Tatar intellectual circles, and some called his language "street jargon." See, Najib Gasyiri, "Probuzhdenie Russkikh Musul'man i ikh literatura," reprinted in Gaiaz Iskhakyyi, *Eserler*, vol, 8, 104-07.

swallow me. I am standing under a large tree, consumed in my *doga* (Islamic prayer). The sun rises. Suddenly the whole forest is swallowed by fire, the fire is getting closer and closer...My fear was boundless. I screamed, “Allah!” and woke up.³¹

Here Zoleiha overcomes her fear of essentially pre-Islamic elements still surviving in Tatar folklore, such as the spirits of forests, fantastic animals and fire by focusing on Islamic prayer. This narration produces stark contrast to the language of the fourth act, when Zoleiha is visited by angels. There, the presence of Arabic is determined by the overarching theme – Zoleiha’s preparation to enter the other world, the Islamic paradise.

Elements of Tatar folklore are particularly salient in the second act, which is centered around a Kriashen wedding. The wedding songs, rituals and dances depicted by Iskhakyi are overtly folkloric. The act starts with a young Tatar villager pouring the wedding guests fermented honey – an ancient Tatar folk beverage.³² One of the centerpieces of the wedding is the entrance of the young bride with pails full of water. The guests and the children exclaim in excitement, “The young bride is coming back. The young bride came back from the water!”³³ The reference here seems to be to the pre-Islamic ritual of cajoling *su iiase* (the water-spirit), practiced by Mishar Tatars, at the end

³¹ Iskhakyi, *Zoleiha*, 518.

³² The 11th-century Arab traveler Ibn Fadlan mentions fermented honey as a favorite beverage among the Turks of the Middle Volga region. See *Tatary Srednego Povolzh'ia i Priural'ia* (Moscow, 1967), 173.

³³ Iskhakyi, *Zoleiha*, 532.

of which the bride comes back with buckets full of water.³⁴ Iskhakyi's birth place, the region of Chistai in Tatarstan had been historically Mishar.

What would those rituals and songs have signified for Iskhakyi's contemporaries in 1917? Perhaps, many would recognize the particular local tradition to which they belonged. Importantly, however, these elements of the folkloric tradition are invented, in a Hobsbawnian sense, in so much as they are extracted from a living and fluid collective oral tradition to an individual literary one that, on at least one level, claims to be representative of a Tatar tradition as a whole. Hence the words of one of the Kriashens, when he is questioned by the village priest and the police about the absence of Orthodox ceremony at the wedding: "Well, we haven't really had a wedding yet [i.e. religious ceremony]. Now we are just... [to the priest:] we are not going to leave you out of the wedding... this [celebration] is just following the Tatar custom."³⁵ Significantly, nowhere else in the play do the characters refer to themselves as "Tatars."

In the summer of 1917, after the play's victorious performances in Kazan and Moscow, the director of the *Sayar* troupe, Gabdulla Kariev, who received from Iskhakyi a three-year contract to stage the play, planned to tour it across the Middle Volga region, the Caucasus and Turkestan. This plan was never realized. In Astrakhan, the local Tatar theater staged *Zoleiha* the wedding guests for the last time in November, 1917. After Iskhakyi's escape abroad in 1919, his plays were no longer performed. Curiously, in March 1922, in *Tatarstan Khabarlari* (Tatarstan News), there was an announcement that

³⁴ The ritual was centered around the bridal offering of bread crumbs and a silver-coins to a water-spirit. This ritual was not specifically Kriashen, but was wide-spread among the Mishar Tatars, who preserved more pre-Islamic traditions as compared to the Kazan Tatars proper. See *Tatary Srednego Povolzh'ia* (Moscow, 1967), 256.

³⁵ *Zoleiha*, 535.

the wedding scene” from Iskhakyi’s *Zoleiha* will be performed on March 24 by the remaining actors of *Sayar*, as well as amateurs, to benefit the new Tatar theater in Kazan “which is in the process of creation.” Soon enough, the mistake was realized, and, the next day, “the wedding scene,” which must have initially seemed well-suited to Soviet plans of encouraging national folk cultures, was substituted by some other work.

By focusing on the particular experience of Kriashens, Iskhakyi’s play and the 1917 production problematize the place of Tatar society within Russian hegemony. The 1992 production restructures and fixes the milieu of memory constructed by Iskhakyi.

The contemporary desacralization, localization and individualization of heritage are one of the overarching themes of Samuel’s study. These tie in with Pierre Nora’s analysis of the transformation of practices of commemoration and the change of memory frameworks that took place in post-WWII France. Unified national memory has succumbed to local rivalries; national heritage can no longer claim incorporation of events, local monuments or holidays into its overarching narrative. In fact, as Nora points out, the “traditional model” of commemoration has been politicized and become inherently “partisan.”³⁶ This claim provides a fruitful contrast to Tatarstan of the 1990s, where post-Soviet nation-building does not leave much room for localization and individualization of commemoration practices. In fact, all aspects of heritage: linguistic, archeological, literary and historical are incorporated into one referential framework– the

³⁶ Pierre Nora, “The Era of Commemoration,” in *The Construction of the French Past: Realms of Memory*, ed. Pierre Nora (New York, 1992), 616-17.

nation. When local sites of memory are erected or commemorated, their primary function is to prop up the emerging national narrative.³⁷

At the same time, Nora's description of the more chronologically distant memory of French Republic, which is at once "authoritarian, unitary, exclusivist, universalist and intensely *passeiste*,"³⁸ also provides a relevant framework for discussing the relationship between the post-Soviet structuring of Tatar collective memory and Tatar nation-building. The Republican discourse demanded "the absolute obligation to enroll local memories in the common fund of a national culture,"³⁹ and resonated with attempts to create one unifying Soviet identity. Soviet construction of collective identity was complicated by the rival policy of creating and promoting national cultures, which were based on particular locale and language. Still, much like that of "La Republique," Soviet identity was constructed in terms of a fundamental opposition (that between socialism and capitalism) and "thrived on enemies," while extending universalist claims (class struggle).⁴⁰ Finally, the immediate commemoration of the very events and principles that founded the new Soviet state, for instance, the celebration of October Revolution, parallel

³⁷ See, for example, a picture story published the prominent Tatar literary, historical and popular journal *Miras*, which, incidentally, means "legacy" or "heritage", concerning the building of a new mosque in the village of *Urta Kirmian* of the *Mamadysh* region of Tatarstan. The story mostly features photographs of the villagers "celebrating the opening of the new mosque" – a new historical site, celebrating the Islamic element of Tatar identity. The villagers are also photographed while praying at the graveyard of the "saints and khans" – clearly a site of local memory (*Miras* 7-8 [1994]: 166-71).

³⁸ As quoted in Nancy Wood, "Memory's Remains: Les lieux de mémoires," *History and Memory* 6 (1994): 132.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 133.

⁴⁰ Compare with Republican claims "of the Declaration of the Rights of Man." See Wood, 134.

Nora's concept of Republican memory as "passeiste," one that "invented and celebrated its immediate claims to posterity."⁴¹

It is out of this authoritarian and "passeiste" narrative, that the contemporary Tatar search for historical heritage emerged. The forms of commemorations of the past that take place in Tatarstan of 1990s are not, by any means, compulsory. They rest on the participation of individuals and recognize local initiative. However, memory and nation are still fastened together in "patriotic synthesis."⁴²

The 1990s performance of *Zoleiha* on the stage of Kamal State Theater signified a break with the Soviet past as well as continuity with the "heroic" pre-revolutionary past, the time when Iskhakyyi was writing. Post-Soviet Tatarstan of the 1990s experienced a burst of national sentiment and a vigorous rediscovery of Tatar heritage. The years that followed the declaration of sovereignty of Tatarstan in 1991 witnessed an intellectual search for a Tatar Golden Age and a new, non-Soviet identity.⁴³ Sources for this new historical reference ranged from the early 11th century Bulgar heritage to the immediate pre-revolutionary past.

"Legendary" literary works such as the 11th century Bulgar poem *Kyssa-i Iosif*, the only literary work to survive from that period, became cornerstones of the "ancient" Tatar literary heritage, featured on the pages of literary journals and new post-Soviet textbooks published by Tatarstan's Ministry of Culture and Education. Folk epics such

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 134.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 134.

⁴³ For a relevant discussion of the dynamic post-Soviet of construction of national identities see Ronald Suny, "Constructing Primordialism: Old Histories for New Nations," *The Journal of Modern History* 73 (December 2001): 862-896 and his "Provisional Stabilities: The Politics of Identities in Post-Soviet Eurasia," *International Security* 24 n. 3 (Winter 1999-2000): 139-178.

as *Edigei*, shared by the majority of Turks of the post-Soviet space were published *en masse*.⁴⁴ Historical sites such as the Söümbike Tower in Kazan, bearing the name of the last Tatar princess who allegedly struggled to the bitter end with the army of Ivan the Terrible during the fall of Kazan in 1552, became places of public commemoration. Vigorous archeological excavation both in Kazan and Bulgar sought to re-establish culture and history obliterated during the seventy years of the Soviet rule. The city of Kazan itself, the capital of sovereign Tatarstan, with its remarkable ethnic and architectural diversity, often featuring mosques and churches in one architectural ensemble, became the symbol of Tatar national resilience and yet national and cultural diversity – the symbol of the new sovereign Tatarstan.⁴⁵

For many Tatar intellectuals, the early 20th century became the most immediately palpable model for intellectual and cultural revival. The works of pre-revolutionary writers, poets, social thinkers and historians were published. The plays of early-20th century dramatists such as Iskhakyi and Gamaletdin Kamal were performed for the first time on the stages of Tatarstan's state theaters.⁴⁶ Certain Tatar *jadid* conceptions such as reconciling Islam with European culture, were taken a step further to generate the concept of European Islam, particular to Tatars.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ *Edigei* was actively published in 1990s by other Turkic groups of the former USSR. Interestingly, each new post-Soviet nation claimed it to be their own “unique” national epic, i.e. *Edige* as a Tatar national epic or *Edige* as a Turkmen national epic.

⁴⁵ This observation comes from my earlier research on the ways Kazan was portrayed in *Miras*. As far as diversity is concerned, slightly less than half of Tatarstan's population is Russian.

⁴⁶ At the turn of the 20th century, the only state theater that existed in Kazan was the Russian Imperial theater. Tatar theatrical activity was primarily based on itinerant theatrical troupes, which, for some period of time, were hosted by the first Tatar cultural club, *Sharyk kluby*, or rented various Russian clubs, stages and even hotel halls for their performances.

⁴⁷ See for example, Rafael' Khakimov, *Gde nasha Mekka?* (Kazan, 2003).

At the same time, the 1990s witnessed significant changes in the way Tatars perceived their historical heritage. Rather than featuring competing diverse commemorative languages, each one arguing for their version of Tatar history and past, the Tatar society which emerged after the collapse of Soviet Union already possessed fixed markers of a nation built within the tradition of Soviet historiography, linguistic and nationality policies.

The elements of this hegemonic narrative, in which it is primarily the nation (post-Soviet nation, importantly) that became the framework of social memory, have structured the performance of Iskhakyyi's *Zoleiha* in 1990s.⁴⁸ Iskhakyyi's original "theater," despite its complex national and extra-national appeal was still textually structured around Kriashens. The contemporary adaptation of the play focuses exclusively on the experience of Tatars as a nation during both the oppressive imperial past and, particularly, Soviet past. The very fact of *Zoleiha*'s staging serves as an active reminder for the audience both of the similarity of the contemporary period to a concrete, pre-revolutionary past and of the more oppressive Soviet period, which saw, after 1918, the obliteration of Iskhakyyi's literary legacy in his homeland.

While the words of the play remain virtually unchanged, the contemporary restructuring is done primarily through music, decorations, dances and the choice of costumes. Most importantly, the message of national resilience, which the contemporary production of the play sought to communicate, is salient in the choice to produce only the first three acts out of five.

⁴⁸ Cf. Nora's France of the 1990s, where collective national memory is fractured into local, patrimonial, competing elements. (*The Construction of French Past*, 610-37).

The fantastic fourth act and the fifth act, in which Zakhar's ambiguous death, not heroic like his father Salimjan's and mother Zoleiha's, prevents the play from having emotional closure and complicates the undiluted stoicism of the first three acts, are omitted. The play now ends with a stark scene of Zoleiha walking off to Siberia in the midst of the snowy night, surrounded by three Russian soldiers.

In the background, the words of an Islamic prayer are sung. In fact, each of the three acts ends with the singing of the Islamic prayer *Allah hu akbar* (God is great). In the first act, it is the dying Gyimadi, the mullah and the Kriashen villagers who sing the prayer, confronting the village priest who came to confess Gyimadi. In the second act, the merry Kriashen wedding is disrupted by the visitation of the same priest and the imperial police. After a long investigation, during which the police bully the villagers, the priest and the *stanovoi* (police chief) decide to send Zoleiha to the monastery and Salimjan to Siberia for burying Gyimadi, a Christian, according to the priest, in the Muslim graveyard. In Iskhakiy's original version, the act ends with the sounds of the gun-shots and general havoc. The 1992 version features disembodied words of Islamic prayer descending from above. The characters of the play, including the Russian police and the priest stand solemnly, as if stricken by a heavenly premonition.

The standardized narrative of the contemporary production with its emphasis on Tatars as a nation oppressed, has little room for the ambiguities of identity ingrained in Iskhakiy's development of Zakhar in the fourth and the fifth act of the play. However, the 1917 audience (or at least critics), as well, were not prepared to accept the full complexity of Iskhakiy's play. The fifth act of the play seemed particularly problematic to Käräm, who complained that "all the intensity of the play is concentrated in the first

three acts...to see more murder and suffering in the last act diverts the audience's attention and dilutes the impression..."⁴⁹ When performed in early 1990s, the play consisted of the first three acts only, as if to remove any uncertainty from the message the performance of the play sought to communicate and not to "divert the audience's attention" from this message.

The identity of the characters of *Zoleiha* perseveres thanks to Islamic belief. Hence, as stated by Fatih Amirhan in 1917, *Zoleiha* "is a document, which confirms the noble role that Islam played in the preservation of our nation."⁵⁰ This view of Islam as an ethical force that binds society prevailed among the Tatar reformers in the early 20th century. But, if for that audience Islamic elements were still an organic part of their existence, a kind of *milieux de memoir*, to borrow Nora's term, the 1990s spectator and performer, emerging from more than half a century of bellicose Soviet atheism would have perceived them very differently. In the post-Soviet performance, these organic elements become ritualized, hence the emphatic singing at the end of each act (especially at the end of the second act when it is not contextualized at all). Islamic practices seem to have become a new element of Tatar self-identification, something that has to be reflected on and commemorated. This is particularly palpable in the second act, when the "folklore" of the Tatar wedding, colored by Soviet conceptions of nationality, collides with words of prayer, sung in Arabic, a language natural to the Tatars in early 20th century but foreign to the majority of the 1990s audience, who grew up without active exposure to either Quranic recitations or pre-revolutionary Tatar.

⁴⁹ Karam, "Gabduallah Kariev benefisy," in Gaiiaz Iskhakyyi, *Eserler*, vol. 8, 302.

⁵⁰ A[mirhan], "Zoleiha."

The heavy Islamic overtone of the end of the second act is a sharply contrasted with the sound of the church bells (part of Iskhakyi's original text) that open the third, final act of the 1990s performance. The same third act also features an episode in which both the main character and Gabdulla, a Tatar villager who sought Zoleiha for some time in order to rescue her, pray in Petr's house. The words of prayer, however are not in Arabic, but in Tatar. In it Gabdullah asks God to grant relief to the "all Muslims who are in captivity of the infidels... those who are sent off to Siberia for their Muslim faith." All of this is present in the original text. The background music, however, a Soviet orchestral adaptation of a Tatar melody, is an addition.⁵¹ Interestingly, the third scene of the original starts with Zoleiha coming back from the church and tearing the cross off her neck. This act, signaling to the spectator her resistance to Christianity – that part of Kriashen identity ascribed to them by the Imperial government and the Church, is absent in the contemporary adaptation, where the Kriashen struggle in and of itself is not significant. In 1990s Tatarstan, Kriashens, with their emphasis on separate identity, rarely elicited sympathy among majority of Tatars, who saw them as either ignorant of their own history or collaborators with the Russians.

Nowhere is the influence of the Soviet hegemonic narrative as obvious as in the second act. As one remembers, it is loaded with folkloric elements which, at the turn of the century, could have reflected both the living present and the disappearing past. These folkloric elements (rituals, songs and dances), originally extracted from a fluid tradition,

⁵¹ Zoleiha's heroic perseverance is emphasized by the very fact that the prayer is enacted on the background of a large cross which is located in the center of the room. The cross, actually, is not real, it is "constructed" optically (if one is to look from left center) out of the chimney of the large stove and a large horizontally positioned cross beam, which is placed on freestanding doorposts. This cross seems to take the place of the icons and the icon-lamp, provisioned by Iskhakyi in the original text.

in the 1990s production become a fixed reference to Tatar nation. The participants of the Kriashen wedding featured in the act are dressed in costumes and dance in ways reminiscent of Soviet state museums and nationality concerts.⁵² The dancing is done by professionals, and, instead of the original violin, a European instrument which was popular among Tatars at the turn of the 20th century, the 1992 production featured an omnipresent accordion – the instrument of the 20th-century Tatar traditional music.⁵³

In 1917, *Zoleiha* was one among many representations of Tatar past, while the original focus of the play was on tensions of Kriashen identity and Kriashens' uneasy relationship to both Tatar and Russian societies. While the 1917 performance of the play preserved the original structure of the play intact, readings of the performance by Iskhakyi's contemporaries, the critics, failed to recognize the actual complexity of Tatar past as reflected in the play, conflating the struggles of Kriashens with the struggles of Tatar Muslim society within the Russian Empire. This singularity of reading could partially be explained by the specificity of historical moment in which *Zoleiha* was staged. The old regime had just failed and Tatars were presented with unprecedented political freedoms, which among some gave rise to hopes of greater political autonomy.

⁵² Cf. with Samuel's discussion of the film adaptation of literary classics, in this case, Dickens' *Little Dorrit*. As Samuel notes, worn-out costumes of the characters were changed into much more aesthetically pleasing attire which also became "historicized" so as to reflect a particular epoch (*Theaters of Memory*, 404-09). Here, in contrast, the play is symbolic of the "timeless" Tatar experience even more so than the original, and "historization" of the epoch is absent. However, the costumes are much familiar to the audience as the artifacts of "traditional" Tatar culture. Also, in Samuel's analysis, images of hell and all the "dark horrors" present in the original were removed, so as to make it more realistic and "believable to moderns" (*Ibid.*, 406). The removal of the fourth fantastic element of *Zoleiha* seems to follow the same principle of modern aesthetics.

⁵³ The accordion is said to have penetrated the Volga-Ural region in the 19th century from Finland.

The existence of a distinct group of Orthodox Tatar complicated further an already complex search for Tatar identity, and perhaps, called to be ignored by Tatar intellectuals seeking for coherent definition of what “Tatar” actually meant.

The 1992 performance of the play in contrast, signified an uncomplicated concept of Tatar identity and historical past, in which the main focus became the heroic perseverance of “Tatar nation,” constructed within the framework of the Soviet state, with its Soviet attributes of Tatar nationality. In the 1990s, for some, the existence of the Kriashen community with its growing anti-Muslim sentiment and loyalty to Moscow was an annoyance, rather than part of their own complicated history. The play’s performances both back in 1917 and in 1992 were situated within specific historical moments which, importantly, bear signs of strong resemblance in the eyes of contemporary Tatar intellectuals. However, emerging out of the Soviet narrative, the 1992 performance significantly restructured and simplified Iskhakyyi’s vision of Tatar past, while simultaneously making *Zoleiha* and its author a part of the new national heritage.

Chapter VI

Sufferings of Russian Censor, V.D. Smirnov

In 1906, the Russian censor, V.D. Smirnov, an individual vested with full power to decide whether or not a Tatar play will be staged, reviewed a Tatar translation of Gogol's *Inspector General*. The play was translated by the well-known dramatist Galiaskar Kamal. The publishing of the translation was sponsored by the Kazan City Duma in honor of the 50th anniversary of Pushkin's death. Smirnov's decision not to allow the production of *Inspector General* in Tatar was motivated by the fear, that, since Tatars could not possibly share the same interests, "same ideals" and "same morals" with the Russians, the "Tatar *inorodsy*" were insincere in their interest in the "work of the great Russian classic" and their intentions were subversive.¹

In this chapter, I will show the ways in which Smirnov, a Russian censor of Tatar drama and Professor of Turkic languages at St. Petersburg University, constrained and defined Tatar theatrical repertoire, thereby indirectly impacting Tatar spectator's aesthetic appreciation and tastes. As the person past whom the Tatar playwrights had to get in order to have their plays performed, Smirnov had power to influence the choice of themes and plots of plays. Importantly, Smirnov's views of Tatar society were deeply bound up in that conceptual dichotomy – so potently expressed by Edward Said – which

¹ Doklad Tsenzora Smirnova o perevode na tatarskii iazyk p'esy "Revizor," RGIA, f.776, op. 25, d.861, l.11.

defines West and East as “rational” and “irrational.”² This view was reflected most saliently in Smirnov’s uncertainty about the benefits of assimilating the “fanatical” Tatar and converged with a notion that the “subversive” educated, reformed Tatar is almost more harmful than the “fanatical” one. Smirnov’s ideas regarding Tatar society and Islam, expressed in his reviews of Tatar drama resonated with the official state view held by such individuals as Prime Minister Stolypin, Pobedonostsev, the Procurator of Holy Synod, and Ilminskii.³ While considering assimilation of Muslims inevitable, these officials were far from the notion of supra-national multi-ethnic citizenship advocated by the civic-minded Constitutional Democrats (who, not at all incidentally, were popular among the members of the predominantly Tatar *jadid* political party, *Ittifaq*).⁴ Ilminskii, for example, saw Tatar reform and greater openness to Russian culture—a cornerstone of

² Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, 1978).

³ See Robert Geraci on Russian intellectuals’ absorption of this tradition of thinking, in “Russian Orientalism at an Impasse: Tsarist Education Policy and the 1910 Conference on Islam,” in *Russia’s Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700-1917*, eds. Daniel R. Brower and Edward Lazzarini (Bloomington, 1997), 138-168.

⁴ On *Ittifaq* relationship with Kadets, see Diliara Usmanova, *Musul’manskaia fraktsiia i problemy svobody sovesti v Gosudarstvennoi Dume Rossii, 1906-1917* (Kazan, 1991). A liberal, though Russo-centric vision of the Empire was formulated by the influential pre-revolutionary thinker Peter Struve. Struve envisioned Russian culture as a medium for cultural and socio-political integration, a sort of “cementing force” that would bind together the multiethnic and multilingual Empire. For Struve’s thoughts on nationality question in Russia see Richard Pipes, *Struve: Liberal on the Right* (Cambridge, 1980), 210-212. Struve’s views resonated in some Russian publications of the early 20th century. For example, as one author argues, it is by means of the “unifying and cementing force of Russian culture” that Russia will overcome its “ethnic particularism and tribalism (*raznoplemennost’*),” Z. Avalov “Pis’mo o natsional’nostiakh i oblastiakh,” *Russkaia Mysl’* vol. 12 (1908): 81. Another author writes that, “the comparatively high level of Russian culture and the noble qualities of Russian intelligentsia played a rather important role in assertion of the idea of state unity in the consciousness of the non-sovereign [nederzhavnye] peoples of Russia. All of them, with the exception of Poles, Germans and the people of Finland, have started their rebirth under the absolute influence of Russian culture,” M. Slavinskii “Russkaia intelligentsiia i natsional’nyi vopros,” in *Vekhi: Intelligentsiia v Rossii [1909-1910]*, (Moscow, 1991), 417.

the modernization argued for by the *iashliar*—as a means of empowerment for the pursuit of the Tatars’ own nationalistic, anti-Russian, subversive goals.

Those Tatar plays which Smirnov found politically problematic, nationalistic or insulting to the Russians, of course were not approved for the stage. The plays that were allowed were most often melodramas and vaudevilles, either written in Tatar or translated from Russian. Although Smirnov found the majority of Tatar plays to be aesthetically displeasing, he never prohibited a play on the grounds of its “lack of taste and vulgarity,” epithets he commonly applied in his reviews. And though Smirnov felt uncomfortable when the plays portrayed the underbelly of Tatar society, openly made fun of religious figures or portrayed whorehouses on stage, these also were generally not cause for censorship, after the expressing of appropriate reservations. (Smirnov thought that, since the majority of Tatars are “dark” and “uneducated, “ making fun of “their *mullahs*” would bring resentment and would be disruptive in term of the state’s objective of integrating *inorodsy* into the imperial structure and found portrayals of the “internal *byt* (way of life) of the whorehouse” ethically objectionable. Still, more often than not, when confronted with these issues, the censor eventually, somewhat irrationally reverted to his notion that what was ethically unsuitable for the Russian audience was fine for the Tatar or even “did them well.”

Smirnov’s reviews reveal an excellent stylist, a sarcastic and emotional writer of Russian who is also very well versed in Tatar. They also show the extent to which Smirnov disliked his job, constantly complaining about the difficulty of reading handwritten Tatar manuscripts and about the poor artistic quality of the material he had to read. Most importantly, however, his reviews show that he had a deeply held belief in

the Turkic and Muslim threat to the integrity of the Russian empire and viewed his job as censor of Tatar secular literature and drama as an important element in the containment of this threat.

In his review of the Tatar translation of *Inspector General* Smirnov wrote:

The question of staging the Tatar translation of *Inspector General* is not as simple as it seems, especially if one is to take into account all kinds of new freedoms and permissions. It would not hurt to recall the circumstances of the appearance of this translation in press. The translation was published according to the resolution of the Kazan City Duma, and practically on their means...Just why did the attention of enthusiasts of Tatar literature fell, first of all, on this satire on Russian society? If for us, Russians, this satire is a didactic literary picture of our bad mores, for Tatar *inorodsy*, it is a sweet amusement directed at the ruling tribe-the Russians, and nothing more. I am familiar with the newest literary concoctions of Tatar writers and journalists which criticize funny and lousy elements of their own Tatar society...yet there has not been a Tatar work which would bring out their vices in such sarcastic and mocking way as *Inspector General*.⁵

Smirnov's conviction that "the Tatar crowd" would find it amusing to see the critique of Russian mores was accompanied by his fear that the Tatar audience would get a "lopsided picture about the behavior of Russian people, to whom, they, Tatars should get accustomed, especially in the situation of current rearrangements of internal modes of life of our state."⁶ Importantly, he notes that "in their daily dealings with the Russians they [Tatars, MG] are familiar with only negative sides." If one takes into account the hierarchical nature of Russian --Tatar relations and Russia's vast bureaucratic structure, through which Tatars had to navigate without knowledge of Russian language and bureaucratic codes, Smirnov's concern is not unreasonable. In 1906, when *Inspector*

⁵ RGIA, f.776, op. 25, d.861, l. 11.

⁶ *Ibid.*, l. 14.

General was translated, the the majority of Tatars did not speak Russian and their contact with Russians largely revolved around bureaucratic interactions, which, by their very nature, were unpleasant. At the same time, the very fact that there appeared a Tatar translation of *Inspector General* sponsored by the Kazan City Duma points to the fact that, at least in multi-ethnic Kazan, there were more positive forms of interaction between Tatars and Russians. The St. Petersburg censor's exceptionally sarcastic tone when mentioning the "history of the appearance of this translation" points to his skepticism regarding a possibility of cultural rapprochement between Tatars and Russians, as well as his doubt concerning the necessity of such "cultural enlightenment" among Tatar *inorodsy*.

Smirnov's conviction that translation of *Inspector General* into Tatar had ulterior motives on the part of "enthusiasts of the Tatar literature" came from his belief that Tatars could not have loyalties to Russia as a country. "The Tatar *tolpa* (crowd) at the moment does not completely share the same interests not to mention ideals with the native Russian population. Tatar psychology also isn't similar to ours."⁷ The same trope of Tatar as essentially alien to Russia and Russians is evident in Smirnov's review of Karim Tinchurin's play *Iatlar* (Strangers or *Chuzhie* in Russian). *Iatlar* was an earlier title of Tinchurin's *Shomly Adym*, staged in 1916 by *Sayar*. The play, which I analyzed in Chapter II, portrays the tragic outcome of a marriage between a Tatar man, Salim, and a Russian woman, Maria. The play ends with Maria leaving Salim and his bitter realization that their relationship was doomed because they were strangers to start

⁷ RGIA, f.776, op.26, d. 85, l. 61

with and will remain such: he is a Tatar and Muslim and she is Russian and Orthodox. If one is to take the marriage between Salim and Maria metaphorically, the tragic ending of the play in which Salim ends up completely alone without his wife, his children and his old Tatar friends whom he abandoned for the sake of Maria, could be read and was read by the critics as a warning against the possibility of opening up to the Russians.⁸ Still, the author did not seem to hold either the Tatar Salim or the Russian Maria culpable. The censor, on the other hand, looked at the play with a preconceived notion of Russian superiority and found it annoying that Tinchurin did not think in the same categories. Smirnov was particularly bothered by what he described as “the ambiguity of the final goal and purpose of the play.”

I am not quite sure how to look at the fact that in the play is pictured an illegal affair between a Russian girl and a Tatar man, especially since neither the title nor the development nor the culmination of the play precisely clarifies what it is that the author wanted to tell to his Tatar and, should opportunity arise, to Russian society: whether that a Tatar should not have married a Russian woman because she would not fit their Tatar mores and *byt* or that, he, a Tatar, was honored to be married to an educated Russian girl, and therefore should not have put forth the demands of his primordial Tatar nature and *byt*, but rather he should have tried to reach his wife’s level of culture (*dotsivilizovat’sia do urovnia ego zheny*).⁹

At the same time, if Tatars were to leave “the demands of their primordial nature,” they could possibly become civilized. The state of being civilized for Smirnov and many of the Russians was defined in term of the West, hence his

⁸ “Shomly adym,” *Yulduz*, 22 November 1916.

⁹ RGIA, f. 776, op. 26, d. 85, l. 47-48.

statements about “us, cultured Europeans.” A Westernized, educated Tatar, on the other hand, was a nuisance, especially when this Tatar was to represent Russia abroad, even in the imaginary world of theater. Thus, the censor became extremely indignant when reviewing a Tatar play, *Mahrusa khanyim*, in which a Western-educated Tatar becomes the consul of the Russian state in Paris.

The last act has an inappropriate scene where a *real* [italics are mine] Tatar is represented a Russian Imperial consul abroad. Granted, Russian consuls abroad can be God knows what sorts of mugs...but still, this sudden transformation of Tatar *inorodets* into a representative of Russian state in a foreign country? It is ridiculous and impossible in real life and odd on stage.¹⁰

Indeed it was impossible for a non-baptized, non-Russified, “real” Tatar to become a representative of the Russian state abroad. Smirnov’s rather emotional indignation at this fantasy of a Tatar playwright might point to his private anxiety over what he vaguely defines as “the current rearrangement of matters in the Empire” and “all sorts of new freedoms and such,” that is the state’s attempt to integrate and bring closer to the center its borderlands.

As far as the *Inspector General* is concerned, the Tatar translation was finally staged in 1916, ten years later, after Smirnov’s assistant, Shamil, reviewed it once again at the request of the translator, Galiaskar Kamal. Shamil or Shamiliev (his name clearly points to his Turkic roots) stated, that while Smirnov saw in the translation only a “critique of Russian administration,” the translation did preserve “the epoch of the original, the

¹⁰ RGIA, f. 776, op, 25, d. 861, l. 18.

1840s, in great detail.”¹¹ Therefore, Shamil stated, it would not be sensible to “deprive Tatars of this classic Russian comedy.”¹²

The Tatar theatrical troupe *Sayar*'s staging of *Inspector General* was extremely successful according to Tatar critics. The production was timed for *Sayar*'s director Kariev's benefit night. Ironically, Gabdrahman Karam, in his review of the production, noted that while it is “somewhat surprising that Kariev chose a translated work for his benefit night -- we do have a shortage of our own plays, and the new national plays have not been approved by the censor yet.”¹³ Karam also reiterated Smirnov's statement about the “biting irony” with which Gogol tells this story about “the barbarism, dishonesty and corrupt practices of the Russian bureaucrats.”¹⁴ An anonymous Tatar critic noted that “despite the expensive tickets, the hall was filled” and that Gogol's play “was brilliant in its satire on Russian bureaucrats.”¹⁵

At the same time, two other critics related to the play as “foreign.” One of them, Shahid Axmadiev, complained that during the performance, the actors did not really understand the play, but rather “used the low tastes of the audience, cared only about how to make them laugh.”¹⁶ Another, an anonymous reviewer, noted that to see a “foreign” play on stage was a way to understand the “foreign life,” and get to know “their” cultural achievements. He also added that, even though the play was written nearly seventy years

¹¹ *Ibid.*, l. 64.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Karam, “Revizor,” *Ang* 3 (1916): 55.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 56.

¹⁵ “Kariev's benefisy,” *Koiash*, 8 March 1916.

¹⁶ Shahid Axmadiev, “Revizor piesasy,” *Yulduz*, 5 March 1916.

ago, “we see the types of bureaucrats shown by Gogol—thieves, scoundrels and brutes—all the time.”¹⁷ Clearly this Tatar critic viewed Russian culture as foreign. For both, Smirnov and this critic *Inspector General* was “foreign” in relation to the Tatar audience. But the same understanding of the dynamics of the audience’s response to the play led to completely opposite understanding of the value of the play for the Tatars. The Tatar critic saw the play as a way to familiarize his society with best of Russian culture. Smirnov feared that Tatars would “get a lopsided of Russian society.” The censor, thus solely focused on the content, ignoring the fact that the play’s magnificent form gave the lie to the impression of the Russians as scoundrels. The greater irony, of course, is that neither the Tatar critic nor Smirnov were paying attention to the fact that Gogol was the writer from borderlands.

Starting with its birth in 1905 and until February 1917 when dramatic censorship was abolished, Tatar theatrical repertoire was by and large circumscribed by the will of one person, V.D. Smirnov. The primary censorship of all published material had been abolished after the Revolution of 1905. Dramatic censorship remained until the February Revolution, pointing to fact that the state thought of theater as a very powerful tool of propaganda.

Over a span of twelve years, Professor Smirnov reviewed every play which Tatars wanted to stage. Until 1914, when the state decided to publish the titles of permitted plays in the *Politseiskii Vestnik* available at every police station, Smirnov received requests every time a private individual or a group decided to stage a Tatar play, even if the play was already permitted or prohibited. He received requests for censor reviews of

¹⁷ Teatralchy, “Revizor,” *Yulduz*, 4 March 1916.

both manuscripts and published plays from individual Tatar playwrights such as Iskhakyi, Amirhan and Kamal, as well as *Sayar's* director Kariev. Kazan's cultural club *Sharyk kluby* also sent requests to stage Tatar plays. Importantly, Smirnov received requests for the production of already published Tatar plays from private individuals who were not necessarily intellectuals. For example, on March 10, 1910 Smirnov received a petition from Usman Bigiev, an employee of Akchurin's factory in the city of Kuznetskii, Saratov guberniia, to allow staging of several Tatar plays, such as Kamal's *Berenche Teatr* and *Bekhtetsez Eget* and Idris Bogdanov's *Pomada Meselese*.¹⁸ It is worth mentioning that Bigiev was a petitioner, as the production of the play was to be done by the "amateur actors," workers of Akchurin's factory, located in the village of Samaikysh of Syzran' uezd, Simbirsk guberniia! Most likely the workers did not know Russian either sufficiently or at all to petition on their own, not to mention the state's bureaucratic language—clearly Usman Bigiev did. The production of the aforementioned plays was allowed less than a month later on March 31, unusually quickly and Usman Bigiev later sent two more requests for the production of other Tatar plays, one in July 1910, the other in February 1911.¹⁹ In 1910, the Governor of Semipalatinsk (Russian Turkestan) sent Smirnov a petition from Ismail Ibragimov to stage six Tatar plays.²⁰ In October 1910 a "society for the support of theatrical and musical art" from the city of Troitsk in Northern Turkestan asked Smirnov to allow staging of a number of Tatar plays.²¹ In 1913, a

¹⁸ RGIA, f. 776, op. 25, d. 976. l. 3-4.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, l. 18.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, l. 5. Unfortunately, there was no mention of the titles of the plays in the petition and I was not able to locate any data on whether or not the petition of satisfied.

²¹ RGIA, f. 776, op. 25, d 1003, l. 29.

teacher of the Astrakhan “Muslim religious school,” Gumer Kurushev petitioned Smirnov to allow production of Kamal’s *Bezneng Sheherebez Serleri* (Secrets of our Town) for “our students’ entertainment.”²²

Smirnov often got secondary petitions which politely reminded him of the initial requests that were sent to him five or six month earlier. Iskhakiy in his presentation at the “All-Russian Conference of the Workers of the People Theaters,” held in Moscow in 1916, claimed that Smirnov had absolute power to decide whether or not a Tatar play was to be staged and that, often, the manuscripts of the plays sat at his desk for 3 or so years and then simply disappeared.²³

The job of the censor of Tatar drama was demanding. For one, Smirnov often had to read hand-written manuscripts in Arabic script which is an exceptionally difficult task. Secondly, while trying to decipher the scribbles, he also had to keep his attention on the actual content of the play. Iskhakiy, for example, was in habit of sending Smirnov hand-written texts of his plays. He sent his *Mogallim* twice, in 1908 and 1915. The first time the censor found it unacceptable on political grounds. Smirnov also noted that, at first, he had “categorically refused to read the hand-written text,” but was ready to read a printed version any time.

Nevertheless, the author found it possible to sent me a hand-written text again, eight months later. This circumstance is not devoid of special meaning. The reading of Tatar hand-written texts, careless and with corrections, literally exhausts the attention of the reader, especially when this attention should be exceptional, since the question is whether or not to stage a given work. I have

²² RGIA, f. 776, op. 25, d. 1058, l. 1.

²³ Vsesoiuznyi Nauchnyi Institut Isskustvovedenia, f. 2663, op.1, d. 1, 105-07, Iskhakov, “O Tatarskom teatre,” *Trudy Vserossiiskogo S'ezda deiatelei narodnykh teatrov*, (Moscow, 1915-1916).

no doubt that the author was counting on straining the censor's brain and eye to the maximum. He knew that he would be arrested had he tried to print his play---which is open propaganda of a revolutionary and social-democratic agenda...he then hoped his work would slide by the censor so that when if he decides to print it, it not the author, but the censor, who would be held responsible...a stumbling block to the censor's well-being.²⁴

Second time, in 1915, following a new petition by Iskhakyyi, Shamilev reviewed the play again, most likely during Smirnov's vacation, and found it overall suitable for the stage with the exception of a few places, which he thought were overtly political: "not only we, all Russia changed. It is a revolution," or "Kazan is boiling," or "Russians got the land, and we are left with nothing."²⁵

In 1914, Iskhakyyi also sent Smirnov a hand-written copy of another play *Mogallima*, which provoked an outburst from the censor. He duly noted that this "hand-written text" was extremely difficult to read and that he frees himself of responsibility of being slow in the review of the play. From his note, it becomes clear that Iskhakyyi wrote a complaint to the Chief of the Main Directory of the Printed Works about the long time it was taking Smirnov to read the text. The Chief in turn scolded Smirnov and demanded in the future to "specify the time frame" of his reviews, which, by the way, has to be "within reasonable limits." Smirnov humbly but strongly asked to release him in the future from reading hand written texts, noting that

The play has nothing in it. No ideas, no sense, no art, but most importantly, nothing that would prevent the production of this theatrical prattle on Tatar stage for the satisfaction of the Tatar public.

²⁴ RGIA, f. 776, op. 25, d. 1163, l. 9.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, l. 6.

It's worth mentioning that *Mogallima*, which I analyzed in Chapter II, although criticized by the Tatar reviewers for its poor structure, was one of the most thought-provoking plays of the 1914-1915 season. It dealt with the question of female freedom and the one Tatar woman's sacrifice for the "sake of her nation." To Smirnov, who came from a completely different culture, the play had no meaning.

The criteria on which Smirnov based his judgment were political, cultural and even ethical, but never aesthetic. The censor never rejected a Tatar play on the basis of its "poor structure" or "bad taste," "vulgarity," or "absence of ideas," although he constantly complained about these problems. In fact, Smirnov often approved poorly constructed, low-quality melodrama, on the basis that such simplistic works would fit the "intellectual level of Tatar spectators." Hence, the lack of sophistication of Tatar theatrical repertoire which was noted by Tatar critics stemmed partly from Smirnov's power to allow or refuse the production of one or another play. Thus, Iskhakiy's *Mogallim*, *Dzemgyat*, *Kyamet* and *Aldym-Birdem*, plays that had a hefty dose of social critique and realism were not allowed to be staged for 5 years. Likewise, a play by a well-known Azeri playwright Nariman Narimanov, *Nadir Shah* which dealt with the history of ancient Iranian kings and where a former vagabond becomes a just and benevolent ruler, was prohibited by Smirnov in 1909 on the grounds that it would "not positively affect the minds of the local population which is already in the state of anxiety because of the recent internecine struggle."²⁶ Smirnov revoked his decision in 1916 and the play was finally staged by *Sayar* in January 1917. According to the critics, the production was excellent and the critic's only complaint was that their own Tatar theater

²⁶ RGIA, f. 776, op. 25, d. 805, l. 1.

is short of historical plays, whereas Tatars have plenty of historical material on which to draw.²⁷

As a censor, Smirnov looked foremost at whether or not a given play was “politically reliable,” had any anti-monarchist, anti-Russian, anti-Orthodox, anti-state references. Some plays and parts of plays he found “unsuitable for production on stage” for ethical reasons, as in case of plays with scenes from the “internal life (*byt*) of the whorehouses.” At the same time, as in the case of a play, *Kem Gaeple*, what was unsuitable for the Russian theater – to stage a story about a religious figure who had an illegal affair with his wife’s relative and then murdered his illegitimate child --- was fine for the Tatar stage.²⁸ “Let the Tatars see what their fanatic mullahs are capable of doing. In any case, let the play be staged. It is the author, after all, not the censor, who will be held responsible for the credibility of the events that will take place on stage.”²⁹

Problems arose when there was a question of irony involved in the play. Irony, perfectly understood by “us, cultured Europeans,” was incomprehensible to the “unenlightened.” For example, Galiaskar Kamal’s famous *Bezneng sheherebez serleri* (The Secrets of Our Town), which was lauded by Tatar critics for its sharp, biting satire on Kazan Tatar merchant society, was criticized by Smirnov for the parts where uneducated merchants talk about Japan’s conversion to Islam and name Turkey, the

²⁷ “Nadir Shah,” *Koiash*, 24 January 1917.

²⁸ RGIA, f. 776, op. 26, d. 85, l. 28.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

greatest power, in the world.³⁰ His fear was that “the Tatars will listen to such “anachronisms” from the stage and even enjoy them.”³¹

Likewise, Iskhakiy’s *Dzemgiat* was prohibited by Smirnov on the grounds that Tatar audience will not comprehend the play’s irony. “For an educated person, even from this badly put together play, it is clear that those Tatars who oppose an establishment of a charitable society, considering it a tool of Russification, are being made fun of.” “For the majority of Tatar audience, these characters, instead of funny will seem steadfast in their fear of Russification and missionaries.”³² This play was again allowed by Shamil in 1915, with the exception of few minor phrases.³³ It must have made meticulous Smirnov very happy to come back from his yearly vacations only to find that Shamil allowed the productions of the plays against which he had so vigorously protested.

It is clear from his reviews that Shamil is an educated native speaker of Russian and, most likely, a non-Muslim. At the same time the language and the tone of Shamil’s reviews of the Tatar play is much less vehement and more intimate than that of Smirnov’s. This might indicate that unlike Smirnov, Shamil was an insider to the Turkic Muslim community. For example when, in January 1912, during Smirnov’s absence, Shamil reviewed the play *Tosheny iaki Ukaz Belesi* (A Misfortune from a Decree), he found the scene in which the village *mullah* was trying to bribe a Russian *pristav*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, l. 30.

³¹ *Ibid.*.

³² *Ibid.*, l. 11

³³ *Ibid.*, l. 6.

objectionable.³⁴ Shamil wrote, “The Tatar public in general is less cultured than the Russian and may not understand why the *pristav* refused the bribe.” He also noted that the last scene which is set in the mosque might seem blasphemous to the “less cultured (*malokul’turnaia*) Tatar masses, which are also very religious.”³⁵ Shamil clearly feels enough at home to judge what Tatar spectators would find objectionable. He is using the same Russian vocabulary of difference but in a much more intimate way.

Smirnov was also bothered by the aforementioned scenes of the bribery and the sermon in the *mosque* but from a different, Russo-centric perspective. In his review of *Tosheny iaki Ukaz belesi*, Smirnov showed his discomfort with the fact that “a representative of Russian government (*vlast*”) was giving in to the Tatars, and even publicly admitted it,” referring to the scene where *pristav* kicks out the *mullah* in fear that “God knows what people might think!” In the scene at the *mosque*, Smirnov found particularly bothersome the new village *mullah*’s “sermon, which calls for the unification of all Muslims...quite a fashionable theme which both Tatars and Turkish sirs love to talk about, instilling in Muslims the idea of pan-Islamism.”³⁶

When it came to Iskhakyi’s *Kyamet*, an extremely biting play where the author makes fun of Tatar mullahs who talk about the Second Coming, both censors found it unsuitable for Tatar stage. Smirnov actually liked it very much that the play made fun of the “ignorance of Tatar mullahs.”³⁷ He, however, again worried that “barbaric Muslims” will miss the irony of the play and take the speeches of the mullahs, who, in the play, call

³⁴ *Pristav*—a police officer in pre-revolutionary Russia.

³⁵ RGIA, f. 776, op. 26, d. 85, ll. 20-21.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, ll. 18-19.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, l. 12.

the Russians *Gog and Magog*, literally. “There is no need to reinforce from the stage what our Muslim *inorodotsy* already have in their heads...To rumple a Russian name in such stupid and tasteless atmosphere, even if the author had didactic goals in mind seems unsuitable.”³⁸ Shamil simply thought that the play, where the “Tatar *ulama* is shown in a very negative light,” will be insulting to the “dark masses of Muslims.”³⁹ Shamil’s comment in 1915, however, is anachronistic, considering the fact that Tatar religious figures had long been a favorite object of satire in Tatar plays, having become almost synonymous with conceit and hypocrisy.⁴⁰

Tatar playwrights’ ostensible or real subversive intentions were another stumbling block in Smirnov’s judgment of Tatar plays. In his review of Gumer Teregulov’s *Shekert hem Iashliar*, the censor pointed out that the play, written in 1908, pictured the struggle between the *iashliar* and *kadimchilar* in which the former were positive heroes advocating learning Russian while the latter were portrayed extremely unfavorably as enemies of everything modern including learning Russian. Smirnov noted that *iashliar* in play also criticized “the Tatars who study in Egypt and Turkey and boast their putative education while they do not even know Russian language.” Smirnov found the play problematic on several grounds. He thought that such critique of Tatar mullahs would provoke resentment among “conservative Tatars.” What bothered Smirnov the most was the fact that the play propagandized the study of Russian not for the sake of the language but “as a tool to wake up Tatar feelings of national consciousness and fight the enemy

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 1. 4.

⁴⁰ See, for example Sagyd Ramiev’s *Iashi Zobaida*, *iashim min*, S. Galiev’s *Nizamly medreseh* and so forth.

with his own weapon.”⁴¹ Since “fighting the enemy with his own weapon,” were the actual words of one of the plays heroes, one can certainly see subversion of Russian statehood in the play. However, these were the words of Zeki, a “Turkofil”, one of the Turkey-educated young men who are criticized in the play. At a certain point the censor himself admits that is hard to say what in the play is “sensible and what is not in not in terms of questions of society and state.”⁴² “What if the words of *iashliar* will find a response among the Tatar public...we certainly do not want to see more of those innovators among Tatars who want to serve their nation even if they are doing such useful and desirable thing as learning Russian.”⁴³

Smirnov reflections on Tatars demonstrate his conviction in the absolute superiority of Christianity over Islam. In his review of the Tatar translation of Heinrich Heine’s *Al’-Mansor* the censor notes that

Even though Heine was a Jew [never mind that Heine was baptized! M.G.], in his play he did picture the victory of the Christian element over the Muslim essence. The Tatar translation, well not really a translation but rather an imitation has nothing of the original idea of the play. Rather it is the episodic picture of the establishment of the two worlds, Christian and Muslim, even if on romantic lining...⁴⁴

The review was written in 1914, and the censor found it unsuitable on the grounds that it “might provoke empty hatred of Muslims spectators toward their Christian compatriots, and this is especially undesirable at the moment when a Muslim state,

⁴¹ RGIA, f. 776, op. 26, d. 85, l. 4.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ RGIA, f. 776, op. 26, d. 85, ll. 58-59.

Turkey is fighting alongside Germany, the enemy of Russia.”⁴⁵ *Al’ Mansor* was staged in 1917 after the abolishment of dramatic censorship. The play’s Orientalist thematics made it probably particularly appealing to *Sayar*. Western deliberations on the East were in vogue among some Tatar intellectuals at the time.

Along with ultimate incompatibility of Christianity and Islam went Smirnov’s distinction between the “civilized Europeans” and Asiatic Tatars -- primitive, unsophisticated brutes. However, unlike Yuri Slezkine’s Small Peoples of the North, who were conceptualized by Russians and later Soviets as pure innocent children Tatars were far from being that.⁴⁶ They were cunning, obtrusive, subversive and dishonest in their intents. In one of his reviews, Smirnov states that Iskhakyi kept on sending him, over and over again, the manuscript of his play after it was already prohibited, with “tiresomeness, inherent in Tatars, hoping that things will just slide by (*so svoistvennoi Tataram nazoilivost’iu ...nadeias’ chto vse proskol’znet na avos*’).⁴⁷ Smirnov’s vocabulary reveals both his latent Judeophobia, at the same time, his own anxiety vis-a-vis “cultured Europe.” To the Russian reader of Smirnov’s time the usage of epithet *nazoilivyi* signaled one of the many essential “Jewish” qualities, making his statement about Tatars more potent and placing them in the culturally more familiar referential space.⁴⁸ Smirnov’s anti-Semitic tendencies are quite evident in his 1916 review of the Tatar translation of *Vechnyi Strannik* (The Eternal Wonderer). “The play is nothing other

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Yuri Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North* (Ithaca, 1994), 389

⁴⁷ RGIA, f. 776, op. 26, d. 85, l. 36.

⁴⁸ For the analysis of the persistence of the language of “jewish difference” in Russian and European 19th centuries literary texts see Leonid Livak “Why is Dracula Afraid of Garlic or Anton Chekov and “the jews”, *Stanford Slavic Studies* vol. 3 Part 1 (2007), 127-153.

than a confession of the Jews (*ispoved' evreistva*)...Constant complaints about the limitations they encounter because of the laws established in Russia....It is clear that these Jews were the victims of some (so-called) Jewish pogrom, and pogroms, as we know, are thought by the Jews and their servants to be instigated by the agents of the Russian government... This tendentious play must not be staged either in Russian or in Tatar, especially in such an unstable time as ours”⁴⁹

When it comes to *avos'* which, to this day, is seen as an essentially Russian quality, but was relegated to Russian peasants by the Russian intelligentsia, it is chosen by Smirnov to signal Tatar laziness and dishonesty. However, it also signals his desire to dissociate himself from that Asiatic and barbaric part of Russia. As evident from his reviews, cultured, civilized and European was synonymous for the censor.

Smirnov's distaste of Tatar plays was often justified by the poor artistic quality of many plays he had to read. At the same time, for V.D. Smirnov, Tatars crystallized everything that Russians were not: uncivilized, brutes, cunning, uncultured, dumb, vulgar, primitive, foreign, nationalistic and hateful of Russia and everything Russian. It is against this backdrop that we must view the *iashliars'* and other Tatar intellectuals' discourse on Tatar identity. The extent to which Tatar identities “performed” in my study were contingent on interactions with the perspectives on Tatar society expressed by Smirnov and those like him is not easily shown. It is telling, however, that in critiquing the Tatar repertoire an intellectual like Karam refers to the authority of his “Russian friend” who thinks the majority of Tatar plays as *poshlye* (vulgar, trivial).⁵⁰ It is also

⁴⁹ RGIA, f. 776, op. 26, d. 85, l. 65.

⁵⁰Karam, “Iashi Zobaida, iahsim min,” *Ang* 21 (1914): 401.

telling that in such periodicals as *Ang*, owned by the progressive Tatar merchant Ahmad Garai Khasani and edited by Karam, the “East” is often referred to as “sleeping” and illustrated by the reproduction of French Orientalist paintings with intoxicated, turbaned men, smoking hookahs in coffee houses or bloody vendettas in harems. It is clear that at least these Tatar intellectuals and entrepreneurs were on some level buying in the Orientalist narrative of Muslim culture and adopting a Russian cultural vocabulary to judge their own culture. This, of course, presents a stark contrast to Amirhan’s conscious appropriation of Chekhov’s artistic forms and Turgenev’s social paradigms while referring to the value of Tatar Islamic cultural tradition and the “ancient” written culture, or to Iskhakiy’s construction of the history of Kriashen community and its relationship to Islam and Orthodoxy.

Chapter VII

Tatar Stage in Soviet-Era Memoirs

In the final chapter of my thesis I will first, briefly discuss the individual fates of *iashliar* as well as political options chosen by the *iashliar* during and after 1917. Then, in the main body of my chapter, I will examine the voices of Tatar actors and actresses, the members of *Sayar*, who unlike the *iashliar*, did not have the social status and cultural outlets to express their personal ideas and opinions directly during the theater's heyday. Here, I will look at the post-revolutionary narratives of Tatar pre-revolutionary theater produced by the former members of *Sayar* as well as the members of *Shimbe kicheler*, the informal gatherings of Tatar youth which I discussed in Chapter 3. I will examine the ways in which the memoirists' retrospective vision of Tatar pre-revolutionary theater was influenced not only by Soviet rhetoric, but also by their very real social backgrounds which differed markedly from each other. I will also demonstrate how Soviet publishers codified and restructured the erratic – albeit permeated by the Soviet vocabulary of class struggle and oppression – autobiography and memoirs of one particular actress into a coherent narrative of stoicism and suffering..

Iashliar in Politics After 1917

The short historical moment of 1917 was a time of unprecedented political freedom for Tatar society as well as other ethnic groups of the Empire. Despite the fears of the Russian Imperial censor, V.D. Smirnov, many Tatar *inorodsy*, or at least the majority of those who were in power to make political decisions, opted to preserve the geopolitical integrity of the old Russia. The Tatar delegates of the first Russian-Muslim congress, held in March 1917 in Moscow, voted for extraterritorial cultural autonomy rather than a federation, the political option preferred by the Central Asian and Azeri delegates.¹ Unlike their Turkestani brethren, the Tatar population lived mixed with the Russians to a much greater extent. Tatar delegates hoped that extraterritorial cultural autonomy would give Tatars a necessary connection with other Turks of the Empire. A few months later, the October Revolution aborted any hopes for either political or cultural autonomy.

Many Tatar intellectuals accepted the Bolshevik regime. The Russian intelligentsia's hostility toward the regime seemed to be absent among their Tatar brethren, or at least the majority of Tatars *jadids* and *iasliar* did not openly express it by either emigrating abroad or refusing to cooperate with the regime internally. After all, the Bolsheviks' motto of "national in content, social in form," fit well with Tatar intellectuals' pre-revolutionary conception of national rebirth, and *iasliar* in their thinking were very close to *narodniki*. Some important exceptions were Gaiaz Iskhakyi and his friend, the political thinker, Fuad Tukhtarov, who both adopted a staunch nationalist stand after February 1917 and fought on the side of the Volunteer Army during the Civil War, hoping to establish a politically independent Idel-Ural state, which

¹ See Aisha Rorolich, *The Volga Tatars: A Profile in National Resilience* (Stanford, 1986), 129.

would include the Kazan and Ufa regions. After occupation of Kazan by Reds, Iskhakyi escaped to Siberia together with Kolchak's Army, and, eventually, through Kharbin, escaped to the France.² In 1920, in France, Iskhakyi organized the "Idel-Ural organization," which adopted a strong nationalistic, anti-Russian and anti-Soviet stand. As Iskhakyi wrote in his 1933 essay *Idel-Ural*: "The Russian revolution is not over. Bolsheviks in this revolution are only its transitional phase. The revolution, whose main content at the moment is the national question, can be finished only by radical solution of this question in the former Russia -- the final liberation of all nationalities which struggle for their independence."³ As a leader of the organization, Iskhakyi established strong ties with Tatar émigré communities of Japan and China. His *Zoleiha* was performed in Tokio in 1937 by a group of Tatar youth.⁴ He moved to Istanbul at the beginning of WWII and remained active in Tatar émigré cultural circles, producing a number of novels and editing a nationalist, anti-Soviet journal, *Inga Milli Yul* (New National Path). Back at home, Iskhakyi's name was obliterated from the historiography of Tatar culture until the collapse of Soviet Union and the Tatar cultural revival of the 1990s.

Other most prominent members of the *iashliar* group such as Fatih Amirhan, Zhamal Validi, Gaziz Gubaidullin, Karim Tinchurin Gabdrahman Karam chose to remain in the newly established Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic and attempted to participate in the cultural and education work of the new regime.⁵ The early to mid-

² Flun Musin, *Gaiaz Iskhakyi* (Kazan, 1998), 110.

³ Gaiaz Iskhakyi, *Idel-Ural* (1933, reprint Kazan, 1991), 62.

⁴ Musin, *Gaiaz Iskhakyi*, 116.

⁵ See Adeeb Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia* (Berkeley, 1998), 281-301, for an analysis of the Central Asian *jadids*' fight for power in the newly established Soviet institutions.

1920s brought a number of reflective works on Tatar history before the October Revolution. It was also a time of relative cultural freedom in Russia as a whole. Gaziz Gubaidullin, for example, published several works on Tatar and Turkic historiography and history.⁶ Zhamal Validi's influential *Ocherk istorii obrazovannosti i literatury volzhskikh Tatar*, published in Moscow and Petrograd in 1923, gave an as objective as possible view of Tatar reform currents before 1917. The section on Iskhakyi described him as "a major force in Tatar literature," and a "person who loves to struggle and possesses bursting social energy,"⁷ despite the fact that Iskhakyi was already in emigration. From the mid-1920s, the atmosphere started to become more rigid, reflecting the growth of Stalin's power in the Politburo, as well as the crackdown on fellow-travelers and "bourgeois" elements in intelligentsia. Hence, a historiography of Tatar revolutionary movements *Tatary v Revolutsii 1905 goda*, written by an orthodox Communist Galimzhan Ibragimov and published in 1926 in Kazan, defines Iskhakyi as a person with no real social and political conviction, a political opportunist who was flirting with socialism in the beginning of his career, and now is "enjoying himself in emigration along with the Whites."⁸ Ibragimov, himself a writer of a considerable talent, whom Zhamal Validi called one of the *iashliar* and a "romantist," as opposed to "nigilist" Amirhan and "narodnik" Iskhakyi in his 1915,⁹ also edited a compilation of

⁶ See, for example, "Razvitie istoricheskoi literatury u turko-tatarskikh narodov," *Pervyi Vsesoiznyi turkologicheskii s'ezd*, (Baku, 1926, reprint in *Gaziz Gubaidullin [Kazan, 2002]*) and "Iz proshlogo Tatar," *Materialy po izucheniu Tatarstana* (1925, reprint in *ibid.*), 112-177.

⁷ Zhamal Validi, *Ocherk istorii obrazovannosti i literatury povolzhskikh tatar* (Moscow-Petrograd, 1923), 84-85.

⁸ Galimzhan Ibragimov, *Tatary v Revolutsii 1905-goda* (Kazan, 1926), 202-203.

⁹ Validi, "Mogallima: Gaiiaz Iskhakyi esere," *Vakyt*, 10 January 1915.

essays dedicated to the 20th anniversary of Tatar theater, in which there was no mention of Iskhakyi.¹⁰ There is also no mention of Fatih Amirhan, who passed away in 1924 and was branded as a “bourgeois” writer. In the compilation, a special place is dedicated to the Tatar comedy writer, Galiaskar Kamal. His story is telling in terms of the ways Tatar cultural history was reworked after the October Revolution. Kamal was one of the best and most popular comedy writers in pre-revolutionary Tatar theater. His works made fun of the Tatar religious establishment and Tatar merchants, whom he, as a merchant son-in-law knew quite intimately. They lacked, however, social conflict. The author himself, although closely associated with *iashliar*, never adopted a particular political stand. According to Tatar theatrical reviews, Kamal’s comedies were light and funny with witty dialogs and characters that were very familiar to Kazan theatrical audience.¹¹

Already in 1916, however, Karam in one of his reviews noted that Kamal had drawn out his creative reserve and has not been “pleasing the audience with new works.”¹² As a playwright, Kamal remained inactive until his death in 1933. Unlike the works by Gaiiaz Iskhakyi, Fatih Amirhan, or Karim Tinchurin, Kamal’s works never presented a political problem for either the Tsarist or Soviet regimes, nor did they elicit a heated reaction among the audience or the critics. In fact, it must have been to both

¹⁰ Significantly, the compilation is still printed in Arabic script, although it was published in 1926 after the adoption of Latin alphabet by TASSR. Ibragimov, an orthodox Communist was against the dropping of Arabic script, arguing that Tatars had a long-established written culture based on Arabic script, see Rorlich, *The Volga Tatars*, 151.

¹¹ Karam, “Kariev’s benefisy,” *Ang* 6 (1915): 126. Kamal was born in 1879, into a fur dealer family which enjoyed a modicum of economic well-being. He attended Kazan’s *jadid* Mohammadia and Gosmania *medresehs*, and was well versed in Persian, Arabic, Turkish and Russian. He was one of the patrons of *Sharyk kluby*, see Galiaskar Kamal, *Sailanma eserler* vol. 2 (Kazan, 1951), 267-68.

¹² Karam, “Tigezsezliar, uylendim, nik uylendim,” *Ang* 19-20 (1916): 313.

Imperial and Soviet censors' liking that in his works Kamal made fun of Tatar mullahs, merchants and their evil-tongued and greedy wives -- the representative of Tatar "religious and cultural fanaticism," to use the staple Russian Imperial as well as Soviet expression. Kamal's works never directly or indirectly dealt with Tatar position vis-à-vis Russian state, church, or culture. They were internally circumscribed. As such, for the purposes of the Soviet ideology, he was the least controversial of all Tatar pre-revolutionary playwrights. Thus, it comes to no surprise that, in 1939, six years past his death, the new Tatar state theater came to bear his name. It has remained Galiaskar Kamal's Tatar State Theater to this day. Despite the fact that Tatar State Theater came to bear his name, Kamal's comedies were not staged throughout most of Soviet time, most likely because they lacked social, not to mention class conflict, until they were rediscovered in the mid-1990s by the theater's new, dynamic director Farit Bikchentaev. Bikchentaev's productions exquisitely reconstructed the Tatar pre-revolutionary ways of socializing and behavior so palpable in Kamal's works, as if to signal to the contemporary Tatarstani audience, raised on Soviet notions of "Tatar nation," a different way to conceptualize Tatar identity and historical past.¹³

¹³ Bikchentaev is a Moscow-educated young director, who came to the Tatar State Theater in the early 1990s. In my conversations with various members of the contemporary Tatar cultural elite, I heard mixed opinions of his style. Some, rejecting his "Moscow style," commented that Bikchentaev does not have a "national soul," (*milli zhan*, in Tatar), especially when compared to the former, deceased director, Marsel Salimzhanov. Others, especially the members of the Tatar youth club, named *Sharyk* (significantly, after the pre-revolutionary culture club) consider Bikchentaev hip and enjoy his productions tremendously. The members of today's *Sharyk*, mostly in their early twenties, are particularly drawn to early 20th century cultural life in Kazan. They see this period as the Tatar cultural Renaissance and consider the *jadids* and *iashliar* their cultural icons. The way in which Bikchentaev structured the last episode of the final act of Kamal's famous *Bezneng shaherebez serliare*, (Secrets of Our City), a parody on cultural mores of pre-revolutionary Kazan, resembled pre-revolutionary photographs of well-off Kazan families. Even the lighting reflected the sepia of old photographs. The costumes also looked as if they were taken directly off of the photographs. Significantly, during Soviet times, the official,

Another member of the *iashliar* group, Karim Tichurin, a stage director of *Sayar* and a playwright, became the director of the Tatar State Theater established in Kazan in the 1924. He produced a number of plays, the most significant and popular being *Zenger Shal* (1929), a musical melodrama, which drew heavily on Tatar folk life, but with an ideological twist, fitting the Soviet motto of “national in form, socialist in content.” Ironically, the ideological twist of Tinchurin’s play, in which the negative hero is a Tatar religious figure, was not at all new to the Tatar theatrical genre. As far as the folkloric elements—the mores and traditions of a Tatar village—are concerned, already by early 1917 Tatar intellectuals pointed to the need to show Tatar “folk traditions” on stage.¹⁴ Tinchurin was arrested in 1937 as an “enemy of the people.” In 1956, his wife, Zahida Tinchurina, received notification of his death from stomach cancer in 1947. In 1987, Tinchurina, together with contemporary Tatar playwright Rabit Batullah, wrote a letter to the KGB requesting a clarification of the time and cause of his death. Fifty years after his arrest, his widow finally received notification of Tinchurin’s execution in 1938.¹⁵

Tinchurin’s fate was no exception. The majority of Tatar intellectuals were purged in the 1930s. Validi, Gubaidullin, the female educator Mohlisa Bobi, Fatih Karimi, Iarullah Vali, even Galimzhan Ibragimov were all purged. Gabdrahman Karam, the main Tatar theatrical critic, was ousted from the cultural scene. His merchant

“national festival” representation of Tatar nation used only village dress, so one would never see these kinds of clothes on stage.

¹⁴ See, for example, a protocol of a musical and theatrical society *Musulman muzyka ve drama zhemgiate* from Orenburg with Fatih Karimi as a member. Published in “Teatr galemi, *Ang*, 2 (1917) is also Kariev’s announcement for the best play competition.

¹⁵ *Karim Tinchurin* (Kazan, 2003), 75. Tinchurina had reason for suspicions about the time and cause of her husband’s death. A certain Lokman Nuguman had seen the name of Tinchurin in a list of “enemies of the people” shot in 1938 and told Tinchurina about it (*ibid.*).

heritage, as well as his work in such “petty-bourgeois” newspapers and journals as *Yoldyz*, *Koiash*, *Ang*, as well as the “pan-Turkic and pan-Islamic” organization *Sharyk kluby* were not forgiven. Starting in the mid-1920s, he was no longer publishing his articles in newspapers and worked as a janitor in a printing-house until his death in 1942.¹⁶

Model Soviet Men and Women The Memoirs of Tatar Actors

The *iashliar*, the main culture producers in pre-revolutionary Kazan, were no longer present in the Soviet Tatar cultural production market by the mid-1920s and, especially, after the purges of 1930s. Tatar actors, on the other hand, those who survived the turmoil of the Civil War, famine and epidemic of typhus, came to the forefront of the Tatar cultural scene. Immediately after October, their artistic paths were lauded as models of perseverance and stoicism.

Tatar actors had also been seen in the light of self-sacrifice by pre-revolutionary Tatar theatrical critics. However, at the turn of the 20th century, no special attention was paid to their social backgrounds. What was important was the actors’ struggle to overcome the “backwardness” of Tatar society, a goal they shared with all liberal-thinking Tatars.

Sayar’s director Gabdullah Kariev’s death from typhus in 1920 gave a stimulus to the production of reflective literature on the history of Tatar theater. Two articles are particularly significant in terms of the kinds of tropes that were becoming dominant in

¹⁶ Aigul Salikhova, “Literaturno-kriticheskoe nasledie Gabdrahmana Karama,” (Avtoreferat kandidatskoi dissertatsii, Kazan State University, 1998), 13.

new Soviet Tatar cultural rhetoric. In his 1920 article named “To the memory of comrade Gabdullah Kariev,” Galimzhan Ibragimov describes Kariev’s artistic path in the language of Apocalypse, class struggle and pre-revolutionary romantic nationalism and self-sacrifice:

The old life is being destroyed and, in the midst of blood, destruction and shock, the new one is being born... Gabdullah Kariev, who lightened up the Tatar world with his glorious example, came from the very bottom of Tatar life, a dark and poor village... Despite being not understood by the people, despite cold looks, initial lack of attention and endless hunger he dedicated himself not only to Tatar theater, but to the creation of fine arts in the Tatar world. For Kariev, there was no personal life, world and happiness, only theater.¹⁷

No doubt that Kariev’s association with Gaiaza Iskhakyi and the Volunteer Army in the aftermath of the October Revolution would not have been forgotten during the purges. However, in 1920, Ibragimov felt comfortable enough to blame this very inconvenient fact of Kariev’s biography on the kinds of “mistakes that the historical time we live in produced.” After all, “Kariev understood his mistake very quickly and returned from *Kolchakstan* to the Soviet land, to the service of the proletariat and the peasants.”¹⁸

The second article, named “To the memory of Kariev,” was written by Fatih Amirhan, in the best tradition of the Russian intelligentsia’s self-flagellation. “Political and economical circumstances made us petty bourgeois, very petty bourgeois, and we remained out of the current of the social life. In these circumstances, the perseverance and self-sacrifice demonstrated by Kariev and his friends in the field of establishing Tatar

¹⁷ Galimzhan Ibragimov, *Kyzyl Armiya*, 30 January 1920, published in *Gabdullah Kariev turynda istelekler* (Kazan), 44.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* “Kolchakstan,” derived from Kolchak and Turkic *stan* for a land, was a pejorative for Admiral Kolchak’s middle Siberian camp, in which some Tatars, like Iskhakyi, Tuktarov and evidently Kariev, escaped after October. See Flun Musin, *Gaiaz Iskhakyi* (Kazan, 1998), 110.

theater is worthy of all admiration.”¹⁹ Significantly, already in 1921, Amirhan adopted the Bolshevik rhetoric of intolerance toward the old intelligentsia.

Sayar's actors reminiscences and autobiographies written mostly in the late 1920s to late 1950s reflect the apocalyptic language of Soviet regime. They portray the pre-revolutionary path of Tatar theater in accordance to the main Soviet trope of class struggle and oppression, ending with the erection of a new kingdom, just and fair. The unpredictable, volatile and, in many ways, bohemian life style of Tatar actors before the revolution was codified by the actors into a rigid story of suffering and stoicism. The very notion of “Tatar nation” (*milliat*), in the service of which *Sayar* along with *iashliar* envisioned itself to be, was changed into “Tatar people.” Ironically, this brought it closer to the *narodnik* roots of the *iashliar*'s thinking, but without the nationalist veneer. “Tatar people” was no longer based on horizontal identification, i.e. unity in language, religion and race. In the story of Tatar cultural and theatrical life written in early Soviet times, it came to mean the impoverished stratum of Tatar society.

Unlike the *iashliar* who wrote Tatar plays producing new cultural aesthetics and sensibilities, actors had a secondary role in the pre-revolutionary Tatar cultural production market. After all, theater was a medium for the *iashliar*'s discourse. Acting, as well as playing musical instruments was looked down on in early 20th century Tatar society. Theater was scorned by Muslim clerics and, for women, acting was considered socially illegitimate. All Turkic Muslims of the Russian Empire, as well as the Ottoman Turks, did not allow their women to act on stage. Usually it was men who performed

¹⁹ Fatih Amirhan, “Kariev khatirese,” *Kyzyl Armia*, n.411, 1921, published in Fatih Amirhan, *Eserlere*, vol.3 (Kazan, 1986), 167.

female roles, as in the case of Turkish theater.²⁰ The Azeri theater employed Armenian women for the female parts, and, in Bokhara, these roles were taken up by the Bokharian Jewish community.

As men and women of new cultural sensibilities, modeling themselves on “progressive” European and Russian cultures, Tatar intellectuals of the early teens attempted to change their society’s unfavorable conception of acting. Karam, for example, in one 1913 article wrote that, “thanks to the efforts of Tatar actors and actresses, Tatar theater has finally acquired the status of citizenship, similar to the status of theater in European countries.”²¹ In 1916, Karam noted that the hard work of *Sayar* and its director, Gabdullah Kariev, had finally changed Tatar society’s conception of actors as “comedians” (*kamitcheliar* in Tatar).²² The extent to which this conception changed is hard to establish. On the one hand, when, in the same 1916, a correspondent of the Tatar newspaper *Koiash* interviewed a very wealthy Tatar merchant, Saidgarei Alkin, one of *Sharyk kluby*’s patron, Alkin was highly critical of *Sayar*’s choice of foreign melodrama, noting that theater is a “school” and that he did not want to be “educated in foreign ways.”²³ Clearly here, a Tatar merchant similarly to Tatar reformers, accords theater a high status of an educational establishment.

On the other hand, Karim Tinchurin’s story of disagreement with his own father, a Tatar peasant, demonstrates quite the opposite. When Karim’s mother, the daughter of village mullah, wanted to send her son to Kazan to be educated in the *medreseh*, his

²⁰ Biblioteka Tatarskogo Otdelenia Vserossiiskogo Teatrla’nogo Obschestva, f.7, n 40. l.10.

²¹ Karam, “Ianga yil karshy alu,” *Ang* 23 (1913): 423.

²² Karam, “Revizor,” *Ang* 3 (1916): 55.

²³ Alkin, “Milli Teatr,” *Koiash*, 29 January 1916.

father objected on the grounds that the household cannot lose a worker. Karim's mother secretly sent her son to Kazan, where he became involved with *Sayar*, first as an actor, than as a director. To the end of his days, Karim Tinchurin's father did not forgive his wife for making their son a "comedian" (*kamitche*), even as Tinchurin was promoted to a prestigious position of the director of Tatar theater, an essential part of Soviet cultural structure.²⁴ The reminiscences of *Sayar* actor Kasym Shamil, written in 1946, tell the story of another *Sayar* actor, Gabdrahman Mangushev, whose father, a professional clerk was devastated by his son's decision to become an actor, a profession, the father considered much less respectable than that of a clerk. According to Shamil, the father personally begged *Sayar*'s director Gabdullah Kariev not to let young Mangushev join the troupe, when it toured Ufa in 1910. Mangushev, however, secretly ran away from his family in Ufa and joined *Sayar*.²⁵ Both Mangushev and Tinchurin came from stable albeit simple social backgrounds. However, many Tatar actors, unlike the majority of Tatar intellectuals, came from economically disadvantaged families. This was especially true of Tatar women, who were the first Turkic Muslim women to act on stage.

Sahibzhamal Gyizatullina-Volzhskaia The First Tatar Actress (1885-1974)

The first Tatar female actress, Sahibzhamal Gyizatullina-Volzhskaia, was orphaned at a very early age. Gyizatullina-Volzhskaia entered the Soviet history of Tatar theater as a quintessential hero. She came from a poor family, she was a woman and a talented actress. Gyizatullina-Volzhskaia wrote her memoirs between 1927 and 1967 in

²⁴ Rabit Batullah, "Ber-bersen ezleuche ike yoldyz," in *Karim Tinchurin* (Kazan, 2003), 60-61.

²⁵ Biblioteka tatarskogo otdelenia vserossiiskogo teatral'nogo obshchestva, f.7, n 42. l.3-4.

both Russian and Tatar, and she also wrote a short autobiography very similar to her memoirs. While the culture of keeping diaries and writing memoirs was not present in Tatar pre-revolutionary society, *iashliar* and Tatar intellectuals in general, possessed power and knowledge to make their ideas public. Gyizatullina, as an actress (still a second-rate profession in Imperial Russia) and a woman, lacked this power. In 1927, however she had the social stature to make her voice heard, albeit a voice greatly influenced by Soviet rhetoric. The actress herself was quite well aware of the ways in which “great October” empowered her.

Her memoirs, (*vospominania* in Russian and *istelekler* in Tatar) were used in a number of published stories such as Kasshaf’s 1956 essay *Berenche artistka* (The first actress) or a book about Gyizatullina published in Kazan in 1982.²⁶ As such for these publications, her memoirs were cleansed of all piquant details of her rivalry with *Sayar*’s prima actress, Bolgarskaia, and her disagreements with the troupe’s director Gabduallah Kariev, which influenced her decision to leave *Sayar* in 1912 with a few other actors and actresses and organize her own troupe, *Nur*, based in Ufa. The focus of Soviet Tatar scholarship on Gyizatullian was her perseverance and stoicism in the face of oppressive Tsarist regime and Muslim religious fanaticism. The tropes of injustice and oppression saturate her memoirs, but one also senses a good dose of youthful vigor and great interest in the life she led as an actress of the first Tatar theatrical troupe, *Sayar*.

Gyizatullina was born to a peasant Tatar family. Her father went to Kazan when she was a child and took an occupation of a switchman at the train station. Seasonal as well as full migration into the city was a common phenomenon among Tatars just as it

²⁶ S. Gyizatullina-*Volzhskaia turynda istelekliar* (Kazan, 1982).

was among Russian peasants in late 19th early 20th century. Moreover, Tatars villagers, although never serfs, were generally poorer than their Russian counterparts, having been moved into poorer lands and pastures. Therefore, a rare Tatar family supported themselves on the land exclusively.²⁷ As she notes in her memoirs, “no matter how hard father worked, he was not able to get the job of conductor.”²⁸

Gyizatullina’s mother worked at the Sokolov’s factory in Kazan. Although “mother worked a fourteen hour shift, she received a miserly pay. Our family was always starving. Mother passed away before she reached forty five.”²⁹ At six-years-old Sahibzhamal was given to a family of wealthy Tatar merchants, the Apanaevs, as a servant. Her memoirs portray the atmosphere of extreme cruelty and abuse at the hands of her masters.

The mistress’ young daughter disliked me and beat me up for every little mishap. Once, when scrubbing the floors in the kitchen, I broke a dish. She beat me to blood. While she was beating me up, an old street-vendor came into the house. When she saw what the young mistress was doing, she tried to stop her. The mistress screamed at her. I begged the old woman to tell my family to take me away from here. Finally, one day my older sister came to take me back home. The mistress was smiling maliciously at her. My sister took off my shoes, the mistress’ present and said, “Give these to your next servant.” “I’ll give it to another beggar,” the mistress answered spitefully. “Yes, we are beggars, but we don’t suck other people’s blood, like you do,” my sister answered back. The mistress’ face grew dark with fury.³⁰

²⁷ *Tatary srednego Povolzhia i Priuralia* (Moscow, 1967), 81-83.

²⁸ *Gyizatullina-Volzhskaia turynda istelekler*, 7.

²⁹ *Ibid.*.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

The same trope of poverty is also present in *Sayar*'s prima Bolgarskaia's short autobiography written in 1946. Bolgarskaia was born in 1891 to the family of a dragoon; he served in the Russian army for ten years and then worked at the police station.³¹ Her father's salary of twelve rubles a month was not enough to feed their family, and Bolgarskaia notes that, from the age of ten, she had to "sew furs for merchants and wash floors."³² Gabdullah Kariev, *Sayar*'s director, was born to the family of shoe-maker and orphaned at a tender age. He worked as a servant for a village mullah and then, at age 16, went to Uralsk "because he could not stand living in mullah's house anymore."³³ *Sayar* actor Kasym Shamil's reminiscences about the actor Miftah Apsalemov had common points with Gyizatullina's story of physical abuse. Apsalemov was also cruelly beaten by his master and walked barefoot in the cold of the winter.³⁴

Tatar poet Gabdullah Tukai's autobiography written before the October Revolution, in 1909, provides a useful comparison to the stories of unfortunate childhood by Gyizatullina and others. Tukai, who lost his father as a five-month-old baby, was given by his mother to a poor elderly village woman who was extremely cruel to him. As a two-and-a-half year old, Tukai was made to freeze outside during the dead of the winter, and he walked barefoot year round. As the author notes, "most importantly, as a child, I did not see any love or compassion."³⁵ His mother, who remarried, could see

³¹ Gyizatullina in her memoirs refers to Bolgarskaia disparagingly as a "police girl," NART, f.7364, op, 1. d.1, l.1.

³² RGALI, f. 2663, op.1.n.110.

³³ *Tatar teatry* (Kazan, 1926), 234-238.

³⁴ Biblioteka tatarskogo otdelenia VTO, f.7, n 42. l.10.

³⁵ Gabdullah Tukai, *Eserler* vol. 4 (Kazan, 1956), 12-13.

him only secretly, as his adopted father hated the boy. Tukai, who died of consumption at the age of 27, blamed his poor health on his childhood experience. The difference between the story told by Tukai before October and Gyizatullina's story written in the Soviet time lies in the ways they contextualize their childhood experience. Being an orphan immediately placed one (and still does) into an economically disadvantaged position. However, what in Tukai's autobiography was an unfortunate stroke of fate,³⁶ in Gyizatullina's memoirs became the canonic story of class oppression.

Gyizatullina's story of *Sayar's* early years became a classic of Soviet Tatar literature. According to her memoirs, in 1907, the 13-year-old Gyizatullina went to see a performance of *Galimlek ve nadanlyk*, a Tatar adaptation of Ostrovskii's *V chuzhom piru pokhmel'e*. This Russian classic was staged, as well as translated into Tatar, by Kudashev-Ashkazarskyi, a teacher from Orenburg, who first organized a traveling Tatar theatrical troupe in 1905, the members of which, excluding Kudashev himself, later became actors of *Sayar*.³⁷

It is not clear from Gyizatullina's memoirs how or why she approached Kudashev. We only know that she "loved going to see Russian plays," and was excited about seeing a Tatar play. In 1907, Kudashev's troupe had no women-actresses, and all the female roles were played by men. Gyizatullina approached Kudashev and asked him why all the female roles are "spoiled by men." He told her that no women want to come

³⁶ Tukai's reflections on his childhood also coincided with other intellectuals' perception of Tukai's misfortune. In Iskhakyyi's play *Mogallima*, written after Tukai's death, the main hero, a female teacher Fatyma, blames the "Tatar world" and especially the "Tatar female world" for lacking love and compassion for such "disadvantaged" people as Tukai or Kaium Nasyri, a Tatar 19th century reformer who was blind. See Giaiz Iskhakyyi, *Mogallima: Eserler* vol. 4 (Kazan, 2003), 296.

³⁷ Honuz Maxmutov, Il'tani Iliialova and Baian Gyizzat, *Oktyabrga kaderge tatarcha teatr* (Kazan, 1988), 32-33.

to the troupe, which is not surprising considering the stigma that theater had in Tatar society. Soon enough, Gyizatullina joined the troupe and became the first Tatar female actress.³⁸ Kasym Shamil in his reminiscences notes that during Kudashev's production of *Nadanlyk ve Galimlek* in Kazan, in 1907, in the audience there was a "girl who behaved herself very freely and caught an eye of our actors. They struck up a conversation with her after the performance, and she told them about her desire to become an actress." This "girl" was Gyizatullina-Volzhskaia.³⁹

When Gyizatullian joined the troupe, it was on its way to Nizhnyi Novgorod, to the Makariev fair. "Kudashev, God knows how, was able to get a permission to stage two plays. Still, the mullahs, the rich and all religious folks in the city did not let us

³⁸ *Gyizatullina turynda istelekler*, 9. Kudashev remained a problematic figure in the pre-revolutionary historiography of the Tatar theater. When, in 1916, Tatar intellectuals in Kazan celebrated the tenth anniversary of the "birth of Tatar theater," an article published in *Koiash* traced the roots of Tatar theater to the "yurt uenlari," the home performances which took place in Kazan during the *Shimbe kecheler*, the informal gatherings of Tatar youth, mainly the children of Tatar nobility and the students of Tatar *medresehs*.³⁸ On the other hand, Orenburg's *Vakt* edited by *Yashliar*'s rival, Tatar *jadid* Fatih Karimi, traced the roots of modern Tatar theater to the very itinerant troupe organized by Kudashev-Ashkazar'skiy, which Gyizatullina joined in 1907. He left the troupe early on, in 1908. Gyizatullina's original memoirs mention his quarrelsome and tyrannical nature: "Kudashev-Ashkazar'skiy never wanted to consult anyone from the troupe, he wanted to have control of all decisions and of all the returns we earned."³⁸ This detail is omitted in the 1982 published version of her memoirs.

Taking into account the traditional intellectual rivalry between pre-revolutionary Kazan and Orenburg, it is not surprising that Kazan Tatar intellectuals were reluctant to credit Kudashev, who came from Orenburg, with the pioneering work in the field of Tatar theater. And they did not want to see an outsider coming into Kazan's cultural production market. In 1915, during *Sayar*'s performance of Iskhakiy's *Mogallima*, Kudashev came to Kazan with his own production of the play. Iskhakiy, who never gave Kudashev the permission to stage his work, was incensed. (Gayaz Iskhakiy, *Eserler*, vol.8 [Kazan, 2002], 200). Karam called Kudashev's production "untalented," and noted that the timing of Kudashev's appearance in Kazan and his staging of *Mogallima* was clearly a "stumbling block to *Sayar*'s success. ("Mogallima" *Ang* 19 [1914]). Clearly Kudashev-Ashkazar'skiy must have been looking to get a rise out of the Kazan cultural establishment -- and he did.

³⁹ Biblioteka Tatarskogo Otdelenia VTO, f.7, n.40, l.6.

perform there. We were starving, and, finally, Kudashev took us to Riazan’.”⁴⁰ The city’s governor, however, “did not let us perform, though we tried to get permission for two months. We were hungry, our spirits started to wane. Some were saying, ‘There will never be a theater for the Tatars.’ Still we did not split apart and nobody left the troupe. We understood very well the importance of our work.”⁴¹ After the unsuccessful trip to Riazan, Kudashev takes his troupe, consisting now of two women (Gyizatullina and her friend, Fatyma Shahimerdenova) and eight men to Moscow. “Back then, Moscow seemed ugly to us,” noted the actress. The “back then” referential time frame is significant because, by the time Gyizatullina was writing her memoirs, Moscow’s representation as a capital of all Soviet people and a place where good friends from all corners of the Soviet Union are made was deeply embedded in the Soviet mentality, and such a city could be ugly no more.⁴² Also, the Soviet publisher in both versions of her memoirs chose not to include this comment.

What follows next in Gyizatullina’s memoirs is a very piquant encounter with a Tatar woman of a dubious reputation. Unlike other personal details, for example of her long standing dislike of *Sayar*’s actress Bolgarskaia, or Kariev’s love for power, this one is not omitted from the published versions of her memoirs. In Moscow, Gyizatullina was approached by a Tatar female dancer, who worked in Moscow’s famous *Iar* restaurant. The dancer, a vulgarly but richly dressed Tatar woman, invited Gyizatullina to her house.

⁴⁰ *Gyizatullina turynda istelekler*, 10.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 11.

⁴² For example, the 1930s Soviet film *Svinarka i pastukh* is the love story of a herdsman from the Caucasus and a pig farmer girl from Ukraine. Also, Moscow was of course, beautified in the 1930s, if one, like myself, likes Stalinist architecture.

Gyizatullina was reluctant, but her fellow-actors told her to go and see what comes of it. One feels how incensed Gyizatullina was when describing a very seedy atmosphere in the apartment of the dancer, Mariam Iskanderova. The latter opened the door, “wearing lots of make-up, with a cigarette in her mouth,” and introduced Gyizatullina to two male visitors who were sitting at the dinner table, smoking and drinking. Mariam Iskanderova offers Gyizatullina the job of a dancer at *Iar*, noting Gyizatullina’s poverty, and the men immediately make passes at her. Gyizatullina proudly turns them all down in the following way, “Thank you, lady. I will not trade my theater for your restaurant. We did not come here to look for riches and pleasure – we are creating Tatar theater!”⁴³

Clearly, for a 13-year old Tatar girl to become the first female actress of the Turkic world, Gyizatullina must have been an unusual and unconventional person. Taking into account the social stigma that profession of acting had in pre-revolutionary Tatar society, especially for women, it also made her reputation vulnerable. Gyizatullina’s description of her encounter with the restaurant dancer, “vulgar” Mariam Iskanderova, was to convey to the reader that, though an actress, she did not engage in any kind of morally and socially objectionable behavior. Gyizatullina clearly focuses on this contrast, describing this encounter in particular detail. Iskanderova points at Gyizatullina while addressing the men: “She is like a child she does not want to,”; the men grab Gyizatullina by the shoulder and say, “What is this caprice of yours, *tsyepochka?* (little chick).”

The story of an encounter between the well-off female dancer of questionable reputation who only cares about materialistic aspects of life and personal pleasure and the

⁴³ NART, f.7364, op.1.d.2, l.3 and *Gyizatullina turynda istelekler*, 15-16.

starving but proud and dedicated female actress fit well the Soviet narrative of personal sacrifice, stoicism and moral purity. Ironically, the story also fit the *iahsliar*'s notion of personal sacrifice in the name of the Tatar nation.

Through the rather bleak picture of “the hard life of the first Tatar troupe,” portrayed in Gyizatullina’s memoirs seeps the vital energy of a group of very young people (some like her were still teenagers!) who joined together to create the first Tatar theater troupe, a very unusual enterprise for early 20th century Tatar society. Here is how the actress describes the same stay in Moscow, “We all delved into this exciting work. Some were writing the roles, others were making the posters, yet others were sewing the costumes.”⁴⁴ At the same time, Gyizatullina’s memoirs portray the not surprising economic instability of an itinerant theatrical troupe. After the performance, which, according to Gyizatullina, gave very little returns, and after paying for the rent of the stage and the apartment, the actors were left with virtually nothing. “We started selling our clothes so we could survive. I had to give up my only ring. I got very sick, my friend Fatyma (another female actress, Gyizatullina’s friend who left the troupe early on) stole old bread from the kitchen for me...”⁴⁵

In March 1917, Gabdullah Kariiev announced a competition for the best Tatar play. The play had to be either on a topic of Tatar history or the Tatar peasant or city culture and mores, have folkloric elements and be written in “good Tatar,” meaning Tatar unburdened with Arabic and Persian. The prize for the best play amounted to 1000 rubles, a very significant sum of money. The author of the second best play was to

⁴⁴ NART, f. 7364, op.1, l.2.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, l.4.

receive 500 rubles, and the author of the third, 200 rubles. It is unlikely that someone besides Kariev was sponsoring the competition. There is no mention of such in Kariev's announcement. Kariev also specified that it would be him who solely owned the right to stage the best plays for five years. The fact that Kariev, who had no means of existence other than acting and directing for *Sayar*, was able to organize such a competition and give out such large prizes is telling. It seems that, at least by 1917, *Sayar*'s returns were significant enough to run a competition for interesting, new plays, which the troupe was always in need of.⁴⁶

Sayar's returns were not large enough, however, to purchase their own building. The absence of the permanent building seemed to be a sore in Kariev's eye as well. In his article published in the memory of Kariev in 1920, Tinchurin noted that "Kariev's dream was to see the actual building that was the Tatar theater. He passed away before his dream was realized."⁴⁷ In fact, until *Sharyk kluby* took *Sayar* under its wing in 1912, the troupe was "forced to rent barracks," as Karam notes in his article.⁴⁸ When, in 1914, *Sharyk kluby* was rented out to Kazan's city government as a hospital for the wounded in WWI, *Sayar* had to rent the stage of the city's Russian theater. The repeating trope of Gyizatullina's memoirs is "Tatar actors – wanderers forever," forced to travel, rent out rooms for their performances and endure the lawlessness of the Tsarist bureaucracy:

When we came to Semipalatinsk, we could not get permission to stage a play. Finally, I was called in to the police. The police chief asked me: "Who are you? Where are you coming from?"

⁴⁶ Gabdullah Kariev, "Dramatug moharirlerebez dikhatyna: konkurs," *Koiash*, June 6, 1917.

⁴⁷ Karim Tinchurin, "G. Karievnyng tatar medeniate tarikhynda totkan uryny," in *Gabdulla Kariev turynda istekekler* (Kazan, 1967), 3-10.

⁴⁸ Karam, "Sharyk klubynda teatr ve muzika musmineng iakune (1912-1913)," *Ang 11* (1913).

Who allowed you to perform in Tatar? I order you to leave in 24 hours.” “Why can’t we play in Tatar, I asked him?” “Because you are a Tatar, God knows what you can say in your Tatar language.” I felt so upset. I could not understand why we, Tatars, are not equal to others... Now, in our Soviet country, there are no more eternal wanderer-actors, who go from one city to another. Now, an actor is a full citizen of the Soviet state.⁴⁹

Bolgarskaia, in her autobiography, also noted that “February did not give us anything. We still moved from club to club. October gave us everything. We are members of the state troupe. We have our own theater. I have an apartment, rations (*paiki*) and a salaried job.”⁵⁰ From both Gyizatullina and Bolgarskaia’s perspective, or at least from what they are saying in their memoirs commissioned by the state, and certainly in their autobiographies, compulsory for every Soviet citizen, Soviet Tatar actors were much happier than Tatar actors in Imperial Russia. The state gave them apartments, salaried jobs, privileges and an official home for their theater.

Noble Women in the Tatar Theater Zahida Axmerova and Rabiga Gabitova

When one juxtaposes Gyizatullina’s memoirs with 1980s interviews with Karim Tinchurin’s widow, Zahida Axmerova-Tinchurina, a different picture of pre-revolutionary life emerges. It is much closer to that *mélange* of Romantic nationalism, admiration of European and Russian high culture and growing bourgeois sensibilities that comes out of reading pre-revolutionary Tatar plays and theatrical reviews. Whereas Gyizatullina’s client was the Soviet state and ideology, which dictated its own agenda and language, Zahida Tinchurina’s interviewer was contemporary Tatar playwright and

⁴⁹ NART, f. 7364, op.2, l. 1.

⁵⁰ RGALI, f. 2663, op.1. n. 110.

intellectual Rabit Batullah, and we hear Tinchurina's voice through his preconceived notions about the Tatar intelligentsia (*zyalylylar*). At the same time, Tinchurina was the daughter of a Tatar nobleman, both of her parents were highly educated, and Zahida was educated in Russian gymnasium. Her lifestyle was privileged, and, although she acted in *Sayar* for six years, it was done as a favor to Kariev, who personally asked her, rather than as a life calling, as in case of Gyizatullina.

There is a clear class distinction between Gyizatullina-Volzhskaia, an orphaned daughter of a former peasant and Tinchurina. The latter in her reminiscences noted that she was a frequent visitor to *Shimbe kicheler*, the informal gatherings of Tatar youth, which I discussed in Chapter 3. In her memoirs, Gyizatullina notes that as a young woman, she heard about informal theater gatherings at the Teregulov's house. (The Teregulovs were also of noble origins and frequently hosted *Shimbeler*.) When, Gyizatullina, in 1907, before she joined Ashkazarskyi's troupe, wanted to participate in the informal theater performances at Teregulovs', she was turned down on the ground that she was not "a nobleman's daughter!"⁵¹

The same class distinction and a very different picture of pre-revolutionary Tatar theater emerges from the memoirs of another participant of *Shimbe kicheler*, a certain Rabiga Gabitova, written in 1952. Gabitova's memoirs give a fascinating picture of the cultural life of the Tatar youth in Kazan at the turn of the century, and a very privileged Tatar youth. These were again the students of the Russian gymnasiums and some students of Tatar *medreseh*, who organized those very same *Shimbe* evenings with home theatrical performances. "Saturdays were chosen so that we would not take time away

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 88.

from our studies,” noted Gabitova.⁵² “As the students of state schools, we knew Russian and European literature quite well. However, we did not know our own literature (rodnaia literatura).” Significantly, Gabitova writes in beautiful Russian, unlike Gyizatullina, whose writing shows clearly that she is much more comfortable in her native Tatar than in Russian. Among the students of Tatar *medreseh* who evidently were invited to the evenings as the possessors of classical Islamic literary and cultural knowledge was the young Fatih Amirhan, as well as the future communist, Mullanur Vakhitov. “We gathered in the houses of [our] families – the Gabitovs, the Teregulovs, the Sakaevs... first, books, then tea and entertainment. At midnight, everyone went home.” All these families were very educated, well-off and participated in the Russian government structure. Ibragim Teregulov, for example, participated in the establishment of and taught in the Kazan Tatar Teacher’s school from 1878 through 1907. He was also one of the organizers of the *Sharyk kluby*.⁵³ One of the older Gabitovs was an employee of the Russian consulate in China in the 19th century.⁵⁴ “Later, during Christmas, at the beginning of the winter holidays, we staged a Tatar translation of a Turkish play, *Gashyik belesi* (Misfortune from Love). Our audience was our relatives and friends, about fifty people total. There was no politics, we were young and understood very little in politics, but still the police became suspicious of us,” mentions Gabitova.⁵⁵

Both Gyizatullina and Gabitova reflect on pre-revolutionary Tatar theatrical life.

While Gyizatullina had no entrance ticket to the cultural circles of Gabitova (and

⁵² Gos. Muzei RT, f.119760, n.12

⁵³ *Tatarskii entsyklopedicheskii slovar’* (1999), 574.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 130.

⁵⁵ Gos. Muzei RT, f. 119760, n.12.

Tinchurina), the former was empowered by the Soviet state to tell the story of the Tatar past. Gabitova's memoirs were never published in the Soviet times, at least to my knowledge. They were too devoid of any political stand and ideology. For the Soviet reader, Gabitova's voice never became public. For the post-Soviet reader, however (and I plan on finding out whether her memoirs were published in the today's Tatarstan), Gabitova reasserts her cultural power through her haughty, aristocratic Russian, her knowledge of the nitty-gritty of Tatar intellectuals circles (although, for obvious reasons, she clearly cannot say a lot in 1952), and her ability to temporally situate the "backwardness of Tatar pre-revolutionary society," in a way different from typical Soviet temporality of before and after October. At one point, after describing the opposition that the first Tatar theatrical productions (the very same ones that Gyizatullina talks about) provoked among conservative-minded Tatars, she talks about the growing popularity of theatrical productions in Kazan (meaning *Sayar's* productions). "Even the backward elements, who initially hoped to stop theater, started calmly visiting it together with their wives who previously never left their 'chapan' or 'chadra.'" The expression seems Soviet because it echoes the ubiquitous mentioning of *chapan* and *chadra*, the female body and face covering. In the Soviet and, to some extent, Russian Imperial vocabulary of difference, both denoted the backwardness of Muslim Central Asia. However, Tatar women never wore either *chapan* or *chadra* and, in Tatar *jadid* discourse, both served as a symbolic representation of their and, generally speaking, Muslim society's backwardness. Gabitova's story tells us that the very moment when Tatar "backward elements and their wives" metaphorically took off their "*chapan*" and

“*chadra*” occurred much earlier than it was represented in the official Soviet historiography.

Chapter VIII

Conclusion

I have chosen theater as a point of entry to my study of Tatar society in the early 20th century for the unique place it occupied and continues to occupy in Tatar culture. Tatar theater was essential to the *iashliar* and the rest of the Tatar cultured public's perception of their society as modernizing and "progressing" toward the kinds of secular, "refined," European-like sensibilities. Most importantly, theater was an experimental space which like no other form of artistic production offered an opportunity for a co-experience among the playwrights, the actors and the audience. Hence in theater, the *iashliar* could test the boundaries and explore the elements of Tatar identity in ways that would have been impossible on the pages of intellectual journals or constrained by the social norms of the everyday life. The fact that some Tatar spectators went on stage to perform the ritual of Islamic prayer during the performance of Iskhaky's *Zoleiha* in Kazan, while the others fainted and were taken out of the building on stretchers, testifies powerfully to the emotional appeal of theater and demonstrates the ways in which public "actively" participated in Iskhaky's deliberations on what it meant to be a Tatar or a Kriashen in the Russian Empire.

Some scholars have noted that in contemporary Kazan, Tatar theater functions as a “purely Tatar space” in a predominantly Russophone city.¹ For the Tatar public at the turn of the last century, Tatar theater and the first Tatar cultural club, *Sharyk kluby*, were the only public spaces in which both Tatar men and women could socialize in such a “purely” Tatar space that was also secular and modern unlike the traditional mosque and the marketplace.

Born on the eve of the First Russian Revolution of 1905, Tatar theater was the favorite creation of the *iashliar*, a group of modernizing Tatar youth, the main Tatar culture producers in pre-revolutionary Kazan and pugilistic secularists who attempted to introduce the wider concepts of modernity into Tatar society. As my study has demonstrated, unlike elsewhere among the Turkic Muslims of the Russian empire, the Tatar reform movement in the early 20th century splintered along generational lines with the *iashliar*, already educated in the reform Muslim schools of Kazan, reacting against the social and political centrism of the earlier Tatar modernizers, the *jadids*. The *iashliar* rebelled against the traditional norms of Tatar society while attempting to define Tatars as a nation in the European romantic sense, as well as a place for this nation in the Russian polity. However, the *iashliars'* own dramatic works and Tatar theatrical performances, which in Kazan proliferated rapidly from the years of 1906 to the beginning of the Civil War in 1918, reflect problematic nature and the mixed results of such effort.

A small but stark example from Chapter IV illustrates my point well. Salim, a “Russified” hero of *Shomly Adym*, a provocative play written by the *iashliar* author

¹ This observation was passed onto me by an anthropologist Helen Faller during her dissertation research in Kazan in the 1999-2000. The city has become more Tatar speaking since then.

Karim Tinchurin, comes to *Sharyk kluby* after a bad breakup with his Russia wife, Maria, only to find himself in tears after listening to his mother tongue and to realize how estranged he has become from his own people. In the play, Salim comes to *Sharyk kluby* to escape from the ubiquitous Russian surroundings and in search of his Tatar national soul (and as the end of the play tells the reader, he has found it). However, there is a deep irony in the fact that both the theater and the culture club were conceived of and functioned as the places that were to bring modernization and progress which partly if not largely entailed the introduction of the essential elements of Russian culture and cultural behavior to the broader Tatar public.

Iashliar conceived of their project of remaking Tatar society as a struggle against the “old life” (*iske tormysh*), i.e. the traditional norms of Tatar society, which they portrayed in their drama as “dark” and “backward.” However, the dichotomy between the old and new life with which the *iashliar* identified was often conceived in explicitly Russian paradigms, as in *Iashliar*, a 1909 play written by Fatih Amirhan, in which the conflict between a *iashliar* hero and his father is conceptualized in terms of generational conflict between *Fathers and Sons* and the analogy with Turgenev’s influential 1880s novel is present in the structure of the play’s text.² What is more, the conflict between the old and new was often cast in terms of struggle between the ‘rational and progressive’ West and the “irrational and backward” East, that very conceptual framework with which many Russian imperial statesmen approached and viewed Tatar society.

² See Chapter III for the play’s analysis.

As I have shown in my work, the writings of the *iashliar* reflect the tensions between what they saw as ultimately progressive and socially and culturally necessary change and the fear that greater openness to Russians would bring cultural assimilation and perhaps even the vanishing of the Tatar community. While introducing broader modernizing trends into their society, adopting and actively propagating (through the medium of theater) distinctly “European” and secular forms of social interaction and artistic endeavor, the *iashliar*’s writings, like *Zoleiha*, expressed the ambiguities of Tatar identities and the multiple potentialities for development of these identities in the context of the imperial state. At the same time, the *iashliar*, along with the *jadids* and the rest of Tatar public, struggled against a whole set of prescriptions, set forth by the various “dominant” voices from the imperial center, for the ways in which “Tatarness” should fit into the imperial structure.

Iskhakiy’s *Zoleiha* reflected on the ambiguities of Tatar identity, while its performance in the aftermath of the February Revolution clearly had a cathartic and unifying effect on the audience. Theatrical critics found in the play’s portrayal of the Kriashen historical past (i.e. forceful conversions, apostasies and adherence to Islam) a metaphor for the Tatar society’s experience within Russian empire. The audience also identified with the play’s exploration of Islam and Tatarness as it was structured on stage at a very particular historical moment when Tatars were presented with unprecedented opportunities for social, political and cultural freedoms. Another performance, however, this time of the Tatar translation of the Russian play, *Sestra Miloserdia*, (Sister of Mercy), in which the main heroine, the Russian nurse, Liuba, dies heroically during the “Russo-Turkish” war, demonstrates quite a different sort of Tatar national and imperial

imagination. *Sestra Meloserdia*, staged in 1914, was an emotional melodrama, extremely popular with the Tatar audience. Its appeal could be partially explained by the public's desire to be entertained (something that the Tatar critics, so focused on the didactic and aesthetic elements of theater were very apprehensive about). At the same time, during the play's appearance on the Tatar stage, Russia was at war with Turkey, to which Tatars were supposedly "always" secretly loyal, at least according to numerous remarks by the St. Petersburg dramatic censor, Vasily Smirnov. The Tatar spectators' long standing ovations at the end of the play, demonstrating their sympathy toward a Russian heroine who died at the hand of the Turks, would have, no doubt, come as a surprise to the imperial censor, whose strong fear of Tatar intellectuals' subversive intentions delayed the staging of the Russian classic *Inspector General* on the Tatar stage by a decade.³

My choice of theater as a prism through which to explore the workings of culture and identity formation in pre-revolutionary Kazan has thus allowed me to explore the ways in which multiple expressions of Tatariness were enacted on stage and, through a study of theatrical reviews, to analyze the ways in which these enactments converged with the Tatar audience's own conceptions of what it meant to be Tatar. At the same time, the study of Tatar pre-revolutionary theater and drama has allowed me to focus on the iconography of the nation as it was envisioned by the *iashliar* and Tatar actors. This iconography is particularly visible in the various "national characters," whether these were the "proud nationalists" and "pragmatic merchants" of Fatih Amirhan's plays or the self-sacrificing, willful women of Gayaz Iskhaky's works. My study of Tatar theatrical performances has also demonstrated that, while both the *iashliar* and the Tatar

³ See Chapter IV, 85-86 for the discussion of the play's production by *Sayar*.

intellectuals, in this case exemplified by the critics, considered reflection of “real Tatar life” one of the requirements of Tatar theater, “reality” was a selective concept, with intellectuals often cringing when the Tatar stage featured portrayals of extreme poverty, prostitution and other social ills of Tatar society, as in the case of Iarullah’s Vali’s dramas *Achlyk kushty* and *Oiat, iaki kuz iashe* (analyzed in Chapters III and IV). Theater, after all, was conceived as a school of cultural refinement, and aesthetic pleasure was important, thus calling for a kind of “sanitized,” in a sense, very bourgeois version of the Tatar present. The theatrical audience, a good portion of which, according to theatrical reviews and archival documents pertaining to the creation of *Sharyk kluby*, consisted of the less cultured elements of the Tatar public, such as clerks, average merchants, shopkeepers and students, enjoyed these plays just as much as it did the elegant European form and nationalist content of Amirhan’s plays or the unparalleled emotional appeal of Iskhakyi’s drama.

The October Revolution of 1917 and coming to power of the Bolsheviks was to have brought about a long-awaited equality for the Romanovs’ former subjects. This “equality,” however, was to be based on class-identification and rendered meaningless Tatar intellectuals’ elaborations of the Tatar society’s place within the Empire.⁴ Still, the Soviet-era memoirs of Tatar actors and actresses demonstrate the extent to which, in these new conditions, national identity could become conflated with class and, in the case

⁴ Soviet policies toward nationalities were, of course, of highly contradictory nature. While attempting to create a single class-based Soviet identity, they also contributed to the consolidation of nationalities and fostered a sense of belonging to a distinct nation, even in the places where primordial national identities were fairly weak. For the discussion of this issue, see Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of Soviet Union* (Stanford, 1993), cf. also Yuri Slezkine, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism,” *Slavic Review* 53 n. 2 (Summer 1994): 414-452

of the female actors, gender identification. For instance, in the recollections of *Sayar's* pre-revolutionary path written by the first Tatar female actress, Gyizatullina-Volzhskaia, we find such exclamations (written in mid 1930s) as: “Rejoice, Tatar woman (tatarka)! Savor your triumph, woman! The chains and shackles which held you for centuries have fallen, you are finally free!”⁵ These signal to the reader that being Tatar and a woman both signify oppression. But then, being a member of a Tatar theatrical troupe in Imperial Russia was already to be marginalized and oppressed. Hence, Gyizatullina interpreted as a marker of inequality the actors’ treatment during the *Nur* theatrical troupe’s trip to Semipalatinsk (Russian Turkestan) in 1913 (recollection of 1935): The Russian chief of police called her in and asked: “What sort of theater can there be in Tatar? Who gave permission to stage in Tatar? After all, you are Tatars, and devil knows what you can say on the stage in your language!”⁶

The social and cultural vulnerability of the female Tatar actress in pre-revolutionary Russia was in a very real sense remedied during Soviet times when people like Gyizatullina became members of a culturally powerful new national elite. (Of course, others, who did not fit the right social or political profile, were silenced and executed.) Moreover, in the cultural discourse of the Soviet/Russian center, the existence of such artistic forms as theater (drama, opera, poetry, painting) – i.e., precisely the forms that existed in Russian culture – often served as proof of the “culturedness” of the non-Russian group. So, ironically, theater, which the *iashliar* conceived of as a vehicle for

⁵ NART, f. 7364. f. 1, d. 1.

⁶ NART, f. 7364. f. 2. d. 1. In regard to the policeman’s words Gyizatullina writes, “I could not understand why we, Tatars, were not equal to others?” (*Ibid.*). *Nur* was Gyizatullina’s theatrical troupe, which she organized in 1913 in Ufa, after leaving *Sayar* over disagreements with the troupe’s director, Kariev.

social change and a marker of “culturedness” became such, but not in the way they had envisioned. Rather, in Soviet times, Tatar theater became a gateway to high social status and material proof to the hegemonic cultural discourse radiated from the center that Tatars also possessed “modern” or modernized culture, culture in its own mold.

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