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A State of the Union: Federation and Autonomy in Tatarstan

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Honors Project

Macalester College

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A State of the Union:

Federation and Autonomy in Tatarstan

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ABSTRACT

Most research on the topic of center-periphery relations focuses on the center as the locus of policy. This project, on the other hand, seeks to establish an alternative understanding of the ways in which nationality has played out both as a Russian tactic to unite disparate and diverse territories, and as a mode by which some ethnic minorities in Russian-ruled spaces have been able to secure relative autonomy. The Republic of Tatarstan, located in the Volga River basin, has achieved unprecedented levels of autonomy while existing as a contingent part of the USSR, and now the Russian Federation. Comparisons have been drawn between Tatarstan and Chechnya in regards to the political, economic, and cultural autonomy they exercise on their respective territories; however, while their autonomy may be comparable, their respective relationships with the Russian central governments are not. Where does Tatarstan's political, economic, and cultural power come from, and what effect does Tatar autonomy have on contemporary center-periphery relations in the Russian Federation?

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Introduction

When I first arrived in Kazan, Russia in August of 2011, I could barely utter basic phrases in Russian. I was perplexed when dogs would board public transportation, and awestruck by the postcard perfect images of onion domes and minarets situated side by side. Over time my language skills improved and I got used to my fellow travellers, but I have since remained intrigued by the cultural crossroads that is the Republic of Tatarstan. My earliest shallow inquiries into my new locale taught me of Tatarstan's reputation as a multicultural haven, but aside from noting an absence of conflict, no person, book, or website had been able to articulate the forms that coexistence takes in Tatarstan.

The subterranean world of the Kazan metro weaves the city's cultural threads together. The fact that the city has a metro system, however modest it may be, is demonstrative of its metropolitan ambitions. Built over the past fifteen years, the granite walls and floors appear shiny and new, paid for by the oil that lies even deeper underground. Brightly colored tile mosaics on the walls and ceilings depict scenes from Tatar folk tales. Messages over the PA system are announced both in heavy-vowelled Russian and feathery Tatar languages. Beneath the busy city streets, people from various cultural backgrounds and walks of life momentarily share the liminal space of the metro station. This is a place where elements of Tatar and Russian culture and daily life routinely intermingle and subtly influence one another.

Contemporary scholarship about the former Soviet space tends to focus on the predominance of Russian power in federal governance. Soviet and post-Soviet federal structures are evaluated from the perspective of the political center, and in terms of the effects they have on peripheral subjects. For instance, explanations of the evolution of

national consciousness in the Soviet period frame nationality policy as something that was devised at and handed down from the center. According to this narrative, in the process of conceiving of a Soviet state after the 1917 revolution, socialist ideology advanced by ethnic Russians and a few members of non-Russian ethnic intelligentsias shaped policy, and subsequently the form of the new ethno-territorial federalist government. The contemporary Russian Federation is the legal and formal successor to the Soviet Union, and the Russian central government is frequently understood in similar terms as the force that dictates the terms of federalism, and passes demands down to federal subjects.

While these narratives tell us about Russian authoritarianism, they largely ignore federal subjects as sources of data, and fail to account for the ways in which republics exercise their own power. First and foremost, this marks a missed opportunity to gather more information about how the Russian Federation functions. More than this though, neglecting to include federal subjects in narratives about Russian federalism creates an inaccurate picture of the Russian state, which has the potential to lead to inaccurate policy decisions. While it might be difficult to look away from the spectacle of the Kremlin, it is irresponsible for researchers and policymakers to neglect the valuable information we can gather from republics and their processes.

Tatarstan is a particularly fruitful example to consider as a window into the workings of Russian federalism, and the way in which the political center's attitudes towards federal subjects change over time. The Republic of Tatarstan seized the opportunity of the dissolution of the USSR to define its own position within the new Russian Federation. The republic's insistence on establishing relations with Moscow

through a bilateral treaty that gave it legal status is one example of the kind of actions it took to achieve independence. Tatarstan spent the 1990s building the structures of a state, and a version of sovereignty that allowed it to operate within structures of Russian governance rather than separating from them as Chechnya attempted to do. Throughout the 2000s as Vladimir Putin's administration has attempted to centralize power in the Kremlin, Tatarstan has worked to protect its unique autonomous status. Its relative success tells us not only about whether and how Tatarstan's sovereignty project has functioned, but also about the privileges and constraints of the Russian federal center.

Understanding the present state of Russian federalism requires a comprehension of the evolution of national consciousness and Soviet federalism; the contingent states of the contemporary Russian Federation were created through Soviet nationality policy after the 1917 revolution. In the 1920s and 30s, nationality was defined and instrumentalized in ways that attempted to advance the socialist ideological underpinnings of the new Soviet state. This process, and its culmination in the ethno-federalist form of the Soviet Union, is explained in depth in the first chapter of this project. I detail the mechanisms of Soviet-era nation building because these ethnocratic structures continue to form the foundation for Russian federalism today.

Unequal shares of power between republics and excessive micromanagement by the central government characterize the Russian form of federalism. Although constituent states have a similar legal status, the actual extent of self-determination varies significantly. This asymmetry is layered because republics not only compete with one another for political power, but also with the Russian central government. Nikolai Petrov defines the subjugation of federal states to an extremely centralized government as

“Highly Managed Democracy.” In the Russian Federation, he identifies extreme centralization of power, lack of flexibility, indecisiveness, and immobility, which replaces democratic institutions with substitutes. Although the consolidation of Russia’s political apparatuses under Putin is intended to demonstrate the government’s strength, it actually weakens the state’s ability to respond to changing conditions. The paradox of federalism, and Russian federalism in particular, is that it draws power away from republican governments, but its ineffectiveness hinders the central government’s ability to counter challenges from its federal subjects. Tatarstan’s relative strength comes from its ability to manipulate Russia’s weaknesses while instrumentalizing certain cultural differences.

Despite the Kremlin’s accumulation of power in Moscow, Tatarstan has achieved a great deal of political, economic, and cultural self-determination throughout the 1990s and 2000s. The republic’s autonomy is unmatched by other Russian federal subjects; although it is sometimes compared with Chechnya, the ways in which these republics have achieved and retained their autonomy are qualitatively different. While Chechnya has pursued a militant separatist path, Tatarstan has leveraged its inclusion in the Russian state to achieve power. In my attempt to answer the question, “Where does Tatarstan’s power come from?” I pay particular attention to the variety of ethnic and asymmetrical federalism that characterizes Russia today, and evaluate the extent to which Tatarstan has established some semblance of sovereignty.

The ethno-territorial republic of Tatarstan was originally made possible by Soviet nationality policies that sought to advance peoples through associations with national groups, and ultimately the Soviet state. The fall of the USSR in the 1990s provided

Tatarstan with the opportunity to seek liberation that was promised and never granted by the early Soviet state. While continuing to exist as a contingent member of the Russian Federation, Tatarstan attempted to achieve sovereignty. Throughout the 1990s, the republic infused the notion of self-determination into permanent structures of statehood such as education, economic agreements, and the built environment. Although Vladimir Putin's reformation of center-periphery relations and efforts to centralize power in Moscow have hindered Tatarstan's ability to achieve sovereignty in new spheres, the republic has largely defended its gains against the Kremlin's encroachment. While Tatarstan's cultural difference distinguishes it from territories that are primarily host to Russian populations, intersections and interchanges between Russian and Tatar identities make it possible for Tatarstan to negotiate with the federal center, and makes it impossible for the center to retaliate when the republic acts as a sovereign state.

The first chapter of this thesis explains and analyzes the evolution of national consciousness and nationality policy in Tatarstan under Soviet rule. This background is necessary to understanding the contemporary structure of the Russian Federation, and the ways in which Tatarstan operates autonomously within that state. The second chapter structures my argument by putting forth two frameworks: the nature of Russian federalism, and the attributes of Tatarstani autonomy. This chapter concludes by evaluating the extent to which Tatarstan exercises independence when compared with other republics. This allows me to continue by describing how Tatarstan practices autonomy in chapters three and four. These chapters move chronologically through the 1990s and 2000s, and explain how the object of Tatarstan's sovereignty project has shifted from policies of statebuilding in the 1990s to policies that protect the structures of

statehood in the 2000s. This perspective allows me to claim that Russian federal relationships are diverse and complex, and ultimately that Tatarstan and other republics possess the power to define themselves. Implicit in this argument is the assertion that symbolic power is indeed potent.

1. Soviet Nationality Policy

In its scope and impact, 1917 was a revolutionary, paradigm-changing year for everyone within formerly imperial Russian territories. While the Russian-dominated center understood the revolution as a struggle for political power, ethnic minorities in the periphery viewed the struggle as an opportunity for national progress. Although the concept of the nation was largely limited to ethnic intelligentsia, to those with national ambitions the revolution represented the potential to eliminate Russian hegemony. In peripheral territories, the Russian Revolution played out as a national war in which minorities were fighting against the Russian center for independence. As Ronald Suny points out, however, "...ethnic and class conflicts were complexly intertwined" (119). In many peripheral territories, the rise of ethnic intelligentsias was a relatively recent development in 1917. Non-Russian elites were divided by the relative costs and benefits of autocratic tsarist rule and influenced by political and philosophical debates going on in Russia (Suny 98).

From the revolution to the establishment of the Soviet state apparatus, Lenin's priorities lay firmly in the abolition of the capitalist economy and the harmful social and political practices of disenfranchisement that Marxism associates with it. Envisioning a communist paradise on Earth as inevitable, Lenin was largely ambivalent towards "The National Question," viewing national identity not as a problem in its own right, but a symptom of class conflict. While Stalin quickly became the key architect of the Soviet Union's nationality policy, Lenin tacitly integrated it into the Bolshevik platform. According to him, the process of creating nationalist sentiment where none had previously existed "...will lead *in practice* to a total abolition of all national tensions...to

an accelerated drawing together ...of nations which will result in the *withering away* of the state” (Slezkine 419). The phrase “withering away of the state” is a direct quotation from The Communist Manifesto, and refers to the supposedly inevitable process by which boundaries of class and nation would dissolve under socialism, and bodies of governance would no longer be necessary.

In contrast with Lenin’s relative disinterest in nationality, Stalin was an advocate and creator of nationality policy in the early Soviet period. Understanding nationality as a historical milestone that must be attained, Stalin viewed it not as a dividing force between peoples, but as a way to bring non-Russians into the fold of the Soviet Union (Martin 71). Through the establishment of new nationalities, he sought to raise consciousness and lift “backward” groups to the level of the developed Russian people. While Lenin believed nationality to be a temporary institution that could be instrumentalized by the revolution, Stalin saw nationality as a more permanent feature of governance. In his 1914 publication, “Marxism and the Nationality Question,” Stalin defined “nation” as “...a historically evolved, stable community based on a common language, territory, economic life and psychological make-up manifested in a community of culture” (Hirsch 257). On the one hand, most would agree that nations certainly are a product of the combination of these factors. On the other hand though, aside from language, these qualities are difficult to quantify. Historical evolution, economic life, psychological make-up, and cultural communities are largely open to interpretation. This ambiguity presented the state with the advantage of being able to reframe nationality as needed in the context of the changing political landscape.

Ideology into Policy

Although the Bolsheviks advocated for national self-determination, it was unclear exactly how “nation” and “nationalism” would be defined in the new system of government. Once the party accepted that nationality policy would be an integral component of the Soviet program, it became the job of anthropologists, ethnographers, historians, and statisticians to study the meaning of nationhood and develop a comprehensive definition. Although Soviet politicians stressed the importance of ensuring national self-determination and promoting a formerly repressed sense of nationhood, they did not know a lot about the people that their policies were meant to protect and nurture. Therefore, it was a combination of researchers who were responsible for developing the definitions that would be used in future policymaking efforts.

The definition that was cobbled together by ethnographers and politicians in the 1920s, and included elements such as history, territory, common language, and culture remained relatively constant over the years. Government officials interpreted it differently depending on the political, economic, and ideological demands on the state. This had major effects on the construction of the USSR’s multi-national landscape. Notably, some groups emerged as dominant titular territorial nationalities and other groups living in the same territory were subordinate to them. Despite the fact that the intention of Soviet policies was to protect the right to national self-determination for all nations, it became clear early on that this would be unrealistic in practice. This is one example of how flexible interpretations of the definition of “nation” allowed for flexible policymaking.

Distinguishing between good and destructive nationalisms was also important in building this flexibility and justifying the encouragement of national identity development. Alongside other policies that would modernize non-Russian territories, positive applications of nationalism would elevate the “backward” peoples of the federation. Negative nationalism, also known as “Great Power Chauvinism,” privileged larger, more advanced nations and discriminated against smaller, less developed groups. Many Bolsheviks believed that nations with an “unfair size advantage” oppressed smaller ones. Tsarist policies that privileged ethnic Russians demonstrated that destructive applications of nationalism could divide the peoples of the empire. The Soviet state interpreted nationalistic sentiments that sprouted in smaller nations as a reaction to repression as well as a key step in development. It was therefore construed as the positive nationalism that the central government sought to nurture (Slezkine 419). Allowing nations that had been oppressed by the Russian Empire the opportunity to develop their identities and equal rights within the context of the Soviet Union would help them to gain trust in their former oppressor and rebuild that relationship in a mutually beneficial way. While the state supported nation building in non-Russian peripheral territories, Russia already demonstrated the characteristics of the modern nation state and had no further developmental use for nationalism. Russian nationalism was therefore supplanted with allegiance to the Communist Party and the Soviet state.

Stalin established the administrative mechanisms for managing these new identities in ways that were productive for the USSR. In response to Finnish and Polish exits from the union and threats that Ukraine and parts of Turkestan would follow, the People’s Commissariat on Nationalities (“Narkomnats”) was established with Stalin at

the helm. Although Narkomnats advocated for national rights, its purpose was also to mitigate nationalist challenges to the unity of the Soviet state. In the face of internal and external threats to the integrity of the Soviet state, Nationality Policy can be understood as a tactic for securing territory, loyalty, and resources from the non-Russian peripheries of the former empire. The Soviet State and Communist Party's acceptance of nationality as an administrative necessity provided an opportunity for ethnic groups with existing national ambitions, such as the Tatars, with an opportunity to advance nationalist interests.

In part because they were absorbed into the Russian Imperial structure of governance relatively early, the Tatars experienced the evolution of an ethnic intelligentsia and a budding sense of nationhood that other ethnic minorities did not. The rise of Jadidist and pan-Turkist ideologies in the mid-19th century characterized the early Tatar understanding of self that would become "national." These ideologies contextualized Tatar folk culture as part of a larger Turkic, Islamic whole. Tatar literary figures like Gabdullah Tuqay participated in the active construction of a Tatar identity by Tatars and for Tatars through his poetry and transcription of Tatar folk tales. In Tatar popular culture, Tuqay is a "people's poet," occupying a similar position in the Tatar psyche as Pushkin does for Russians. Tuqay is representative of the movements that educated and inspired Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev, a prominent Tatar socialist-nationalist in the early Soviet period.

The backdrop of nationality policy was not only ideological, but also practical. The catastrophic violence of 1917 forced the new Soviet government to shift its focus away from that which was desirable in order to focus on that which was immediately

necessary. The overthrow of the Tsar not only threw systems of governance into chaos, but also disrupted the stability of everyday life for civilians. While political factions struggled for dominance, average communities bore the human and economic costs of violent conflict in Europe and the civil war raging within Russia. When revolutionaries toppled the tsarist regime and established the provisional government, they believed that they were accelerating an inevitable progression of events in which workers would rise up and secure political and economic control from oppressive bourgeois regimes (Sultan-Galiev 3). They expected the revolution in Russia to kick off a global revolution, which would culminate in the foundation of a worldwide communist utopia (4). As a consequence, the Great War in Europe would be ended because its driving forces would dissipate under the new global order. When this did not happen, the newly established government staffed with inexperienced political officials was not only tasked with socially, economically, and politically restructuring its own territory, but also with engaging in violent conflicts within and outside of its borders.

After successfully overthrowing the Tsarist regime, factionalism within the revolutionary government, civilian and military dissatisfaction at the new government's inability to establish peace, and a weakening of military in the trenches all threatened the very existence of the new Soviet state. In 1917, divisions between Marxists contributed to the chaos. While Marxist theory provided the foundation for the revolutionaries, factions arose advocating for different methods of implementing the ideological underpinnings of the revolution without a common enemy to unite them. Despite the democratic ideals of the revolution, the Bolsheviks gained power of the party and state apparatus through use of force in the October Uprising. Once in power, policies that created nations in non-

Russian parts of the territory and bound those nations to the Soviet Union provided ideologically sound means to secure manpower and resources.

Once a definition of nationality had been established and ideologically woven into the mission of the Party as a necessary step in reaching global communism, it had to be actualized through the creation of new institutions that would foster national development. In the Soviet imagination, language and culture were not only understood as defining elements of peoples (*narodnost'i*), but also as tools with which to bring people together and disperse the message of socialism. The Bolsheviks were committed to ensuring the right to national self-determination throughout the Union. Although promotion of national identities would seem to go against the supposed universal nature of socialist ideology, Soviet officials justified their support for these policies by using nationality to adapt the message of socialism in order to make it applicable to people throughout the USSR. One legacy of oppressive tsarist policies was the discouragement of non-Russians from using their native languages in official settings (Suny 97). Lenin, and later Stalin, sought to remedy this perceived wrong by reversing such policies, instead incorporating markers of national self-determination into the official sphere through native language education, and national art forms.

Under the monarchy, non-Russians did not have access to education in their native languages, and the vast majority of people had no access to education at all (Suny 97). If the new government was to raise consciousness and spread socialist ideology, they reasoned that it would be necessary to increase access to education universally. Although the same Marxist-Leninist oriented curriculum was used everywhere, the new Soviet schools taught lessons in native languages (Slezkine 420). Until 1959 when policies

dictating native-language education were weakened, all students were required to study the titular language of their republic irrespective of their own nationality (Gorenburg 37). This ensured that large proportions of each ethnic group maintained a connection with their culture and traditions (39). Native-language education required the development of an “ethnic intelligentsia” to interpret traditions and culture for a modern socialist audience. Academies and institutions developed for the purpose of not only studying, but also producing the culture of ethnic groups. For most groups these were the first secular academic institutions, and they facilitated the creation of national histories, literatures, and arts (39). Institutions that drew people towards one titular national identity distanced them from other groups, and encouraged or forced people belonging to minor nationalities to assimilate.

Promoting national languages and cultures was of particular importance in “nativization” policies (korenizatsiia), which encouraged people to connect with their national roots. Learning from the ineffectiveness of inconsistent and unreasonably harsh tsarist policies in non-Russian parts of the old regime, Soviet officials realized that force of will would not effectively spread socialist ideology. Bolshevik revolutionaries understood that the process of transforming each individual citizen from a religiously or tribally identified person to socialist Soviet citizen was bound to each of the numerous republics. Connecting people through regional territorially bound national identities was a primary step in this process (Suny 116). In many areas, state officials seized on local languages and cultures as potentially effective tools in spreading the message of Communism; likewise the Communist Party claimed that language and other cultural “forms” were devoid of essential, ahistorical meaning. Rather, they were superstructural

expressions of a given historical consciousness, and so contained no unchanging or immutable ethnonational essence. If the promotion of certain cultural forms had the potential to canonize national content that worked against the progress of universal socialism, then the division of form and content preserved the universality of Leninist-Marxist ideology alongside the cultural uniqueness of national groups. According to this logic, it was acceptable to use native cultural forms to promote socialist messages because “there was no such thing as national content” (Slezkine 418).

The use of the veil in formerly Muslim territories as a symbol of modern nationhood illustrates this crucial ideological separation of form and content. In the Soviet context of nation building, the veil was ideologically disentangled from the religion of Islam, so that it could be embroidered by Soviet policy makers with national cultural meaning. Because the nation form confers modernity to a given ethnoterritorial group on the global stage of History, the veil as a symbol of nationhood demonstrated modernity in a way that veils of sacred or personal meaning could not; from a Marxist-Leninist perspective, these other proprietary forms were understood as regressive. The veil therefore was branded national in form only as long as it expressed national sentiment, and therefore contained socialist-historical--and not “pseudo-eternal” religious--content. It is worth mentioning here that while the veil is imbued with a historical consciousness of its own, the actual historical subjects—women wearing the veils—are deprived of theirs.

Policy Into State

Connecting people through regional territorially bound national identities was at the foundation of the Soviet model of Federalism. Through the establishment of nationality

as a category of classification and the fostering of nationally specific cultures, the Soviet regime worked to instill a sense of national identity in places where it had never existed before, and connect those identities with Soviet state structures.

Perhaps the greatest triumph of nationality policy was that it changed the way people identified themselves. In part, this was due to the incorporation of nationality as a category of classification. Prior to the establishment of the Soviet Union, people would commonly select their socio-economic status, religion, or locality as their primary identifying characteristic. After the revolution, nationality became a classification that was used in censuses and on internal passports. These systems required individuals to choose a national identity. In other words, “It is reasoned that these institutional steps virtually forced upon each citizen an ethnic awareness (and indeed an ethnic identity) which he might not otherwise have had” (Simonsen 1071).

In the early years of the Soviet Union, theoretically every national group would have the same institutions and protections to foster their identity development. In practice, however, subordinate identities were assimilated or eliminated. Ethnic groups that were small in number or failed to demonstrate the development and modernization that rationalized the Soviet state’s support for nationality policy were encouraged, sometimes forcefully, to assimilate with titular national groups. In “solving” the “nationality question,” rigid boundaries were established between peoples; however, these policies played into the long-term goals of eventual homogenization of the Soviet Union (Simonsen 1072). This was achieved through a combination of utilitarian policies that progressively narrowed the list of recognized nationalities.

In 1927, 172 nationalities had obtained “official status” (Hirsch 255). In contrast, only 57 of the largest nationalities were reported on the 1939 census results—a decrease of 155 titles (276). Between the time when the Soviet Union was founded and the late-1930s, the vocabulary and definitions that had been established in the early 1920s remained more or less constant (267). However, the process of consolidation resulted in the emergence of certain dominant nationalities and other subordinate ones. Consolidation was a combination of processes of assimilation of smaller and larger ethnic groups, and the elimination of groups from the list of recognized nationalities. According to Francine Hirsch, this happened in two steps. First, the Soviet state apparatus made a distinction between “major” and “minor” nationalities. Then the state emphasized the differences between “narodnosti” (peoples) and “natsional’nosti” (nations), leading to the rise of territorial titular nations (277).

After the first list of nationalities was created in 1927, ethnographers were asked to create a list of “major nationalities” (Hirsch 264). For the most part, distinguishing between major and minor nationalities was a function of limited time and resources. It would simply be too inefficient to analyze detailed statistics for each of the 172 nations that had obtained official status. The method of data consolidation had a huge impact on the results of this practice: instead of totaling the number of people identifying with a national group within the union, data was localized regionally. This means that even if an ethnicity had a formidable union-wide presence but members were widespread (as was the case for ethnic Jews, for example), they would appear as minor rather than major nationalities in regional data (265). Creating a new list of major nationalities did not only mean highlighting the groups with the highest membership, but also included the much

more complicated task of merging smaller groups that shared similar traits with major nationalities (264). In some cases, people who had already begun to develop a connection to a smaller developing identity were urged or forced to re-identify as the territorial dominant nationality and assimilate. For example, until the 1930s the Talysh people living in the Azerbaijani ASSR had their own schools and press, but the Talysh were consolidated with the Azerbaijanis as the list of nationalities was narrowed (Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization).

The second phase of consolidation was the distinction between narodnosti (peoples) and natsional'nosti (nations). Soviet definitions organized these terms in a hierarchy in which all nations were peoples, but not all peoples were nations. Narodnosti were still developing as a cohesive, modern group, while natsional'nosti had already reached a higher level of evolution. Leading up to the 1937 census, if a group had not “made the leap” from narodnost' to natsional'nost', they would not make it onto the list of official nationalities, instead being “relegated to the ethnographer’s dustbin” (Hirsch 267). This was an ideologically motivated decision-making process that reflected the ideals of modernization and spreading socialism through nationality policy. In other words, focusing on developed national identities (natsional'nosti) highlighted the successes of Soviet policy, and eliminating groups that had not elevated themselves erased what might be perceived as a mistake. Of course, a “modern” nation would be one that had developed “consciousness” and adhered to Marxist-Leninist ideology. Therefore, groups that had not modernized and were still considered “backward” by the Soviets were categorized as narodnost'i rather than natsional'nosti (267). The Tatars benefitted from their early integration into the Russian Empire, which eventually allowed for the

growth of an ethnic intelligentsia. In the early Soviet period, this elite group, and especially individuals like Mirza Sultan-Galiev, contributed to the high status of the Tatar people within the paradigm of Soviet nationality.

The failure to be categorized as a *natsional'nost* was characterized by a palpable loss of benefits and privileges that were reserved for nations. In this phase, consolidation was not so much a co-integration of national identities, but an elimination of those that did not meet Soviet standards and therefore could not belong to the Union as independent republics. Although distinguishing between nations and peoples seems to betray Lenin's initial promise to restore rights to every nation, it is in fact this designation that also affirmed Lenin's promise. The Soviet state was successful in ensuring that groups defined as *natsional'nosti* received the representation and rights that the state promised to them. *Narodnosti* did not have the right to territory, autonomy, involvement in government, schools, newspapers, etc. because they were *not* nations, and the Soviet regime therefore had no obligation to ensure these things.

Nationality policy was a key component of the Soviet Union's comprehensive program of social revolution. Despite seeming contradictions with Marxist-Leninist ideology, fostering nationalism provided a backdrop for the development of socialist institutions in non-Russian territories of the USSR. The effect of these policies was to change the way that individuals identified themselves; instead of associating with a social class or religion, people began to connect with a shared national identity, and with the political regime that had created it. Nationalism was a new concept in the Soviet borderlands, and policies that intended to allow national identity development actually created the identities that emerged and decided which ones would not. Academic

analyses of the Soviet nation-building process, including those I have included in this chapter, frequently depict a model where national identity is handed down to non-Russian minorities by a Russian-dominated metropole. While nationality policy was indeed an instrument of the center, ethnic groups were active participants in the creation of their national identities. If we understand the contemporary Russian Federal system to be, in part, the descendent of its Soviet predecessor, we should interpret it not only as a hyper centralized/consolidated federal model, but also one in which minority groups have the power to define themselves.

While existing research on center-periphery relations focuses on the center, this research seeks to take stock of the data that might come from republics, and establish an alternative understanding of the ways in which nationality have played out both as a Russian tactic to unite disparate and diverse territories, and as a mode by which some ethnic minorities in Russian-ruled spaces have been able to secure relative autonomy. The Republic of Tatarstan, located in the Volga River basin, has achieved unprecedented levels of autonomy while existing as a contingent part of the USSR, and now the Russian Federation. Comparisons have been drawn between Tatarstan and Chechnya in regards to the political, economic, and cultural autonomy they exercise on their respective territories. While their autonomy may be comparable, however, their respective relationships with the Russian central governments are not. Where does Tatarstan's political, economic, and cultural power come from, and what effect does Tatar autonomy have on contemporary center-periphery relations in the Russian Federation?

2. Framing Tatarstan's Sovereignty Project: Federalism and Power

Soviet Legacy

Now that we have established the ways in which socialist ideology shaped the Soviet state, I will explain how the legacy of the Soviet ethno-federalism shapes the contemporary Russian Federation. When the governing apparatus of the USSR was dissolved in 1991, the ethno-territorial pseudo-state structures underpinning its federal model remained largely intact and formed the basis for the new Russian Federation. Territorial borders and titular nationalities were largely unchanged as a new federative government coalesced on Russia's still-expansive and diverse territory. In the new federal order, Tatarstan has achieved its uniquely autonomous status within the Russia through alternating phases of state creation and state maintenance. The establishment of Tatar systems of governance during the Yeltsin presidency can be explained as an exercise in state building, wherein Tatar politicians and activists created the foundational attributes of a state in Tatarstan.

In the age of President Putin's efforts to centralize power in Moscow, the Tatar mentality has shifted to protecting the gains made in the 1990s and maintaining the structural elements of statehood. This pattern suggests two things about the nature of Tatarstan's relationship with the Moscow; first, that despite the Soviet state's construction of ethno-territorially based nations and Russia's subsequent adoption of a federal structure of governance, nation-building is a dialogic process in which the national group that is being "built" is active and has agency in its own construction and definition. Secondly, it contrasts the adaptability of federal subjects when compared with

the legislative and executive apparatuses of the federal center. In the case of Tatarstan, the republic is able to respond to political challenges from the center with agility, while Moscow is hindered by sheer volume and structural clumsiness. This chapter establishes two frameworks through which I propose to advance my thesis. First I consider what Nikolai Petrov's concept of Highly Managed Democracy means for republics like Tatarstan. Then I ask how we can measure Tatarstan's independence in relation to the political center and other federal subjects. These questions set the stage for subsequent chapters to examine how and why Tatarstan has achieved and protected its unique status within the Russian Federation.

Contemporary Russian Federalism

Federalism is a subdivision of government within a territory where local, regional, national, and supranational levels of government share responsibility and power. Federal systems are inherently contradictory, seeking to legitimize expansionist ambitions by unifying otherwise fragmentary states and attempting to reconcile unity and difference, and security and freedom. Despite the efforts of federations to protect the right of peoples' self-determination, Serge Sur argues that, "There is no federalism without a federator" (225). In many Western contexts federative systems carry democratic implications, but Sur suggests that a federation is simply an iteration of empire. Federations simultaneously weaken central authorities by devolving powers to state or regional bodies, and strengthen them by harnessing territories. The case of the Russian Federation illustrates this phenomenon; the necessary devolution of power to republics stifles the central government's ability to act, but strengthens Moscow by maintaining its authority over a massive swath of territory. On the other hand, when the federal

government accrues power that did or could belong to republics, it also takes on responsibilities that can overwhelm it. Russia's control over its territory is therefore accomplished through a process of governing that is closely supervised by the center, and only nominally democratic.

Through the development of flexible vocabularies of nationality in the 1920s and 30s, the Soviet government and non-Russian ethnic minorities manufactured national identities. Though the emergence of these identities was contingent on the exclusion of others, the consolidation of the Soviet State and the Communist Party allowed for the successful integration of a multinational territory into a coherent union of states for nearly 75 years. This unity relied heavily on the structures of governance created and operated by the centralized party apparatus, and was not resilient enough to survive the dissolution of the metropole that cemented it together. As the Soviet Union fell to pieces in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the erosion of the union was reflected in ethnically motivated conflicts and demands for independence. In the chaos of the early 1990s, the federal structure seemed to be the only viable option for Russia's weakened central government to appease the periphery and maintain control and security in its territory. Just as non-Russian groups understood the 1917 revolution to be an opportunity for the advancement of national priorities, some national groups viewed the breakup of the USSR as a potential opening. Similar to the early Soviet period, territorial vastness and ethnic divides provided the basis for a federal system in Russia in the 1990s. Furthermore, the basic structures of federalism were already in place and could be co-opted by a new government. In line with Serge Sur's understanding of federative states,

the Russian central government used the devolution of power to republics in order to dull separatist sentiment and maintain control over territory.

While federalism in the 1990s was marked by decentralization of power and responsibility to republican governments, the 2000s have been marked by the opposite trend as the Putin administration centralizes power in Moscow. Specific policies that have subdued the periphery to the government of the Russian Federation have included the removal of the “against all” option on electoral ballots, the establishment of regional governments that are under the direct control of the central government, and the abolition of elected republican governors between 2004 and 2012. Russian federalism is inherently asymmetrical; despite identical constitutional status, republics do not have equal shares of power. The centralization of power in Moscow adds another of inequality to the Russian federal system. Republics are not only in competition with one another, but also with Russia. Inequality between republics can therefore be understood as their unequal ability to resist or bargain with Moscow.

Nikolai Petrov calls the Russian political regime a “Highly Managed Democracy” (HMD). This does not mean that the present model of government is democratic, but refers to the “protodemocracy of the Yeltsin period, which later evolved toward ‘managed democracy’” (35). Petrov identifies extreme centralization of power, lack of flexibility, indecisiveness, and immobility as key characteristics of this model of government, which replaces democratic institutions with substitutes and quashes “fail-safe mechanisms” like media and non-governmental organizations. Under Vladimir Putin’s administration, he sees centralization “beyond the limits of rationality and effectiveness” that creates an unstable model of governance (ibid.) Lacking the systems

of checks and balances that allow governments to be responsive to changing conditions, HMD is clumsy and unable to adjust to new circumstances (38). The overloaded central government does not have “...an objective and high-quality expert-analytical foundation for making decisions and designing effective mechanisms to harmonize interests,” limiting the effectiveness of the central government in relations with its federal subjects (43). Petrov argues that Highly Managed Democracy is unstable and unsustainable, and that the regime will slip either into full-blown authoritarianism or democratization. He finds the second option to be more likely (35). Paradoxically, HMD has drawn political power away from republican governments, but by overloading the Kremlin, it hinders the central government’s ability to counter challenges from its federal subjects. Tatarstan’s relative strength comes from its ability to manipulate Russia’s weakness in this regard.

Tatarstan’s Sovereignty Project

Tatarstan’s sovereignty project began in earnest with the rise of nationalist activism in the late Soviet period, from the 1980s until the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. The dissolution of the government of the RSFSR led to the decentralization of a formerly excessively centralized governing apparatus, and local and regional bodies absorbed responsibilities and powers. This period of decentralization is characterized by Boris Yeltsin’s notable quote, “Take as much sovereignty as you can ingest” (Graney, *Kahns* 18). In 1990 Tatarstan adopted the Declaration of State Sovereignty of the Tatar Soviet Socialist Republic, which dissolved the Tatar ASSR and established the Republic of Tatarstan. This simple, brief document provided the foundation for the construction of a Tatar republic post 1990, and for political and economic relationships between Tatarstan and the Russian central government.

The use of the word “sovereignty” in the context of Tatarstan leaves little ambiguity around the republic’s ambitions; Tatarstan does not seek some abstract notion of autonomy, but actual statehood on equal footing with the Russian federal state apparatus. In her book, *Nation, Language, Islam: Tatarstan’s Sovereignty Movement*, Helen Faller argues that the 2000s have seen this objective eschewed, as the republic does not continue to advance its sovereign status. Although Tatarstan’s goals may have shifted from building new elements of statehood to protecting already extant ones, the ideal of sovereignty plays no less of a role in the republic’s relations with Moscow. Power sharing between Moscow and Tatarstan is far from equilibrium, but this does not mean that the central government wields unbridled control over the republic of that Tatarstan’s sense of sovereignty and practice of statehood has dissipated.

Tatarstan has attempted to achieve sovereignty by building the functional mechanisms of a state, even those that usually belong to a central government. Sovereign ambitions encapsulated in the structural elements of statehood outlast shifts in the political landscape. Katherine Graney explains the ways in which Tatarstan has constructed itself as a state by “looking like a state,” “providing like a state,” and “acting like a state” (*Kahns* 55, 62, 71). In other words, throughout the 1990s and early 2000s the Republic of Tatarstan served the basic functions associated with sovereign statehood despite its ambiguous legal status as a contingent member of the Russian Federation. It accomplished this by establishing the symbolism of statehood in public spaces, levying taxes on citizens and providing them with services in return (i.e. education), and establishing relationships with foreign governments independently of the Russian

Federation. This last activity is especially peculiar because foreign affairs are almost always delegated to central governments of federations.

There are two predominant perspectives in contemporary scholarship on Tatarstan. One interprets Tatarstan's status and resulting power as a primarily economic arrangement based on the region's revenue from oil and various industries. Other scholars contend that this interpretation does not account for the importance of the region's commitment to its unique culture, history, and national character. Both of these analyses view Tatarstan's independence as a formality of minimal consequence. In my estimation of Tatarstan's self-determination that follows, I emphasize that the republic's relationship with the federal center is both economic and cultural. Furthermore, I highlight the very real, practical implications of Tatarstan's symbolic and discursive power. Tatarstan is measurably stronger than other peripheral republics, and strong enough to exert pressure on the Russian government.

It is worth noting here that "sovereignty" and "independence" do not always cause progressive democratization. Like Russia's federal government and the governments of a great many former Soviet territories, Tatarstan's government suffers from corruption and cronyism. In 2002 it was estimated that Shaimiev's closest relatives held the most lucrative jobs, "...controlling up to 70% of the republic's economic potential" (Makarychev and Valuev 10). Political opposition within Tatarstan is extremely limited, and the media is heavily controlled. Critics of republican sovereignty in the former Soviet space argue that federal subjects have "...tended to use their new powers and authorities to build autocratic and indeed ethnocratic regimes" (80).

Measuring Tatarstan's Autonomy

In his discussion of the need for a methodology to analyze and understand Russia's regions, Rostislav Turovskii puts forth a plan that incorporates three "axes" with "consolidation-competition," "center-regions," and "democracy-authoritarianism" as their respective poles. Here I will use Turovskii's "center-regions" scale to measure the extent of Tatarstan's autonomy today. This will provide the basis for my discussion of why and how the republic has achieved such a unique status in Russia. In order to ascertain where a republic falls on the scale of autonomy from the center of political power, Turovskii suggests a series of questions. "First, how well developed is federal control over the state structures of the region, who exercises this control, and how?" (43). In Tatarstan, federal control over state structures is exercised primarily through the application of federal legislation and occasionally through more decisive action. For example, Moscow requires that federal laws must be reconciled with the laws of the central government. In theory, this is a mechanism by which the central government can use the federal legislative process to temper republics like Tatarstan. Although Tatarstan's constitution says that the president of the republic can only be elected by the people of the republic, Putin's 2004 federal reform gave Moscow the power to appoint all regional heads of state (Turovskii, "Governors" 59). However, Dmitry Medvedev, who was the president at the time, nominated Rustam Minnikhanov at the request of his predecessor, Mintimir Shaimiev. Although the Kremlin's laws are applied to the semi-autonomous republic, Tatarstan is in a unique position to negotiate over its interests. Therefore central influence is not exercised unilaterally as it is in weaker regions.

The second question Turovskii asks is “How well developed is the region’s representation at the center?” (Turovskii, “Regimes” 43). Tatarstan maintains a plenipotentiary representative in Moscow who works with federal authorities on issues of interest to the republic, and participates in the drafting and review of legislation that would affect the region (Republic of Tatarstan “About the Plenipotentiary Representation of the Republic of Tatarstan”). Russian authority over Tatarstan is not only mitigated by officials in the region, but also by regional officials operating in the center. Whereas other republics that do not have representation in Moscow are disadvantaged by the geographic distance between center and periphery, the presence of a republican representative at the center lends itself to a closer relationship with the federal government. This is, in part, what explains the difference in power between weaker republics like Mari El and stronger republics like Tatarstan.

Thirdly, Turovskii says that we must consider the geographical origin of the head of state and other top regional officials (43). Most notably, Tatarstan’s president, Rustam Minnikhanov, is an ethnic Tatar from the village of Rybnaya Sloboda. Local Tatarstanis occupy many top federal positions in the republic, including Ildus Nafikov in the office of the prosecutor general, Asgat Safarov in the ministry of internal affairs, and Renat Timerzyanov in the office of the chief federal inspector. Ethnic Tatars hold high offices in the republican government and are responsible for making decisions that might otherwise be delegated to Russians.

Level of financial independence is the last criterion that Turovskii uses to ascertain a region’s autonomy from the federal center. It is in this sector especially that Tatarstan has excelled. As a resource-laden region with a strong industrial sector,

Tatarstan is one of the most economically developed regions in Russia. Its level of financial autonomy has ebbed and flowed as the relationship between the republic and central government has shifted, but Tatarstan has continually controlled a large proportion of the revenue it generates. One of the best examples of Tatarstan's current level of financial independence is the republic's relationship with the oil and gas company, TatNeft. While most petroleum companies in Russia are either owned by the Russian state or have strong connections to the Kremlin, the government of Tatarstan maintains a "golden share" in TatNeft, giving it the power to outvote other shares in certain circumstances.

Despite challenges to Tatarstan's autonomy between the 1990s and 2000s, the republic has maintained the power to define itself, to govern itself, and to represent itself in Moscow. Russian federalism's asymmetry and micromanaged nature consolidate power at the political center. While this limits the ability of republics to govern themselves, the influx of responsibility in Moscow overwhelms the central government, and challenges its ability to react when republics act defiantly. Now that I have established the asymmetry of Russian federalism, I will discuss the ways in which Tatarstan defines and defends its uniquely independent position in the Russian Federation. Chapter three evaluates the Tatarstani process of building the mechanisms of statehood in the 1990s, and chapter 4 discusses efforts to protect these mechanisms in the face of Putinist centralization.

3. The Tatarstani Sovereignty Project in the 1990s

The Russian Center in the Early 1990s

While Western narratives of the collapse of the USSR often highlight and celebrate iconic events like the fall of the Berlin Wall, the dissolution of the Soviet State apparatus left a void of uncertainty for its contingent states and the people living in them. Reconstruction of political mechanisms, the challenges of converting a state-controlled economy to a market-based one, and the social changes brought about by the introduction of capitalism characterized the 1990s as a particularly turbulent time in Russia and the territories of the former Soviet Union. The systems of governance that had unified the vast and disparate lands of the Soviet Union no longer existed, and it was far from clear what the replacement for those structures would be. Uncertainty grew as some republics terminated their relationship with the Soviet Union. Starting with Lithuania in 1990, the Baltic states were at the forefront of the movement for independence from the USSR. Yeltsin inherited the challenges of maintaining cohesion that Gorbachev struggled with in the late Soviet period.

After the disintegration of the USSR, Russia sought to maintain its international status as a great power. An interstate system based on non-intervention sets the stage for the existence of great powers because larger states that possess economic and military strength exercise global influence (Zacher 215). Internal cohesion is key in the production of this economic and military power, and it allows states to project an image of strength abroad. Federative agreements with republics helped to reestablish Russia's international image after the fall of the Soviet state by devolving power to republics while ensuring that they would not separate from Russia. In this regard, it mirrored the way in

which Soviet federalism was brought about in part by administrative necessity. The structures established in this period (the 1920s in particular) were inherited by the Russian Federation, along with their asymmetrical and ethno-territorial nature.

Assuming the presidency in 1991, Boris Yeltsin's strategy of devolving power to republics cemented the positions of peripheral territories within Russia and relieved pressure on the financially and politically troubled central government. With Moscow occupied by macro political and economic issues, it made logistical sense for republics to take over some administrative responsibilities. On the one hand, this provided an opportunity for national-territorially bound republics for which the Soviet project was restrictive rather than liberating to claim unprecedented levels of independence. On the other hand though, post-Soviet restructuring was fraught with financial, organizational, and political problems at all levels of governance. Russia's asymmetrical model of federalism led to inequality between republics; while non-Russian territories were treated like states, ethnically Russian sub-state structures were treated as administrative districts governed almost solely by the central government (Hughes). The challenge of economic transition was accompanied by sharp increases in poverty, unemployment, homelessness, addiction and alcoholism, mental health issues, and HIV/AIDS (Lyons). Despite increased autonomy, most republics were struck by the financial crisis and lacked the funding to provide the social welfare that was in higher demand and no longer supported by Moscow. While this restructuring was a disadvantage for many territories, it was in this period of devolution that the well-resourced republic of Tatarstan reclaimed revenue, ethnic heritage, and political autonomy.

This chapter will examine the steps that the Republic of Tatarstan took in the 1990s to establish itself as a sovereign state within the nascent Russian Federation. First I contextualize Tatarstan's claims to sovereignty as a movement that is inspired by but separate from the "Parade of Sovereignties" initiated by the Baltic states. Then I analyze the legal basis for Tatarstani sovereignty. The next section of this chapter illustrates Tatarstan's sovereignty project through three structures that confer statehood: economic control, education reform, and the creation and incorporation of state symbols in the built environment. This allows me to demonstrate that throughout the 1990s, the Tatarstani strategy of achieving sovereignty was to encapsulate it in permanent institutions.

Tatarstan in the 1990s

Tatarstan took advantage of the instability and uncertainty of the Soviet State to make legal and political moves towards sovereignty in 1990. Moscow was not only distracted by crises that threatened the central government, but also those that compromised the cohesion of the union. In what has come to be known as the "Parade of Sovereignties," the USSR lost six union republics in 1990--the three Baltic states, Moldova, Armenia, and Georgia. Tatarstan's claim of sovereignty in the 1990 Declaration of Sovereignty differed from the independence movements of these states. Even though the Declaration of Sovereignty claimed that the soviet of the Tatar SSR would be the supreme governing power, the existing Tatar state as a subject of the Soviet central government merely took a new form. In other words, this document did not establish Tatarstan's complete independence or separation from Russia. While some states on Russia's borders followed separatist paths, Tatarstan remained a contingent part of Russia. The fact of the territory's geography made separatism an impractical option for

Tatarstan, but it has a demonstrated ability to accrue power and avoid violent conflict with the Russian center. In response to challenges from the center, Tatarstan brokers compromises with Moscow that are in the best interests of the republic. At times it continues to function as a state without federal permission. This is particularly significant in contrast with Chechnya's pursuit of independence through war.

The political and administrative decentralization of the 1990s provided the Tatar ASSR with the opportunity to claim its independence from Moscow. Although Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics had stronger self-determination than other administrative units like okrugs and oblasts that are typically ethnically Russian, they were still a contingent part of the Russian SFSR, and lacked the privilege granted to union republics (SSRs) to disassociate from the union (Pipes 43). The Tatarstani claim to sovereignty therefore had to negotiate this legal distinction. The Tatarstani sovereignty project was fueled by dissatisfaction as much as it was by opportunity. Disappointed in the empty early Soviet promises of self-determination, minority nationalist activists across the RSFSR were inspired and aided by the growing movements and successes in the Baltic States (Graney, *Kahns* 15). Perhaps most importantly, the government and populace of the Tatar ASSR were becoming increasingly disillusioned by the economic inequality between the richly resourced republic and the metropole. Of the 25 trillion rubles that the robust Tatarstani economy produced per year, 80% was siphoned off to the Union, 18% to the RSFSR, and 2% remained in the republic (Tagirov 230). Tatarstani sovereignty therefore sought to manipulate opening political channels to reverse perceived historical, cultural and economic wrongs and realize the international norm of self-determination in a meaningful way. President Shaimiev's reclamation of the

republic's economy and rejection of shock therapy allowed Tatarstan to provide a higher standard of living than other Russian territories. Clearly conscious of this, Shaimiev has said, "Due to the sovereignty we have been able to develop our own economic and social policies: a more reasonable privatization program, stopping the decline in oil production, to develop an agricultural program that fulfills basic food needs, and adopt a program of targeted social protection of the population...Our sovereignty works in the interests of humanity" (Shamiev 2002).

The first legal step in achieving autonomy was the adoption of the Declaration on State Sovereignty on August 30, 1990. In the midst of the chain of political crises that would lead to the fall of the Soviet State, the Tatar ASSR declared its sovereignty. The declaration converted the Tatar ASSR into the Tatar SSR (union republic), claimed the Tatar state soviet would be the highest governmental authority in the territory, and provided the basis for the constitution of Tatarstan (Declaration on the State Sovereignty of the Tatar Soviet Socialist Republic). The republic accomplished this without Moscow's permission, and in a way that had legal standing. Although the Declaration of Sovereignty reveals Tatarstani ambitions for independence from Moscow, this brief document does not detail how these abstract ideals would be put into practice. For example, although the declaration asserts that, "Tatar SSR guarantees all citizens of the Republic equal rights and freedoms," it does not go into further detail about how those rights and freedoms would be secured (ibid). Furthermore, the Declaration of Sovereignty stipulated that the newly founded Tatar SSR would abide by the laws of the RSFSR in the time elapsing before a constitution was ratified, which did not occur until 1992.

Declaring sovereignty is one thing, but making change on the ground is quite another. For Tatarstan in the 1990s, sovereignty was not an objective that could be accomplished, but an ongoing process that involved establishing state-like structures, and defining and redefining what it means to be sovereign within a Russian-ruled space. It is in this context that Tatarstan established a legal basis for sovereignty. Although the Declaration of State Sovereignty states that the Tatar SSR would prepare to sign a bilateral treaty establishing relations with the RSFSR, this process was complicated and spanned three years. In 1992, the republic held a referendum to establish the legal status of the state. With 81.6% voter turnout, 61% of the electorate, which included Tatars and Russians, voted for Tatarstan to become “a sovereign state and subject of international law” (Gabidullin and Edwards). Ten days after the referendum, President Mintimir Shaimiev declined to sign the Russian Federal Treaty that he had previously agreed to “for fear that [Tatarstan] might lose its sovereign status” (Graney, *Kahns* 35). Shaimiev and other Tatarstani officials now called for a bilateral, equitable treaty with Russia. Despite Yeltsin’s acclaimed support for sovereignty projects, he was operating under the assumption that appeasing nationalist sentiments would make them easier to tame and bring into the Russian-dominated fold once he was in power. Tatarstan’s refusal to sign the treaty drew the Russian president’s ire; Yeltsin warned that Tatarstan’s rejection of the agreement “presupposes that Tatarstan is not part of Russia” (ibid). It was not until 1994 that Tatarstan and Russia entered into a formal legal agreement (Treaty on the Delimitation of Jurisdictional Subjects and Mutual Delegation of Authorities Between the State Bodies of Power of the Russian Federation and the State Bodies of Power of the

Republic of Tatarstan) establishing the republic as a sovereign state “associated” with Russia, and delegating certain powers to the central government (Graney, *Khans* 39).

Consisting of at least five documents, the legal foundations of Tatarstani sovereignty are riddled with ambiguity, complexity, and redundancy. This “legal chaos” poses challenges to the governance of the republic, but Tatarstan has deftly and adaptively manipulated the conditions of its position in the federation in order to maximize empirical and symbolic self-determination and minimize Moscow’s meddling. In the decade following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Tatarstan’s insistence on the primacy of republican legislation over federal, and use of legal autonomy to build practical structures associated with statehood, the republic has secured an unprecedented amount of power as a federal subject of the Russian Federation. Throughout the 1990s, the outcome of this strategy largely favored Tatarstani interests and completely avoided violent conflict with the Russian center.

Recipe for a State

With the legal basis for Tatarstani autonomy in place, the republic had to transform the language of sovereignty into a living reality. Highlighting Tatarstan’s cultural distinctiveness was a key element of this project from early on. Originally there were two separate versions of the Declaration on State Sovereignty: one focused on reforming the relationship between the Tatar ASSR and the RSFSR, the other on reforming the relationship between Tatar and Russian languages in the republic (Tagirov 232). This fact demonstrates a consciousness among Tatarstani elite that legal and cultural sovereignty would need to be bridged.

Due to the heterogeneity of Tatarstan's population, emphasizing cultural distinctiveness required the reconciliation of ethnic Tatar and Russian interpretations of the history of the territory. According to Tatar historiographies, the middle Volga region is a historic ethnic homeland, and the Tatars only lost control of the region due to Slavic aggression and violence. Many ethnic Russians viewed Tatarstan as a part of Russia, and credit European Slavic influence with the cultural, social, and economic development of the region. Therefore, the republic's sovereignty project hinged on the development of an inclusive cultural identity that conceptualized ethnic Tatar history and culture in a broader *multicultural* context that would appeal to Russians and non-Russians alike, and on the development of a political identity that did not separate the republic from Russia. Speaking on the 10th anniversary of the Declaration of Sovereignty, President Shaimiev upheld the idea that, "Sovereignty is not directed against Russia or its integrity, and does not claim the authority of the federal center. It is necessary for us to organize our lives in accordance with the features that exist in this country" (Shamiev 2002). Therefore, Tatarstan's founding documents, and political, economic, and cultural reforms underscored the uniqueness of the republic in a way that appealed to and benefited those who did not identify as Tatar. In other words, it was possible to be *Tatartsani* regardless of affiliation with an ethnic identity.

Economic Autonomy

Recalling that economic grievances were an important motivator in the Republic of Tatarstan's claim to sovereignty in 1990, it makes sense that economic arrangements between the center and periphery are significant sites of struggle and indicators of autonomy. Through the 1994 bilateral treaty with Russia and a number of auxiliary

documents, Tatarstan negotiated nearly complete autonomy over the tax code, control over natural resources, and power-sharing over defense industries in the republic (an economic sector that the central government would administer in most circumstances). Whereas the federal government controlled taxes in most republics, until 2000, Tatarstan was allowed to levy its own taxes and send a percentage of the money to Moscow. Of particular importance to the Tatarstani economy is the agreement with Russia regarding gas and oil production, and the vertically integrated holding company Tatneft. The republican government owns a “golden share” of the company (56%), giving it a majority vote in any major decision (Terentyeva). Because the republican government had jurisdiction over the economy, it was able to stabilize it as Russia transitioned into a market-based economy, saving many from the instability experienced in other regions as a result of Yeltsin’s catastrophic shock therapy.

Some scholars like Laurence Hanauer praise Tatarstan’s model of “economic sovereignty” for avoiding the “emotionally charged rhetoric” of ethnicity that characterized the conflict in Chechnya (Jeffries 347). It is certainly true that Tatarstan has drawn political power from the economic resources it possesses. The republic can literally and figuratively afford to oppose Russia when necessary. Throughout the 1990s, Tatarstani officials returned to the economic agreements of the 1994 treaty again and again in defense of republican sovereignty. President Shaimiev credited the treaty with “stabilizing the political situation” with Russia. For example, although the tax code was renegotiated after Putin came to power, the government of Tatarstan has used this agreement to maintain its control over Tatneft, the republic’s largest oil company. By using indirect rather than direct action against the metropole, the republic asserted

autonomy and resisted complete centralization. Although Hanauer distills Tatarstan's autonomy into a purely economic agreement, given the way in which Tatarstan has actually leveraged its economic position in conjunction with comprehensive social and cultural reforms, I suggest that there is more to the republic's sovereignty project than money.

Education Reform

The establishment of "national" schools in the 1920s and 30s had been an important part of the Soviet doctrine of "korenizatsiia." These schools taught classes in the native language of the regions they operated in, but the curricula were centrally dictated by Moscow, making them "national in form and socialist in content." In the wake of the dissolution of the USSR, the reimagining of national education that included national curricula became a tool in the effort for discursive and material sovereignty in the republics. Katherine Graney tells us that the language of sovereignty was frequently applied to education reforms in Tatarstan in the early 1990s. Examining the republican educational initiatives gives us insight into the nature of Tatarstani aspirations for sovereignty. Discourses on education reveal tensions that exist between ethno-centric elements of sovereign Tatarstani identity and a commitment to multiculturalism. From language to history to literature, education reform in the republic prioritized Tatar ethnic identity. Concurrently though, new curricula also emphasize a territorial, civic approach to understanding nationality, which is inclusive of all ethnicities (Graney, "Education" 622). Politically, republican educational reform was publicized as an improvement of education for all students, elevating it to an internationally accepted level. Despite efforts to construe the nation as territorial, multiethnic, and primarily civic, the parallel dialogue

of reclaiming academic subjects holds special significance for Tatars, the titular territorial nationality.

In the case of Tatarstan, education reform was based primarily on language education, and history, literature, and hard science curricula that incited republican values. Mandatory Tatar language education for all students regardless of ethnic identity was intended to create a culture of “functional bilingualism” in the republic. In addition to language, education reform included changes to most subjects in the interest of “...relocating the production of cultural and historical knowledge away from Moscow and to the republics” (Graney, “Education” 614). In Tatarstan textbooks and courses were redesigned to reflect a “Tatarstani” interpretation of history, include Tatar authors, poets, and cultural figures, and coursework on the ecology and geography of the republic (615-16). Although science may be a seemingly neutral subject, educational reforms in the sciences were centered on those subfields that were pertinent for future economic development--namely the oil and chemical industries (614). Although education reform benefitted students regardless of ethnicity, proactive encouragement of Tatar perspectives in education may not always apply to Russian students. For example, although all students are encouraged to learn Tatar, “...the asymmetry of the language policy...encourages young Tatars to develop a unified ‘national’ identity, combining language, ethnicity, religion and other elements, which is not matched by the policy as it affects young Russians, who neither expect to speak Tatar nor are likely to express their identities in these terms” (Veniguer and Davis 187).

Building the Nation: The Foundation

Markers of statehood are not only functional, but also symbolic. Tatarstan's pursuit of sovereignty therefore included the creation of symbols that represent the republic. According to the National Library of Tatarstan's website, "A state's existence is impossible without the presence of state symbols to personify its state system, social features, the historical development of its society, and the customs and traditions which have developed within it." In 1992, the Supreme Council of the Republic of Tatarstan approved a new coat of arms designed by a special commission tasked with developing new republican symbols. This coat of arms features the national colors, red and green, and a winged snow leopard (*ak bars* in Tatar), a figure from Tatar folklore. Since the adoption of this crest, it has been incorporated into public and official spaces throughout the republic such as subway stations and government buildings.

In addition to integrating new symbols into existing spaces, the Republic of Tatarstan has also projected its sovereignty through the creation of new buildings and spaces. The Kul Sharif Mosque was built during a particularly productive period in the history of Tatarstani autonomy. Planning the mosque began in 1997 under the watchful eye of Mintimir Shaimiev, president of the republic and key figure in the Tatar sovereignty project. The mosque is the embodiment of Shaimiev's core plan to "build the nation" by incorporating expressions of national identity in the built environment (Graney, *Kahns* 99). The decision to build the mosque within the white walls of the Kazan Kremlin was more than an effort to balance the official representation of religion in a multi-ethnic and multi-confessional republic.

The location of the mosque is significant to Tatars because it is adjacent to the alleged site of the original mosque of the Kazan khanate, which is said to have been burned down and replaced by the Annunciation Cathedral when the city was conquered (Villum). On the one hand, rebuilding the mosque recognizes the long history of Tatar culture and lifestyle in the region, and makes a statement by including that identity in the official space of the Kremlin. On the other hand though, building the mosque in the Kremlin positions it firmly within the Russian structure of federal governance, and symbolically solidifies Tatarstan's role within the Russian Federation. Tatarstan is unique in its ability to work within the prescribed federal structure and incorporate ethnic Russians and elements of Russian-ness into its identity, though it is unable to fully accomplish this. The Kul Sharif Mosque is not only a symbol of this relative autonomy for ethnic Tatars, but also a demonstration of the ways in which Tatar and Russian identities are woven together.

Official and Unofficial Dimensions of Tatarstan's Statehood

Tatarstan has achieved an unprecedented level of autonomy within the Russian Federation. The dissolution of the Soviet Union and Yeltsin's positive attitude toward the devolution of power to republics presented Russia's periphery with an opportunity to practice self-determination in a much more meaningful way than during the Soviet period. This window of opportunity combined with existing discontent with Russian and Soviet governance provided the backdrop for Tatarstan to seek sovereignty. From 1990-1999, Tatarstan's sovereignty project included the establishment of the legal foundations for statehood, such as the Declaration of Sovereignty, the constitution of the republic, and the Federative Agreement with the Russian state. Public officials took steps to translate

words on paper into actual functions of statehood. The government of the republic reclaimed revenue that would have been redistributed previously, education reform introduced national values to the classroom, and the state proactively incorporated symbols of Tatarstani nationality into the built environment.

For Tatarstan, the 1990s were a decade of national development, in which the elements of statehood were produced. The Republic of Tatarstan did not officially become a state and never separated itself from Russia. Instead, it maximized its own autonomy and independence in practice while avoiding provoking the Russian Federation into potentially negative retaliation (Graney, *Kahns* 34). Tatarstan's strength as a federal subject of the Russian Federation comes from its bargaining power, which was especially developed during the 1990s.

4. Tatarstani Sovereignty and Power in the 21st Century

Vladimir Putin's Administration and Changing Federal Dynamics

Formerly a ranking member of the KGB, Vladimir Putin joined Boris Yeltsin's administration in the mid '90s and quickly worked his way into the executive office of the federation. He became acting president in 2000 when Yeltsin resigned, and subsequently won the presidential election with ease. Along with economic growth and stability, reforming relations between Moscow and the regions quickly became a hallmark of Putin's first presidency. In addition to being credited with the "pacification" of Chechnya, he spearheaded an overarching policy of centralization that was intended to bring power back to the federal government through measures like "harmonizing" regional and federal laws, and appointing regional leadership rather than holding popular elections.

Despite Putin's manifold efforts to consolidate political and economic power, the centralization of the 2000s was by and large confined to the path of decentralization of the 1990s. The amalgamation of power at the metropole was far from a comprehensive policy; it was a negotiated ad hoc approach. Just as regions had established relationships with the federal center individually and asymmetrically, the undoing of these agreements was undertaken individually and asymmetrically (Gel'man 11). Even when the federal legislation was passed to bring peripheral republics into line, it was applied selectively, allowing some states to maintain relative autonomy. The uncoordinated policy of centralization throughout the 2000s has exacerbated inequality between territories, leading to a federal system in which some republics like Tatarstan are in a position to negotiate with Moscow. Where does Tatarstan's power come from? And how do certain

republics maintain relative independence in the face of increasing centralization? What does this dynamic tell us about the Russian federal center?

Tatarstan in the New Russian Federalism

With Vladimir Putin's ascension to office in 2000 came monumental shifts in the structure of the Russian state, particularly in the changing relationships between Moscow and the regions. Due to the 1994 power-sharing agreement between Tatarstan and the Russian Federation and other supplementary economic agreements, life in the Republic of Tatarstan was very different than life throughout Russia. Under Putin, however, the resurgence of central authority was a top priority, which hinged on the elimination of differences between administrative units. In order to achieve this, a cascade of policies was handed down from Moscow intending to "harmonize" republican legislation with the central government's and severely limit the power of stronger republics like Tatarstan. Although Putin's administration(s) have made it difficult for Tatarstan to establish new forms of autonomy, the Russian metropole has had a difficult time destroying the republic's existing infrastructure that conveys independence and power. Tatarstan's negotiating power may have been tempered, but it is still significant.

As the relationship between Russia's federal government and Tatarstan changed, so too did the understanding of Tatarstani sovereignty. Strictly interpreted as an international norm, sovereignty was already out of reach in the 1990s, but centralization under Putin made it a more definite impossibility. Some debate whether the republic's relative independence can be considered sovereignty at all. Scholars Helen Fallor and Katherine Graney diverge on whether Tatarstani sovereignty was ever realized. While Fallor argues that the start of the 2000s marked the end of the Tatarstani sovereignty

project, Graney suggests that the spirit of sovereignty lives on in the republic. I agree with Graney that sovereignty has remained the Tatarstani objective in the face of political centralization, but this requires a broad and flexible interpretation of the term. In the context of Tatarstan this word cannot be understood as a complete divorce from the Russian political and economic systems, but it does connote a power to broker compromises that other regions would have no hope of negotiating.

Whereas the fall of the Soviet Union created an opportunity for the Republic of Tatarstan to take on new responsibilities and define its political powers, the 2000s have been devoted to protecting the gains made in the 1990s. Tatarstan's privileges are largely encapsulated in the structures of statehood. Because political institutions, industry and taxes, and symbolic representations of cultural identity play necessary roles in society and by nature have a certain permanent quality, they are not easily erased by Russian centralization. For example, although the Russian government successfully blocked legislation that would change the Tatar alphabet from Cyrillic to Latin in 2001, Tatarstan is still the republic that spends the least time learning Russian in schools because of the mandate that all students must master Tatar (Derrick 55). Tatarstan has maintained a nearly unprecedented amount of bargaining power in the Russian Federal political system.

Economic Sovereignty: Tatarstan's Petrostate

Tatarstan's continued role in regulating its own economy is an important element of the republic's sovereignty in the 2000s. Scholars like Helen Faller and Matthew Derrick suggest that the republic's privileged economic position guards against discontent in other areas as the central government reclaims certain powers. In other

words, Tatarstan's sovereignty is limited to its economic rights. While economic self-determination is important in and of itself, I understand it to be intimately connected to other important mechanisms of sovereignty. Throughout the 1990s and into the 2000s, the republic's economic independence reinforces and is reinforced by other forms of autonomy. The wealth generated by the republic's industries funds the structures that allow for its independence from the federal center. In turn, Tatarstan's autonomy allows it to manage its own economy.

Tatarstan's changing relationship with the federal center challenged its economic autonomy. In his first year as president, Vladimir Putin discovered that the republic had been committing tax fraud, sending only 6-7% of taxes to Moscow instead of the 30% agreed upon in 1994. After a closed-doors meeting with Tatarstani President, Mintimir Shaimiev, "...Tatarstan immediately agreed to cede at least 50% of the revenues generated on its territory to Moscow, which, as in Soviet times, were not redistributed back to the republic" (Faller 11). In the years that followed, subsequent changes to the Tatarstani tax code engineered by Moscow sought to hollow the region's autonomy (Derrick 52). Despite these challenges to the republic's economic independence, Tatarstan has continued to enjoy more control over its industry and economy than other republics.

The Tatarstani government's role in the oil and gas industry, the top generator of revenue in the republic, illustrates the close relationship between government and economy in Tatarstan. Recall that the government of Tatarstan gained a 56% share in Tatneft, the largest oil and gas business in the republic, through a provision in the 1994 power-sharing deal with Russia. Although the bilateral treaty has since been revoked, the

republican government has retained its “golden share” in the company, a majority share that allows it to make business decisions that are in the interests of the republic. In the 2000s, the growth of small oil companies, often under the umbrella of Tatneft, has both complicated the economic landscape and reinforced Tatarstan’s economic autonomy and power, enhancing the republic’s ability to resist the advances of the Russian center.

According to A.N. Tokarev (writing in 2013), “The gas-petrochemical complex...currently provides more than 60 percent of the republic’s industrial output and about 65% of the profit” (Tokarev 50). Tatarstan’s official economic policy hinges on stabilizing the production of oil; however, this is hindered by the fact that Tatarstan’s oil production is “mature,” meaning that the republic’s most accessible oil fields are being quickly depleted. As hard-to-recover oil and high viscosity crude oil constitute larger and larger percentages of Tatarstan’s natural resources, demand for innovations in the retrieval and processing industries rises. Tokarev details the role that small oil companies are taking on in response to this need. Small companies do not operate independently; many of them operate on contracts from Tatneft, and are motivated by governmental incentives in the form of tax benefits. As these companies benefit from government incentives, they contribute to the state’s goal of stabilizing oil production and maximizing the use of difficult-to-access and near-depleted oil fields. In the case of the oil and gas industry, the republic’s investment in the largest company and manipulation of incentives to promote innovation in the industry keeps Russian influence largely out of the Tatarstani oil market, and the Tatarstani economy more broadly.

Political Representation

Helen Faller argues that Tatarstan's sovereignty project has lost the intensity that characterized it in the 1990s. Particularly as the federal government encroaches on the rights and responsibilities of the republic, Tatarstan remains a fully integrated component of the Russian Federation and has made no real gains in terms of territorial sovereignty. This analysis hinges on a comparison of Tatarstan's faculties with those of the Russian Federation. Focusing instead on a comparison between Tatarstan and other ethnic republics within Russia, we might establish a different conclusion. Putinist policies to draw power back to Moscow have challenged the supreme authority of the republican government and the documents that establish it; however, through alternating programs of cooperation with and resistance to Moscow, Tatarstan has maintained much of the political autonomy it accrued in the 1990s.

Throughout the 2000s, the republic has blatantly neglected to engage in the process of legislative "harmonization" spearheaded by Moscow. Tatarstan continues to operate through laws and administrative structures that do not align with the central government's regulations. One recent example of republican disobedience that has caused uproar has to do with a Russian law dictating that only the president of the Russian Federation is eligible to use the title "president." While nearly all other republics have changed their regulations to abide by this guideline, Tatarstan refuses to give up the title. Despite fury from the center, there is little that Moscow can realistically and intelligently do to halt the republic's seizure of symbolic power. This is especially true because Tatarstan is a republic that Moscow has explicitly endorsed as a positive example of cooperation between peoples.

Despite the Kremlin's efforts to reestablish supreme authority on republican territory, in many ways Tatarstan's close relationship with Moscow gives the republic an advantage in political negotiations. Even though Tatarstani heads of state Mintimir Shaimiev and Rustam Minnikhanov have both been proponents of sovereignty, they have also gained a certain amount of respect and trust from Moscow, which they have leveraged for the benefit of the republic. Russia's tacit approval of the pro-sovereignty tilt of Tatarstan's leadership was highlighted in 2010 when regional elections were suspended and regional governorships and presidencies became appointed positions under Putin. While Muscovites were appointed to positions all around Russia, Rustam Minnikhanov, Shaimiev's hand picked choice for the position, became president of the republic. Not only has Moscow allowed Tatarstan to have native representation within the republic, but Tatarstan is also represented at the center. The Plenipotentiary Representative of Tatarstan advocates for the republic's interests in the federal legislative process, an advantage that few other republics have. Additionally, Tatarstan has opened consulate-like operations abroad, and manages independent ties with a number of countries including Turkey, Kazakhstan, and Iran. In light of the recent cooling of Russian-Turkish relations, Tatarstan has openly defied orders from the Russian government to cut ties with Turkey (Whitmore, "Tatarstan and Belarus"). Tatarstan's insistence on keeping its plenipotentiary representative in Istanbul is an overt demonstration of the republic's unprecedented power in Russia.

Islam as a Symbol of Cultural Difference

As a symbol of cultural difference, Islam has been officialized and instrumentalized as a part of the Tatarstani nation-building and sovereignty-seeking

processes. Scholars frequently comment on the resurgence of religious practices in former Soviet spaces after 1991. A significant amount of academic attention has been given to Islam in particular, in part due to rising Western anxieties about the religion in geopolitical contexts. Tatarstan has been used both as an example of interreligious and interethnic cooperation and peace, and as a perceived breeding ground for threatening extremist varieties of Islam, especially Saudi Arabian *wahabbism*. Although not all Tatars are Muslim (some are baptized Orthodox Christians, and a small minority hold alternative religious beliefs), Islam's place in Tatarstani nation building is contested terrain. The resurgence of Islam after the fall of the Soviet Union has brought into question, which kinds of religious practices are "native" to Tatarstan, and which varieties are "foreign."

Following the Soviet period of a-religiosity, many people throughout the Russian Federation have returned to religion as a marker of ethnic and cultural identity. The Volga Tatars trace their heritage back to the Volga Bulgars, "...a medieval Turkic people who have inhabited the middle Volga and lower Kama region since around the eighth century when they began converting to Islam" (Karimova 40). Therefore, the "Tatar" variety of Islam is understood to be the Hanafi tradition that was passed down from the Bulgars, and which is frequently perceived as the oldest and most liberal school of Islam (*madhhab*) (ibid.). In a republic where Tatar and Russian populations are nearly equal, the cultural practices of each group intersect and influence one another. This combined with the suppression of religion of the Soviet era may have an effect on the perceived liberalness of Tatar Hanafi religious practices. Certain observable cultural habits point to

the synthesis of Russian and Tatar ways of life. For example, although Islam prohibits the consumption of alcohol, some Muslim Tatars choose to drink.

Although Hanafi religious practices are the most prevalent among observant Tatars, there is a significant minority of religious Tatars who have different religious practices. Those who are often educated abroad in Arabic countries or learn from individuals who are educated abroad, are more likely to adhere to literal, conservative interpretations of Islam. Because Tatar identity is connected to a particular understanding of the religion, stricter interpretations of Islam cause anxiety among Tatar nation-builders who believe that Hanafi practices and values are the only ones appropriate for the Tatar people. Tatar Islam symbolizes Tatarstan's cultural difference from Russia, which provides justification for the republic's relative independence. Simultaneously though, a version of Islam that is distinctly Tatar differentiates it from other predominantly Muslim republics like Chechnya and Dagestan, and eases anxieties about the republic's autonomy within Russia. For this reason, the version of Islam that is "branded" as Tatar is generally tolerant of and accepted by non-Muslims, promoting cooperation and peaceful coexistence between Tatars and Russians.

Building the Nation Continued: The Scaffolding

The previous chapter introduced the Kul Sharif Mosque the incorporation of symbols of Tatarstani autonomy into the built environment. This section elaborates on that theme, describing how the mosque encapsulates a version of Islam that is understood to belong specifically to the Tatars. The complex of the Kazan Kremlin lies at the top of a long sloping hill. Tourists stroll up the European-style cobbled streets, passing the Tatarstan National Museum. Outside of the entrance to the Kremlin at the top of the hill

is a towering statue of the famous Tatar poet Mussa Jalil freeing himself from the chains of fascism. Entering the pristine white gates of the Kremlin, the bright blue tiles that cover the roof and minarets of the Kul Sharif Mosque reach up to the sky. The Annunciation Cathedral, which was built after the conquest of Kazan by Ivan IV in 1552, sits adjacent to the mosque. The blue of its onion dome is more of a navy than the turquoise sported by the mosque, and it is dulled by hundreds of years of snowfall and sunshine. These contrasts between ancient and modern, Tatar and Russian, and East and West that exist in the Kazan Kremlin have played out in a sovereignty project that attempts to accommodate all of these tensions in a comprehensive sense of the national.

Although the Kul Sharif Mosque can accommodate up to 6,000 prayer-goers, the vast prayer room is usually mostly empty, and the building functions primarily as a museum and tourist site (Villum). Although the mosque symbolizes the preservation and assertion of Tatar culture in the context of Russian federal relations, it serves a primarily non-Muslim, non-Tatar constituency. Locals and tourists visit Kul Sharif to admire the architecture, and learn about the history of the republic through the various historical artifacts displayed in the museum (ibid.). The mosque does not act as a purely functional site, but as a site that French theorist Pierre Nora would designate as a site of memory (*“lieu de memoire”*). Encapsulated in Kul Sharif is a conscious “will to remember,” which, according to Nora, elevates the object above history and into the realm of the memorial (Nora 19). The Kul Sharif Mosque seeks not only to preserve the history of Tatar identity as it was before 1552, but as a constructed representation of the ideal Tatar identity in the mid-1990s when it was conceived (Villum). The placement and function of

the mosque demonstrate that Tatar national and political identity, while defined in contrast with Russia, also incorporates elements of Russian-ness.

Evaluating Tatarstan's Power

Confronted with Moscow's efforts to centralize power that was formerly devolved to republics, has Tatarstan sacrificed real power for empty symbols? Although the nature of Tatarstan's independence has changed as the political goals of administrations have shifted, the republic maintains significant political, economic, and cultural autonomy. While the 1990s provided an opportunity for Tatarstan to define its position within the nascent Russian Federation and build the features of a state, the republic has defended that position in the twenty-first century. Because the republic is geographically and politically close to the Russian federal government, there is no real possibility for it to establish complete independence. On the other hand though, this closeness maintains Moscow's trust and the institutionalization of Tatarstan's power makes it difficult for the capital to fully neuter the republic. Furthermore, Tatarstan's symbolic power is an important feature, and shouldn't be dismissed or discredited. Political scientists Barnett and Duvall identify four distinct types of power, and although they vary qualitatively, no type is quantitatively more powerful than another. Through symbols like the Kul Sharif Mosque, the republic exercises discursive power to define itself and its position within the Russian Federation. This is significant given the obstacles that stand in the way of other republics that might hope to do the same thing.

Conclusions

This thesis has questioned how periods of history (the Soviet period, 1990s, and 2000s) have shaped Russian Federalism. Nationality Policies in the 1920s and 30s established an ethnoterritorial version of federalism in the USSR that would theoretically restore the power of self-determination to non-Russian peoples of the union. However, the consolidation of state and party apparatuses and the resulting centralization of power in Moscow limited the ability of republics to exercise real authority and control their own governance. Nationality once again became a source of political power as the Soviet Union dissolved in the 1990s. If we understand the Russian Federation as the successor of the USSR, the federal form of governance can be understood as an inherited structure. As Union Republics (SSRs) claimed independence from the Soviet Union in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Moscow leveraged federalism to secure power over its remaining territories. For Yeltsin, devolving power to republics was a tactic to appease republics and encourage them not to renounce their membership in the Russian state. It is quite possible that the first president of the Russian Federation did not expect republics like Tatarstan and Chechnya to take such a big bite when he stated that they should “take as much sovereignty as you can ingest.”

When Vladimir Putin came to power in 1999, first as acting president and then occupying the position more permanently, empowering the central government of Russia, and the executive branch in particular, became a priority. Redefining the central government of the Russian Federation required bringing republics back into the purview of the Kremlin by “harmonizing” regional and republican laws with the supreme law of the federation, replacing regional leadership with trusted figures (often hailing from

Moscow), and reclaiming control over elements of governance like taxes and social programs.

Tatarstan's unique status within the Russian Federation makes it a logical place to study changes to the federal system. Tatarstan is distinct among republics due to the amount of autonomy it possesses, and the ways in which it obtains and maintains that independence. In contrast with Chechnya, which has sought independence from Russia through violent rejection of the hegemonic power, Tatarstan negotiates and manipulates its position within the Russian Federation to achieve autonomy. While Tatarstan has certainly been forced to make sacrifices and compromises (especially as Putin's administration centralizes power in Moscow), the republic continues to operate as a politically, economically, and culturally distinct territory. It leverages its cultural uniqueness and political power against perceived Russification.

While the Tatarstani sovereignty project may have lost the vigor that fuelled it in the 1990s, Tatarstan exhibits notable independence when compared with other ethnic republics and with the federal center itself. Not only does Tatarstan advance its interests more effectively than other republics, but it also conducts its affairs in ways that make it nearly impossible for Moscow to intervene intelligently and effectively. In other words, Tatarstan pushes the boundaries of autonomy set by the Kremlin, but makes compromises when necessary. These compromises generally benefit the republic even if its leaders cannot achieve the full extent of their agenda. Struggles over language education policy illustrates this phenomenon; although the federal center might desire for the republic to spend less time teaching Tatar language and focus instead on Russian, there is little it can do to intervene. In Chapter 4 I discussed how Moscow hindered the republic's efforts to

change the alphabet of the Tatar language to Latin to more closely mirror its Turkic roots. Despite blocking this specific expression of sovereignty, Tatarstan continues to uphold its education policy of functional bilingualism.

Alongside my assertions about how the Republic of Tatarstan obtains and protects its independent status, this project attempts to address questions about the nature of Russian federalism more broadly. I have established the ways in which the Russian federal model has changed over time, but there are two elements that remain relatively constant in all three historical periods that I evaluate. First, Russian varieties of federalism are firmly grounded in ethno-territorialism. This can be contrasted with American federalism and the European transnational federal model. Since the 1920s, the units that comprise the Russian federal structure are based on the connection between a non-Russian ethnic group and a delineated territory that is constructed as a homeland even if that ethnic group is dispersed throughout the territory. Second, Russian federalism is asymmetrical, and that asymmetry is present on two levels; though republics share the same constitutional status, the actual power they wield in the federal system is various. The second dimension of this asymmetry has to do with the power differential between peripheral republics and Moscow. Understanding these attributes, how should scholars and policymakers evaluate Russian federalism?

Until now, most research about Russian center-periphery relations has focused on the metropole. Building on a framework developed by Rostislav Turovskii, perhaps examining the ways that republics relate to the central government is a valuable way to evaluate the state of Russian Federalism. Working on the unique case of Tatarstan, this thesis attempts to propose an approach that recognizes the power of republics to define

themselves, marking a shift from the study of center-periphery to periphery-center relations. In the second chapter of this thesis I explained Nikolai Petrov's estimation of "Highly Managed Democracy." Petrov says that Russian governance is centralized beyond rationality or efficacy. Because it is overburdened, the federal center can't always react to political action at the republican level that it tries to regulate. It is in the context of this tension that republics define themselves. Petrov argues that HMD is unstable and unsustainable, and that the Russian Federation will slide either towards authoritarianism or democratization. In either case, from a perspective that prioritizes the state of republics, his argument does not address the problem of authoritarianism or ethnocracy at the substate level. Examining the connection between these strata of governance is a possible future direction for this research.

At this moment in time there are a number of forces that could drive unforeseen developments in the state of Russian federalism. In April 2016, Putin announced the creation of a new National Guard that would answer directly to the president. He has called the Guard "...a new body of federal power" (BBC, "Putin creates new national guard"). Although analysts largely agree that the reshuffle is intended to protect the political establishment from popular unrest, particularly with parliamentary elections nearing, there is speculation from Kremlin-watchers like Paul Goble that the new security force is intended to rein in Ramzan Kadyrov. Depending on how this policy plays out, and on how politically strong republics respond to it, this development could have ramifications on the future of Russian federalism. This is only one example of an event that is currently in flux and could fundamentally influence the Russian federal model. As such situations unfold and scholars and policymakers respond to changes in internal

Russian political relations, I recommend that special attention be paid to the positions and actions of republics. As this thesis demonstrates, they are important indicators and actors in federal relations.

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