

PART 3

Third Wave



Sweden

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The Tatars in Sweden form a tiny minority, hardly known or acknowledged even amongst experts and immigration authorities. During the past 60 years they have led a mostly anonymous life within Swedish society. Many are completely assimilated with few or vague references to their cultural, ethnic and religious background. An active community, clear ethnicity and a symbolic universe which could preserve the Tatar cultural heritage outside the family context do not exist. The history of the contemporary Tatars and people with Tatar origins living in Sweden is poorly documented and based on a few documents and oral reports brought together mainly by Didar Samaletdin and Türker Soukkan, and anecdotal evidence (Westman 1983; Samaletdin 1983; Soukkan 1986, 1987; Södling 1992; Gustafsson 1993; al-Nadaf 2002: 86). Almost everything written about Swedish Tatars is based on these sources (Svanberg 1984: 69, 1990a, 1999: 386; Svanberg and Tydén 1992: 376; Otterbeck 1998: 145). Today a few descendants of Tatar immigrants in Sweden show an interest in their background, but this is more a kind of *Großmutter-Effekt*, as the German ethnologist Ulrich Tolksdorf (1975: 73) calls it, or third generation phenomenon (Hansen's Law), using the words of the American historian Marcus Lee Hansen (1938), rather than a preservation of their ethnic or cultural group identity.

The exonym *Tatar* for a person of Asiatic origin, or more specifically for an individual belonging to a Turkic-speaking group within the Russian Empire, has been used in Sweden at least since the 1540s. A Tatar named Bugdan Balatzen from Russia was, for instance, employed as a keeper of exotic animals (camel, bear, lion) at the Royal Palace in Stockholm in the 1590s (Bernström 1951: 71). The Swedish military encountered Tatars in several wars against Russia, and in analyses of political processes in neighbouring countries, Tatars are sometimes mentioned. The chancellor Axel Oxenstierna noted in 1630 that “the Tatar has strongly attacked Poland with 120,000 men and reported to be ravaging”. Tatar troops also sometimes attacked Finland, which formed the eastern part of Sweden until 1809. The khanate of Crimea, ruled by Tatars from 1441 to 1783, kept since the 1500s diplomatic contact with Sweden, and envoys from the khan arrived in Stockholm at least in 1630, 1633 and 1637 (Jarring 1987: 85–86). However, there was no immigration to or settlement of Tatars in Sweden, partly because the Lutheran clergy was

opposed to believers of other religions or denominations. The Swedish Church Law of 1686 stated that “Jews, Turks, Moors and Pagans entering the country should be informed about the right belief and baptised as Christians”. Some “Turks” (that is, Muslims from the Ottoman Empire) were actually baptised in Stockholm in 1672 and 1695 and could settle in the country (Svanberg and Tydén 1992: 134).

A Tatar businessman, Ebrahim Letejeff Umerkajeff (1877–1954) from Penza, settled in Stockholm as early as in 1897 in connection with the General Art and Industrial Exposition of Stockholm. He married Maria Elisabeth Hult (1876–1955) and worked as a furrier in his workshop in central Stockholm. He is buried in Helsinki at the Tatar Muslim cemetery. His Swedish-born son Hussein Umerkajeff (1901–1989) also worked in the fur-trade business in Stockholm.

Several Swedish travellers studied Tatars during their journeys in Russia and Central Asia. The Swedish officer Philip Johan von Strahlenberg (1676–1747) was a prisoner of war in Tobolsk. After his return to Sweden he published a book in 1730, which described in detail the languages and customs of several ethnic groups in Russia, amongst others the Tatars (Strahlenberg 1730: 35, 68). Johan Peter Falck (1731–1774), a botanist and zoologist who explored southern



FIGURE 7.1

Ebrahim Letejeff Umerkajeff (1877–1954) from Penza in central Russia was a pioneer immigrant amongst the Tatars in Sweden. He settled in Stockholm as early as in 1897 in connection with the General Art and Industrial Exposition of Stockholm. Although he married a Swedish woman and raised a family there, he was buried in the Islamic graveyard in Helsinki

PHOTO: SABIRA STÅHLBERG, 2011

Russia and Siberia around 1770, collected information about several kinds of Tatars in different regions (Falk 1785; Svanberg 1987). Most famous was the explorer Sven Hedin (1898: 33–34), who during his journeys in Russia and Central Asia had the opportunity to get personally acquainted with many Tatars. Some encounters with Tatars took place within the framework of Swedish missionary activities. Attempts were made to convert Muslims in Central Russia, mostly Bashkirs, to Christianity (Sarwe 1927).

Emigration from Finland and Estonia

Most of the present Tatars in Sweden are descendants of Mishar Tatars, who after the end of the Second World War emigrated from Finland and Estonia. Mishars live south of the Volga in the Nizhny Novgorod, Tambov, Penza and Ryazan Districts of Russia, as well as in the Chuvash Republic, Republic of Mordova and Mari El Republic (Iskhakov 2004; Vovina 2006; Svanberg 2011b: 363; see also this book's chapter about Finland). Few Tatars left Finland for Sweden before the 1940s, although some spoke Swedish fluently and had business contacts in Sweden, amongst them the merchant Hasan Kanykoff (1880–1954). Swedish was also widely used in towns like Viborg (Vyborg) in Karelia where Tatars lived. A reason to remain in Finland was probably that one could more easily reach the home villages by railway. In the 1920s, when the eastern border was closed, most Tatars had already adapted and owned flourishing companies in Finland.

An exception was the family of Ahsen Böre from the mainly Finnish-speaking town of Tampere (Tammerfors). The younger sons of Zinnetullah Ahsen Böre (1886–1945) studied at a Swedish-speaking school in the 1930s and joined a Swedish sports club. Two daughters also went to the Swedish school in Tampere. Zinnetullah did not know much Swedish (or any other language besides Tatar), but imported goods and visited factories in Sweden and he moved part of his possessions to “safety” out of Finland during the Second World War. The sons left for Sweden at the beginning of the 1940s to study and take care of their father's business, but remained in the country, integrated and changed careers. Vasif (1924–2008) became a successful civil engineer, working for different logistics companies and lecturing about technical topics; he later moved to Belgium. Zeyd (1920–1984) became an architect. Both married Swedish women and are buried in Christian cemeteries. Today several Ahsen Böres live around Linköping (Ahsen Böre 1945: 7, 36, 60).

In the 1940s the Tatars moved from Finland to Sweden mainly because of the difficult political and economic situation. Finland had lost the war and the Soviet Union called for the return of prisoners of war. Ethnic Ingrian Finns who had been evacuated to Finland in 1942–1943 were sent back (Matley 1979). Many Tatars feared that they also would be sent to the Soviet Union, and Tatar men who had served in the army fled along with Finnish officers and soldiers to Sweden. Finland did not extradite the Tatars, but at least two Tatar communists had left voluntarily in the 1920s and 1930s for the Soviet Union. Several Tatar men returned to Finland from Sweden within a few years when the situation had calmed down. Fear of the Soviet Union prevailed, however, and in the 1950s there was again some immigration to Sweden (Leitzinger 2006).¹

The next wave from Finland came in the 1970s, when thousands of Finns moved to more prosperous Sweden in search of work (De Geer and Wande 1990: 98–101). Tatars, usually young men, joined the economic move and settled in the Stockholm area. They either married in Sweden or later brought their families over from Finland. These Tatars kept close contact with their families and friends back home, and their children were regularly sent to relatives and summer camps organised by the Tatar community in Finland. Some later returned home, but most stayed in Sweden and they still keep in touch with Tatars in Finland.

Finnish and Tatar immigrants from this period used somewhat similar strategies of conserving traditions and relationships with the mother country. The Tatars could thus in several respects be defined as Finnish immigrants, also because they had Finnish citizenship and often passed as Finns in the eyes of Swedish institutions. They did not, however, create “colonies” or separate quarters in some bigger Swedish towns like the Finns, and they did not look for employment in industries or big companies, but usually made their own small, independent trade enterprises. Another difference is that the Tatars more easily learned Swedish than many Finns and they were more adaptive to the new environment, having already the experience of integrating into Finnish society. The Tatars were at least bilingual Tatar-Finnish with some school or working knowledge of Swedish and English when they came to Sweden. Without much effort they improved their Swedish to a reasonably good level which enabled them to communicate more efficiently with the surrounding society.

Another Tatar migration to Sweden originated in Estonia. The Tatars in Narva, Dorpat (Tartu) and Reval (Tallinn) had a similar background as the community in Finland. They were related through kinship ties and had a

1 Oral communication with Harry Halén, Helsinki, October 2011.

similar infrastructure, but the group was very small (see this book's chapter about Estonia). In 1887 there were 109 Tatars living in Estonia, and in 1934 the Tatars there amounted to 166 individuals. Until the Second World War there were 200–300 Tatars in Estonia, who preserved their traditions, educated their children in the Tatar language and arranged cultural events with theatre, poetry readings and singing (Abiline 2007; Özkan 2009: 91). When the Soviet troops occupied Estonia in 1940, several Tatars fled to Finland, but they had to continue their journey to Sweden in order to escape Soviet "repatriation". They lived for some time in borrowed summer houses in the vicinity of the capital, but then moved into central Stockholm, and often their families joined them from Finland (Soukkan 1987: 9).

Of five Tatars in Sweden interviewed by Türker Soukkan in the 1980s, two were born in Finland, two in Estonia and one came from the Soviet Union. It is not known if any Tatars came from war or concentration camps in Germany. Germany hosted a large Tatar community before the Second World War (Cwiklinski 2008). Before 1989 the Tatars in Sweden had many relatives and contacts in Finland and some in the Soviet Union, including Estonia, but due to political and transport reasons the relationship with Finland was the strongest. It was, and still is, very easy to travel between Sweden and Finland by plane or ferry, and many Tatars use the relatively cheap one-day cruises to visit relatives in either country. In the 1980s, the Tatars in Sweden were estimated to be around 50 and persons with one Tatar parent about 30. Most of them lived in the Stockholm area and about 15 in other places, such as Karlstad and Norrköping (Soukkan 1987: 9).

Traditions and Modernisation

The parents of the modern Tatars in Sweden came to Estonia and Finland as petty traders, travelling from their villages to the nearest town and from there by train from Russia to Finland and Estonia. Before 1917 Finland was part of Russia and the Tatars did not have much difficulty in establishing themselves in the autonomous grand duchy. The men usually arrived first and women and children were brought later from the villages. Some men kept small restaurants for *pilmin* (*pelmeni*, that is, dumplings filled with meat, mushrooms or vegetable stuffing), but most were hawkers who within a few years established themselves in markets and shops selling small things, gold, jewellery and handicrafts. Many worked in the textile and fur businesses. In Sweden the first generation kept to the same occupation. One Tatar had a fur shop at least until 1985 in Stockholm. In 1983 Didar and Emir Samaletdin opened a popular restaurant called Djings



FIGURE 7.2

Djingis Khan was a restaurant in Stockholm in the 1980s. It was owned by a Tatar family and served Oriental and Swedish food

PHOTO: INGVAR SVANBERG

Khan in Södermalm, southern Stockholm, which lasted throughout the 1980s (Svanberg 1984: 69, 1990a). Today Tatars cannot be separated from Swedes on the labour market; they have academic degrees and work in all kinds of fields like the majority of the Swedish population. A few Tatars modernised the traditional occupations and were involved in importing horses from Central Asia and the Caucasus to Sweden before the 1990s.

The first and often also second immigrant generations still know the Tatar language, but the third speaks predominantly Swedish. Children of one Tatar parent usually do not speak Tatar. Separate education for children has not been arranged in Sweden except for some private teaching. Cultural events such as tea evenings took place in the 1960s and 1970s, but the Tatars are not organised as a community. There is no data except personal information about the language situation, but during the 1980s Tatar children were sent to summer schools in Finland and had ample opportunity to speak Tatar outside the family environment. Also exogamic marriages have been common in Sweden since the 1960s and some Tatars married Turks who immigrated in larger groups as workers (Lundberg and Svanberg 1992). Social control was not as strong as in Finland, where the Tatar community is much bigger, and although some Tatars looked for partners in Finland, many married Swedes or persons of other ethnic backgrounds. Didar Samaletdin, who was born in the 1940s, mentions that she was fluent in Swedish and lived like most other teenagers, but had a stricter upbringing. She accepted Islam as her religion when she was 15 and married a Tatar from Finland at the age of 18, but educated herself to become a social worker and had a long career in the social field (Södling 1992; Gustafsson 1993; al-Nadaf 2002).

Tatar culture in Sweden has been preserved by families and individuals to a large extent with help from the community and relatives in Finland. Since the 1990s, contact with Russia and especially Tatarstan is easier to make, but still



FIGURE 7.3

Traditional fried or baked round Tatar pastry, părămäts, with meat or potatoes. Modern versions also have mushrooms or other ingredients. This is an oven-baked mushroom-potato părămäts

PHOTO: SABIRA STÅHLBERG, 2012

the main inspiration and organisation come from Finland. Tatars from Sweden have also taken trips to the villages in Russia where their ancestors lived, and some have reconnected with Estonia. When the Tatars travel to their “home-land” in Russia, the second and later generations travel in the capacity of Finnish or Swedish tourists, with the difference being that they can speak to the villagers. There are linguistic differences today, however, because the Tatars in Russia use many Russian words, whereas Finnish and Swedish Tatars use words from their environments. Few Tatars have relatives in these villages nowadays, due to the massive emigration from there to Finland before 1917 and the destruction of the villages in the 1930s, which forced the remaining inhabitants to move to cities like Moscow or Saint Petersburg. Today the villages south of Sergach in the Nizhniy Novgorod area are inhabited by a few hundred elderly Tatars who have returned and rebuilt the villages since the 1950s. During these visits to Russia, the Nordic Tatars usually also visit Kazan, which is considered to be the centre of Tatar culture and language. Nowadays Tatars from Russia visit Sweden for various reasons, and Muslim leaders, for instance, have been hosted by local Turkic Muslims living in Stockholm. In May 2010, the chairman of the Russian Mufties Council, Mufti Sheikh Rawil Gainutdin (b. 1959), visited Stockholm and met with Tatars, Kazakhs and Uighurs living in Sweden.

Food plays a crucial role in Tatar culture. Until the 1950s, Tatars in Sweden often invited each other over for celebrations, and Tatar visitors and immigrants were taken care of by other families. When Rudolf Nureyev, the famous Tatar-Bashkir dancer from the Soviet Union who defected to the West in 1961, visited Stockholm, several Tatars watched the ballet. They visited him afterwards, and realising that he longed for *părămäts*, a special fried or baked Tatar pastry with a filling of minced meat and onions, a few women stayed up all

night preparing pastries for him. Tatars also traditionally prepare a sausage made of dried horse-meat. In Estonia, Tatars were horse butchers and called horse-flesh eaters. In Sweden they found a profitable market niche of selling horse-flesh to industrial workers. Tatars in Finland have also kept small *pärämäts*-shops, but there is no information that there have been similar food stalls or bakeries in Sweden.

Pioneer Muslims

According to the Swedish census of 1930, which is the last with information on religious affiliation, only fifteen Muslims lived in the country. At that time the laws did not allow a Muslim congregation. However, Swedish legislation changed and became more liberal after the Second World War, and in 1949 the first Muslim congregation of the country, Turk-Islam Föreningen i Sverige för Religion och Kultur (Turk-Islamic Association in Sweden for the Promotion of Religion and Culture) was founded by Tatars and two Turks. The initiative came from Ali Zakerov (1911–1975), a refugee from Estonia and the father of Didar Samaletdin, Osman Soukkan and Akif Arhan (who was of Turkish origin). Amongst the founders was also Ebrahim Umerkajeff. Osman Soukkan (1903–1975) became the first imam of the congregation. A handful of members – Tatar, Turkish and Arab men – met in Kjellsons konditori, a café on Birger Jarlsgatan in the centre of Stockholm, where they could gather around one single table (Soukkan 1986: 109; Karlsson and Svanberg 1995: 15; Svanberg 1999: 384; al-Nadaf 2002).

Soon after, the association rented Folkets Hus (The People's House, a leisure and cultural centre built for the working class) in Stockholm. According to Didar Samaletdin, it served as their first mosque or prayer room (Westman 1983; Samaletdin 1993). Next they gathered in Medborgarhuset located on the southern side of Medborgarplatsen, Södermalm, where they held Muslim celebrations. The association was also the first to apply for the rights to build a mosque in the 1950s, but the application was rejected. It changed its name to Islam Församlingen i Sverige (The Islamic Congregation of Sweden) and bought some land in Stockholm's Forest Cemetery, Skogskyrkogården, where a separate Muslim graveyard can still be found. The congregation held ceremonies at the cemetery until the mid-1970s (Soukkan 1986, 1987: 12).

Tatars made up the majority in the beginning, and the Islamic Congregation was a kind of ethnic community, but it lost its Tatar character during the 1960s. The activity was at its peak during the first decade. In 1952 the Tatars in Stockholm published one issue of a journal named *Heberçi* (Messenger)

(Halén 1979: 12). Labour immigrants from Turkey and Yugoslavia, Arabs, Indonesians and Pakistanis filled the membership ranks, but the Turks from Anatolia held the leading positions. Similar to the Tatars in Finland, the form of Islam the Tatars professed was a tradition-based Sunni, but the newcomers had other views on how to practise religion. Muslim communities started to split up along ethnic lines when they grew. In 1953 there were around 500 Muslims in Sweden and in 1966 more than a thousand. The Tatars turned to Finland for support. Unlike the situation in Finland, there was no strong Turkish cultural movement amongst the Swedish Tatars, and they did not have the ranks to or the possibility of creating cultural activities or an ethno-confessional community like their neighbours. Islamic culture in Sweden was created by other groups, and the Tatars were marginalised from the mainstream Islamic community by the end of the 1960s (Karlsson and Svanberg 1995: 15; Svanberg 1999: 384).

The difficulty of raising Tatar children and being a Muslim in Sweden has been discussed many times in media by Didar Samaletdin. She has been a pioneer in trying to explain Islam to members of Swedish society, especially during the 1980s. Didar was the only woman president of the congregation for a short while and has been an important spokesperson for the Muslims of Stockholm. Later she turned to local politics, and for many years she was of interest to the media and students (Otterbeck 2003: 12). Her father and grandfather taught her the faith, and her view is typical of the liberal Tatar attitude to religion. She received a Christian education at school, which “did no harm”, and although she is a woman, she and other Tatar women participate in all religious ceremonies and activities. She is open to all traditions and religions, and as a child she requested a Christmas tree like everybody else. In her own family she invented Ramadan gifts for the children instead of Christmas gifts, but also had a tree like the Swedish majority. During her social work she has shown respect for different religious needs by, for instance, installing prayer rooms in nursing homes with many immigrant elders (Westman 1983; Gustafsson 1993).

Religion is important as an ethnic marker to Tatars in Finland and Sweden, but few participate in religious life except for the ceremonies connected with transition, such as name-giving and funerals or celebrations of the feast of Ramadan and of Kurban Bayram (the Feast of the Sacrifice). Few or no Tatars practise circumcision in Sweden. Today mainly families gather and there are few occasions when Tatars come together in bigger groups. Some of the Tatars who emigrated from Finland return to the country they grew up in when they get older, or wish to be buried in the Tatar Muslim cemetery in Helsinki together with their relatives. A parallel practice exists amongst Turks and other

immigrant groups to Sweden and there are several funeral agencies providing services for families whose members want to be buried “at home”.

Assimilation

Mishar Tatars have always been a highly adaptive diaspora minority, but through personal and family networks they are able to keep contact over great distances (Svanberg 2011b: 363). The establishment of the Soviet Union cut off Finnish and Estonian Tatars from their home villages and the sources for their culture, such as newspapers, books and magazines from Kazan. Some Canadian sociologists employ the term “institutional completeness” to describe the extent to which an ethnic group has access to institutions that contribute to the preservation of culture and language. Important diacritical cultural traits in this connection are language and religion, but also resources within the group and the pattern of settlement and the number of immigrants (Driedger and Church 1974). The Tatars in Sweden had, despite the fact that they were pioneers of organised Muslim life in Stockholm, a low institutional completeness. Instead they experienced a high degree of integration into the host community.

There are many reasons for the quick assimilation of the Tatars into Swedish society. Tatar immigration was always small, and there was no continuity from Russia, Estonia or Finland which could feed the community with new impulses. When the Soviet Union broke down, the mental distance was already too large for recuperation. The Tatars in Sweden are deeply integrated; most are assimilated and exposed to exogamy to a high degree. They call themselves Tatar or Mishar. The language has been called Tatar and not Turkish or North Turkish as in Finland during a certain period (Soukkan 1987). Most Tatars in Sweden nowadays have double first names, Swedish and Tatar, and several take Swedish or international “aliases” to be able to function in places of work or schools. Sweden is officially an open country for immigrants, taking care of language and cultural education for many groups, but in everyday life Tatars feel that a Swedish name and a local identity help them to integrate better.

Changes in Sweden have affected the Tatars in several ways. They have received formal rights, such as freedom of religion in 1952, and in the 1960s Christian education in schools started to change into a general study of religions. Most Tatars do not bother about *halal*, the lawful slaughter of meat according to Islam, or Ramadan fasting, and many eat pork meat and drink

alcohol, which facilitates assimilation. Multiculturalism and full equality for immigrants was introduced in the 1970s, which has made it easier for small communities to exist, but at the same time more difficult to be heard in society amongst the larger groups. There have also been some conflicts. Tatars tend to bury their dead within a few days, but in Sweden the procedures can take up to two weeks or even more (Soukkan 1987).

In the late 1980s, Islamic terrorism and negative images of Muslims flooded Swedish media and Tatars together with other Muslims were forced to clarify their positions. Tatars choose mostly to leave out the religious aspect or explain its positive sides, but religious identity remains difficult. Today the Tatar language and identity are slowly disappearing in Sweden. There are less than a hundred Tatars, and the next generations will not speak Tatar. Tatars or Tatar descendants can be found on all levels in Swedish society and they are engaged in social, political, military and economic activities which have nothing to do with the Tatar language or culture. A few younger Tatar descendants are interested in their roots, but they have a generic Tatar identity which comprises all Tatars, comparable to the pan-Turkic ideas of the nineteenth century. They use the Internet as a tool for finding out or informing about Tatar culture and often nurture romantic ideas about being a Tatar and about the glorious past of the Tatars (Ståhlberg 2004).

Even though there are a few individuals who are interested in their ethnic background, there seems to be no possibility for the Tatar minority to survive in Sweden. There are no efforts to revitalise the group, because the demographic and institutional conditions needed to create a new institutional completeness are not present (cf. Lundberg and Svanberg 1992). Sweden is a pluralistic country with many cultures, languages and religions, but it is also an assimilating society, which emphasises individual choices of lifestyle, religious and sexual orientation as well as political opinions. At the same time the economy and career opportunities require assimilation or at least a kind of adaptation to existing values, language usage and social context. The Tatar group is also too small to be able to influence Muslim organisations or policies, and there is no interest on either side that they would be accepted into any of the larger Muslim congregations.

Today there are no statistics about the number of Tatars living in Sweden. There might be Tatars hidden in different groups which immigrated since the 1960s from Turkey and the Balkans, especially Romania and Bulgaria. They often call themselves Turks and only in private communications they might acknowledge to another Tatar that they are in fact Tatars or have Tatar ancestors. These are mainly not Volga Tatars like the Tatars from Finland, but they

are instead of Crimean Tatar origin. They speak a language closer to Turkish and come from a culture connected with the Ottoman Empire, in contrast to the Volga Tatars whose history and culture since the sixteenth century have been formed by life within Russia. There is also a tiny group of Noghai in Stockholm, originating from a few villages in the Kulu District of central Anatolia, and they are often referred to as “Tatars” by other Anatolian Turks (Svanberg 1990b; Svanberg 2011a: 273).

Tatars have also immigrated to Sweden more recently, since the beginning of the 1990s within the large move from the previous Soviet republics. According to Mikael Parkvall (2009: 151), there are around 220 “Tatar-speakers” in Sweden, and most of them seem to be recent immigrants. Only 9 per cent are Swedish-born and most of these new Tatars have migrated from Russia (2/3) and some from Uzbekistan. Parkvall concludes that the number of Tatars grows “unusually fast”. It is not sure, however, that all (or even the majority) who call themselves Tatars speak the Tatar language or carry the culture, as many Tatars in Russia and Uzbekistan usually speak Russian or Uzbek as well and have assimilated. If this is a new beginning of a Tatar community in Sweden only time will tell.

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