

Introduction

Tradition is a process: it lives only while it changes.

The history of Central Asia's Turkmen as they evolved from a set of loosely connected tribes at the beginning of the twentieth century to a sovereign state at the start of the twenty-first century is a fascinating one. Tracing the long-term development of Turkmen identity and sociocultural practices—with a particular focus on literacy, language, and learning—places the Turkmen experiences with modernity into a global context and sheds light on a nation that regional analysts have often described as “opaque,” “incomprehensible,” or “perplexing” since its foundation as an independent country on 27 October 1991.¹ This study spans the years from early twentieth-century social reform to significant education reform in 2014 and, in the process, probes the intersections between cultural and social power in the historical context of shifting politics through the transformation, acquisition, or loss of cultural knowledge. These intersections are not recent phenomena in Turkmen history but have drawn new attention since the end of the Soviet Union and the establishment of Turkmenistan as a sovereign state.

Beginning in the early twentieth century, Turkmen identified mass literacy and learning as the means by which their people could become a modern nation.² The Turkmen nation's experiences with language and education reform support the argument that elements of everyday life—even those as seemingly innocuous as alphabets—are fraught with political value and serve as components of social power. In each era examined, political considerations and intellectual struggles redefine the meaning, the conceptualization of Turkmen identity, modernity, and literacy, what it meant to live as a Muslim, and indeed, what it meant to be a citizen of the world.

Knowledge of a language or alphabet became equal to possessing cultural capital, as defined by Pierre Bourdieu, who equated such intangibles as cultural capacity, political power, experience, talent, and skill with actual wealth.³ Through a history of cultural policy and education reform, the Turkmen language became emblematic of twenty-first-century Turkmen national identity when, only a generation earlier, it was not even an identifying marker. At various times, different actors (reform-minded Muslims, Soviet authorities, independent Turkmen) held the pre-

dominant degree of cultural capital and thus could dominate the scene, and some actors, over time, possessed the cultural capital needed to shape Turkmen identity and ultimately a Turkmen nation. Examining the relationship between language and power enhances our understanding of national identity construction not only in Turkmenistan but also throughout Central Asia. Among Turkmen, as with other national groups, the educated elites and intellectuals—“the producers and transmitters of culture”—engaged modernity on behalf of the people.⁴ They began in earnest in the 1910s, and over the following years shifts in education and cultural policies were often dramatic enough to trigger a reassessment of the Turkmen national identity, whereby identity, language, and learning became tightly linked.

Twenty-five years after the end of the USSR, there is a paucity of research about Turkmenistan, and little of what there is employs Turkmen language sources. Typically confined to the periphery of scholarship, the Turkmen are situated at the heart of this analysis, which brings in Turkmen language sources, taking into account the local culture within the context of global designs and drawing out the Turkmen voices. Western studies of power in Turkmenistan are typically limited to that of the state or individual leaders.⁵ There are very few works that cover cultural power or the role of language or education as factors in social relations.⁶ The focus here is on the power of language and education as social determinants, bringing in the voices of average citizens and taking the examination beyond the role of the state to include the agency of the people. The reader is encouraged to think in terms of a specifically Turkmen experience. Although Turkmen were not unique in history, they were exemplary in their use of language and education to underscore identity.

The work of Adrienne Edgar has been invaluable. Her work on Turkmenistan in the 1920s and 1930s demonstrates that culture was heavily politicized in the Soviet Union. She aptly illustrates the many ways in which identity was shaped in those years, involving not only Soviet officials but locals too.⁷ Here a new perspective takes a long view, integrating these early years of the twentieth century in a broad context that includes Turkmen’s experiences in late tsarist and the post-Soviet periods. My perspective is not only grounded in Soviet archival information and Turkmen language sources but also based on my personal observations and interviews with local residents while I was living in Turkmenistan and on my research in the Turkmen State National Archive and Turkmenistan’s Manuscript Institute Archive.

Turkmen Identity

The history of the Turkmen nation and its struggle with modernity illustrates some of the nuances of Turkmen identity. Turkmen are part of the ethnolinguistic Turkic continuum that stretches from western China to western Turkey. They share a claim to western Turkic (Oguz) heritage, which is found in today’s Azer-

baijan, Iran, Iraq (Turcomans), Afghanistan, Turkey, and small areas in China.⁸ Despite the development of a distinct twenty-first-century identity, Turkmen culture and traditions historically overlapped with that of all other Turks. The term “Turkic” refers to the cultural and linguistic heritage shared by all Turkic-language speaking groups.⁹ While all Turkic people speak languages with fundamental similarities, a separate Turkmen sense of identity was born out of their particular historical experience.¹⁰ A nomadic heritage, Oguz dialects, genealogical claims, and distinctive tribal traditions contributed greatly to the identity that sets Turkmen apart from other Turkic groups and has characterized a specifically Turkmen sense of identity.¹¹

For millennia, the peoples living throughout the vast lands of Central Asia grouped themselves according to ancestry, religion, lifeways, or patronage. Until the early twentieth century, Turkmen identified themselves according to lineage and ancestry—or nomadic versus settled. Turkmen claim their identity in distinction from other Turks based on patrilineal descent from the semimythical, eponymous Oguz Han, whose legacy lives on in oral traditions.¹² As a result of this claim, genealogy was the organizational norm of Turkmen society long before the modern language became a matter of identity. Only in the 1910s did a small coterie of Turkmen begin to explore expression of their identity through language. Before this time, language was not politicized.

The earliest evidence of a Turkic writing system is the runic script that Turkic groups used before they adopted Islam in the tenth century.¹³ Chiseled into stone stelea that record the history of the Gök Türk empire (from the sixth to the eighth century AD), these signs show that, long before Turks reached the borders of modern Turkey, the written language reflected a Turkic identity. Upon adopting Islam, Turks began using the Arabic script of the Qur’an to reflect their membership in the *umma*, which bound them to the community of believers.¹⁴ It also facilitated access to great traditions of learning, poetry, literature, and treatises on governance, which were often written in Persian.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Turkmen still did not yet conceive of themselves as a unified people. Turkmen society was not a stable coherent entity with a singular political leadership. Organized according to tribes and clans spread throughout Transcaspia, Bukhara, and Khiva, the notion of being Turkmen was based primarily on the Oguz genealogical claim.¹⁵ As they encountered modern ideas, Turkmen began to examine their society and group identity. While “modernity” is an amorphous and highly contested term among scholars, educated Turkmen conceptualized it in a Turco-Muslim way that shaped their collective responses to global change.¹⁶ The ongoing reconceptualization of the Turkmen “self” had much to do with what was taking place throughout the Muslim world. Muslims in the Russian empire identified education as the vehicle that would transport them to modernity. More specifically, they pinpointed literacy as the key to that vehicle.

But before Turkmen could promote mass literacy, they needed to standardize their language and unify the speech community.

The language of modern Turkmenistan is known as the literary language (*Türkmen edebi dili* or *häzirki zaman dili*).¹⁷ What makes it a literary language is that it has been standardized and codified over the past century, primarily in the 1920s and 1930s, prior to which language was not represented by an official or agreed upon version but, rather, reflected the many dialectical variances. Turkmen dialects reflect variants that correspond to tribal identity; that is, there is variation in vocabulary and some differences in the grammar of spoken Turkmen dialects. Tribal identity has always been complex among Turkmen because the distribution of power among them has led to contention. This was mostly so during the nineteenth century when there was actual warfare among the tribes, but it continues to this day. There is a palpable imbalance in the distribution of power, with the Ahal Teke in a dominant position in part because of President Berdimuhamedov's own Teke identity and hiring practices that favor them. As a result of this imbalance discomfort over tribal dialects persists.

Tribal identity includes but is not limited to Teke, Ýomut, Gökleň, Salyr, Saryk, Ärsary, Çowdur, Nohur, and Änew; Teke and Ýomut are the greatest in number. Tribal identity corresponds closely to geographic location due to the history of migration and power over the centuries.¹⁸ Turkmen dialects persist and are regional. In this way, it is possible to find local concepts and cultural traditions reflected in the language. All regions contributed terms related to local handicrafts and ways of life. For example, the Ýomut live in the northern and western regions near the Caspian Sea and contributed fishing terms.

The literary language is essentially a blending of Teke and Ýomut characteristics, but its content is closest to the spoken language of the Teke tribe, especially the Ahal subdialect spoken in Aşgabat, because in the first half of the twentieth century many of the individuals involved in writing and publishing were Teke.¹⁹ The influence of the Teke's Ahal subdialect spoken in Aşgabat is especially prominent today because the majority of officials and intellectuals who use the language live in Ashgabat.²⁰ Yet Ýomut influence is seen in grammatical usage, especially in the use of the phoneme [r] at the end of the present tense: *bermek* (to give) is *berýär* in the official literary language from the Ýomut, but it is *berýä* without the [r] in the Teke dialect. The dative case and verbal infinitive in Teke and Ýomut is *bermege*, but is *bermene* in other dialects.²¹

The dialects are mutually intelligible, but there is noticeable variation in everyday life. The Teke words *oňat* and *gowy* mean "good" or "fine" and are the appropriate responses to the question "Nähili?" or "How are you?" But the Ýomut word *jahşy* is also heard. For the concept "sister" one may hear *ajal dogan*, *gyz*, *bajy*, *ejeke*, or *uya*. There have been a number of variants for father as well: *kaka*, *ata*, *däde*, *aba*, *eke*, and *akga*.²² There is a dramatic difference in the pronunciation of the graph-

emes “s” and “z,” which most dialects pronounce with the interdental fricatives “th” [ð] and “th” [θ] where the tongue is placed between the teeth. This results in the sounds found in “this” (voiced dental fricative [ð]) and “thin” (unvoiced dental fricative [θ]). Yet there are some that do not employ the interdental fricative and pronounce the letters “s” and “z” as one would expect, with a dental fricative as in “sun” and “zero.” Because of such differences native Turkmen speakers are able to identify each other’s tribal affiliation. This contributes to the imbalance among tribes and perpetuates the Teke dominance. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Turkmen speech community was not unified in all aspects of their everyday language. However, language planners did create a standardized written language, which is now found in schools, newspapers, and official documents.

By 2014 Turkmen were a literate people, many of whom had experienced socialism as well as an independent state. Although there are continuities that allow a people to self-identify under a rubric such as national identity (Turkmen, Uzbek, Irish, Mexican), there are also transformations, local and global, that alter a group over time. Identity is an ongoing process. Michel Foucault describes the nation as a “discursive formation.” He notes how “statements different in form, and dispersed in time, form a group if they refer to one and the same object,” but he concludes that this “does not enable one to individualize a group of statements, and to establish between them a relation that is both constant and describable.”²³ That is, one must examine the interplay, the processes, and the transformations among historical clues to understand a discourse or a term over time. In this case the term was “Turkmen,” and the discourse was becoming a Turkmen nation.

Modernity

As Turkmen have worked to fit aspects of their society into broad global patterns over the last century, the nature of “modernity” has come into question. Various ideas were rooted in Western societies, but Turkmen viewed them as global, even Muslim, because these notions arrived via other Muslim groups such as Azerbaijanis, Ottomans/Turks, Tatars, and Uzbeks, who all played important roles. Indeed, the concept of “multiple modernities” suggests that we see modernity as variegated and having authenticity in societies that are not Western.²⁴ One constant is that modernity “is inherently future-oriented,” but it is not a coherent or integrated whole. “Multiple” is also an appropriate adjective here because the concept of modernity, as with others such as literacy, can be interpreted in multiple ways by diverse subjects.²⁵

As political circumstances fluctuated, so did the parameters by which “modern” was defined as well as the concepts of learning, literacy, and power. These fluctuations were connected to recognition of change in the world and a reconsideration of tradition, with a sense of the individual and his or her rights in contrast to the group’s rights, and with possibilities for societal growth. Over the period under

study here we see both reinterpretation and transformation of symbols, institutions, and self-conceptualization. The Turkmen experience offers the opportunity to revisit the concept of modernity and the processes of becoming modern and to ask what they mean in specific historic contexts.

The end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century was a time in which Muslims around the world debated and experimented with various concepts, forms, and expectations of modernity.²⁶ Early twentieth-century Turkmen reformers believed that education and literacy were essential in the engagement of modernity. The Bolshevik/Soviet understanding of modern was incompatible with the Muslim modern.²⁷ Both agreed that the established order had to go, but they disagreed over how and who would oversee the project. Even in independent Turkmenistan (post-1991), with its full literacy rates, the state and a cadre of intellectuals believed that converting their Cyrillic alphabet to a modified Latin script was an appropriate way to mark the birth of the sovereign state. The post-Soviet Latin-based writing system conveyed Turkmen national consciousness in a manner worthy of the country's new international standing, elevating it from the former Soviet periphery where it previously had languished. Literacy, language, and learning offer lenses through which to see modernizing forces at work into the twenty-first century.

The concepts of modernity, power, identity, and literacy recur throughout the following chapters. The ultimate aspiration of many historical actors was to make Turkmen society modern. However, the means of getting there varied. Even Turkmen intellectuals in any particular era did not always agree on the best pathway to modernity, and they certainly were not always in step with St. Petersburg/Moscow. The notion of Turkmen modernity was not static, but in the historical records there is an underlying sense that certain Turkmen intellectuals believed they could progress if only they could codify their language just right, spread literacy, and educate the Turkmen people. If they could perfect their alphabet to reflect Turkmen speech and if they could combat illiteracy among their people, they would all become "modern." I therefore use the terms "modernity," "progress," and "internationalism" as they apply to each "phase of modernity" or sociopolitical era under discussion.²⁸

Literacy Studies and Sociolinguistics

Every reader will be able to identify with the task of learning to read and write. What may surprise many, though, is how such mundane cultural aspects as an alphabet or a vocabulary can serve both as a sharp implement for nation building and as a powerful political tool.²⁹ Speech communities around the world have experimented with script change. That is, one or more groups within a society determined that changing the writing system would bring benefits—if not material, then at least symbolic gains. In the modern era, such change often has been linked to ex-

pressions of national identity. Turkmen have used forms of language and writing as a means to position their local society in response to or in opposition to various global designs.

Before adopting Islam in the tenth century, Turkmen, like other Turkic peoples, employed a runic script. The adoption of the Arabic writing system marked their people as Muslim and situated them within the *umma*, or community of Muslim believers. Even in these early years, writing marked the Turks' place in the world. Since then, the modern Turkmen language has been written with three distinct systems of writing as Turkmen shifted from Arabic to Latin (1928–1940), to Cyrillic (1940–1993), and back to Latin (1993–present), with modifications also taking place in 1923, 1925, 1928, 1995, and 2000.³⁰ Each alteration was tied to the continuing politicization of culture either by such broad political forces as Soviet nationalities policy or by such internal shifts as the desire to symbolize an anti-Russian cultural stance after independence in 1991.³¹ Each reform dramatically affected the lives of the Turkmen people and acted as an important marker of the transformation of the Turkmen people. For example, in the 1910s, modification to their Arabic alphabet signified Turkmen membership in the larger Turco-Islamic world, but it also promoted a specifically Turkmen identity. This is a story that takes place on four intersecting and mutually influential levels of identity and political power: Turkmen, Turco-Islamic, Russian/Soviet, and global modern.

The details illustrate how a universal concern such as literacy is addressed at the local level. Language and education are particularly useful historical lenses because they were consistently important to Turkmen along their path toward modernity. Exploring the varying Turkmen responses to universal literacy and learning over several generations reveals both continuity and change over time, especially as their responses paralleled political eruptions and intellectual breaks. Through exploration we can see the intersections of language, politics, and cultural power.

Literacy is not a constant but is ever transforming. As the work of scholars in literacy studies demonstrates, using literacy as a means for transforming a people has not been limited to the modern era.³² Nevertheless, literacy is closely linked to conceptualizations of progress and modernity across diverse cultures. As Harvey Graff explains, “the rise of literacy and its dissemination to the popular classes, therefore, was, and is, associated with the triumph of light over darkness, or liberalism, democracy and universal unbridled progress; literacy takes its place among the other successes, and causes, of modernity and rationality.” But he also warns us of the “problems in treating literacy as an independent variable.”³³ Graff encourages scholars to contextualize analyses of literacy and to problematize the definition therein. This study does that by examining the role of literacy in modern Turkmen history as it related to language, education policy, and power more generally, illustrating that the very concept of literacy is not a constant but is ever transforming within larger contexts.³⁴

Decisions about language (language reform, official language policy) are frequently guided not by linguistic considerations but by social or political considerations.³⁵ “Language development” or “language planning,” for example, entails deliberate efforts to shape language via public policy.³⁶ Ideological or political realities can demand new usages of language and culture—such as when the Soviet state began injecting the Turkmen language with Soviet-international vocabulary so that the language could keep pace with sociopolitical and economic change in the Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic (TSSR). The language of instruction in schools is as much a political choice as a technical one.³⁷ New functional expectations—for example, an emergent technology or administration of a new state policy—may require language to adjust, and adjustments may include taking in new terminology or symbols, standardization in spelling or grammar, or adoption of a new writing system. In the end, members of the speech community (usually intellectuals or political elites) make efforts to adapt the language so as to meet social exigencies.³⁸ Pierre Bourdieu refers to this as bodies of specialists competing for a monopoly over legitimate cultural production. The history of such efforts is one way that language reflects the social experiences of a speech community.³⁹

My work is inspired by Professor Joshua Fishman’s call for language-related studies of power.⁴⁰ As Fishman’s enterprising *International Journal of Sociology of Language* reveals, languages around the world have undergone transformations and amendments similar to those in Turkmenistan, and the pathways taken by the Turkmen in language reform and national identity formation are well traveled by other communities around the globe. Sociolinguistics is the study of the relationship between society and language, which illustrates that point through the many histories of official language creation, grammar codification, adoption of alphabets, language planning, the emergence of print cultures, and the innumerable histories of peoples’ wielding language to manifest a group identity. Turkmen, like so many nations, have constructed a modern national identity, tinkered with the emblems reflective of that identity, and sought to experience the human condition through the prism of modernity.

Language and Power

My analysis is deeply influenced by the work of Pierre Bourdieu, including the idea that language endows a speaker with social capital. Within a speech community, facility in a language provides an individual with an important tool so as to function in that society. Bourdieu writes also of “linguistic capital,” asserting that “speakers lacking the legitimate competence are *de facto* excluded from the social domains in which this competence is required, or are condemned to silence.”⁴¹ An individual who lacks capacity in a community’s language or is illiterate is fundamentally disadvantaged and will likely remain politically marginalized and struggle to participate

in everyday life. In Turkmenistan, it was not merely a question of knowing one particular language, either Russian or Turkmen, but also about being proficient in the writing system and alphabet employed for Turkmen, which were Latin-based in the 1920s, but then Cyrillic in the 1950s. It also meant being adept in the political language of the time, “speaking Bolshevik” in the 1930s or knowing the language of the president’s nationalistic book *Rubnama*—in a new Latin-based script—after the year 2000. As Bourdieu explains:

Symbolic power [is] power of constituting the given through utterances, of making people see and believe, of confirming or transforming the vision of the world and, thereby, action on the world and thus the world itself. . . [whoever] makes “social solidarity” dependent on the sharing of a symbolic system [such as language or alphabet] has the merit of designating the *social function* . . . it is an authentic political function which cannot be reduced to the structuralists’ function of communication. Symbols are the instruments *par excellence* of “social integration”: as instruments of knowledge and communication . . . they make it possible for there to be a *consensus* on the meaning of the social world, a consensus which contributes fundamentally to the reproduction of the social order.⁴² [original emphasis]

In other words, forms are socially determined; they are notions conceived when society agrees upon a definition for a term or concept. Power relations are embedded in everyday life and cultural practices.⁴³ Cultural policy was more than a question of how people would read or what alphabet letters they would use. Culture posed questions as to who rose or fell; in some cases, as in the 1930s purges, it was about life and death. A few years after the fall of the Soviet Union, for example, Turkmenistan changed its script from Cyrillic to a Latin-based one. The state moved away from all Soviet symbols, including the Russian language. This put Russian speakers at a great disadvantage. President Nyýazow’s language policies disrupted the country’s workforce by enacting regulations that advantaged Turkmen speakers and augmented their social power. These policies undermined the socioeconomic place of Russian-only speakers by dispossessing them of their ability to work when state jobs required employees to speak Turkmen.

Bourdieu asks, “What creates the power of words and slogans, a power capable of managing or subverting the social order?” His answer is “symbolic power,” by which he means the ability to create meaning or the power to convince, and “confirming or transforming the vision of the world, and thereby, action on the world and thus the world itself.”⁴⁴ Bourdieu suggests that within society there is a constant struggle for meaning, knowing, and possessing the power to define society’s norms through the definitions of “culturally valued knowledge.”⁴⁵ In the pre-Soviet era, education or possession of knowledge was gained through Islamic ways of learning. The ability to say prayers, even without a formal education, earned one the title *molla*. In the Soviet era, knowledge was defined by ideology and one’s relationship

to the state. Both the understanding of knowledge and the access to it was in constant flux throughout the Soviet era. In the post-Soviet era, the definition of useful knowledge underwent a complete transformation.

Power appeared in a variety of guises. One method to gain power is to reduce others' access to it. Early twentieth-century reformists challenged the authority of traditional Muslim clergy by expanding the social meanings of literacy and transforming access to knowledge. In the twentieth century President Nyýazow likewise claimed the legitimacy of his rule through the semiotics of sovereignty (flag, anthem, and alphabet), while some members of society resisted by avoiding the new Turkmen script.⁴⁶ In the early post-Soviet years, language and education were among the greatest social concerns of Turkmenistan's citizenry. Some were empowered while others were disempowered due to a lack of access to language skills or education.

Continuity and Change

In order to understand the dis/continuities, it is necessary to delve into the intricacies of education and alphabet reform—should the alphabet have one letter or two to represent long vowel sounds? Should Turkmen write in the Cyrillic script or reform to a Latin-based one? What does it mean that some Turkmen do not know the Turkmen language? Fine-grained details are tightly embedded in real and serious political issues that confronted the Turkmen nation, issues that frequently challenged and focused Turkmen social power during tumultuous historical periods. Over the decades, the politics changed and the historical agents were transformed or forced out of the picture, but the aim of Turkmen intellectuals, nationalists, and others remained constant: to transport Turkmen society into modernity via literacy, and this led to calls for an alphabet that accurately reflected a refined, standardized language and an education system that taught it.

Historians look for turning points upon which to pivot their narrative, and this can sometimes lead to more emphasis being put on change rather than continuity. While I have organized the chapters in this book around moments of cultural change, I underscore the continuities among eras, historical actors, processes, institutions, and symbols. This method allows the reader to absorb the general history, with its accent on linkages, while tracing the most important transformations in its cultural currency.

There are shifting interpretations and uses of cultural capital and the application and appreciation that linked literacy and learning to cultural and social power, including Auguste Comte's concept of cultural knowledge as "wealth" and Bourdieu's concepts of "cultural capital" and "symbolic power."⁴⁷ In Turkmenistan cultural power changed as access to it changed hands through the possession of knowledge, language, or ethnicity in each respective era. At times, it paid to privilege or empha-

size being Turkmen; at other times it was more profitable to be “Russian” (a Russian speaker)—or at the very least conversant in the Russian language. There are three principal reasons to emphasize continuity: (1) to situate the Turkmen in historical context; (2) to stress that people’s lives and local cultures traverse the boundaries of political regimes, and periodization of history is complex when individuals are taken into consideration; and (3) as a reminder that there are often historical precedents for behavior, leaving few ages unique. Bourdieu extended the idea of capital to such constructions as social capital, cultural capital, symbolic capital, and even linguistic capital. For Bourdieu, each individual is defined not solely by class, gender, or religious group but also by the kind of capital, the amount of social currency, that individual can bring to a social situation. Bourdieu’s theories help to illustrate and situate the historical realm of the Turkmen language and learning. They illuminate the historical turning points and trajectories as political affairs affected the value of cultural capital, thereby altering the ability to profit from accumulated social “wealth.”

Organization of the Chapters

In chapter 1 the focus is on education and print culture as primary sites where Turkmen focused on social reform and on how language became symbolic of their group identity in the early twentieth century. Throughout the Russian empire in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Muslim reformers who wished to modernize Islamic cultural and social institutions through new methods of teaching (*usul-i jadid*) and socialization became known as *jadids*. Jadid activities attracted the attention of a small number of progressive Turkmen (I call them “Jadid-inspired” Turkmen). In response to the nineteenth-century perception that universal education and functional literacy possessed transformative modernizing powers, early twentieth-century Turkmic intellectuals proposed modifications to their schools and pedagogy and employed a modified, expanded Arabic script in the belief that it would expedite learning. Turkmen simultaneously explored pedagogical reform.

Drawing particularly upon the newspaper *Ruznama-i Mawera-i Bahr-i Hazar*, chapter 1 traces Jadid-inspired Turkmen as they articulated many of the cultural conceptions that later informed the work of early Soviet institutions. Turkmen believed that literacy could transform their society. Influenced by the reforms that moved across Central Asia, reform-minded individuals founded new schools and promoted a new pedagogy, opposing traditional schools that emphasized rote learning instead of functional literacy.

The next three chapters illustrate that Moscow also stressed the fundamental importance of literacy, but in later years this was political, not functional literacy. As political or cultural powers shifted, various sectors of Turkmen society used ed-

ucation, literacy, and writing systems to inculcate a socialist outlook in the masses. One could not function in Soviet society without at least a rudimentary familiarity with Marxism-Leninism, whether it was in the classroom or at a parade. Bolsheviks shared basic ideals about the role of literacy with Turkmen reformers, albeit within a different ideological framework.⁴⁸ Moscow expanded and intensified its control over Turkmenistan (and Central Asia more generally) when the Arabic writing system was supplanted first by a Latin-based script and then by Cyrillic. It was not tanks that rolled into Aşgabat, but the Russian alphabet. Moscow employed and manipulated the symbolic power of alphabets, creating meaningful change in people's everyday lives. The Cyrillic script and the Russification of language that accompanied it forced a new nexus in Turkmen speech, which suppressed the Islamic aspects/components of the Turkmen language so as to support the centralization of Soviet power through linguistic Russification.

Chapter 2 explores cooperation and competition between indigenous and Moscow-directed elites over how social arenas such as schools and print culture were employed to promote political objectives among Turkmen in imperial Russia and then in the Soviet Union. The overlap existed only so far; each group had different expectations of who would possess cultural power in Soviet Turkmenistan. The change in the political atmosphere and the purges of the 1930s reflected the limited correspondence of reformist and Bolshevik ideals. The groups had all agreed that literacy was a strategic solution in creating a progressive society, but ultimate goals, processes, and especially decisions about who was in charge differed wholly.

Chapter 3 tells two stories. The first is the Jadid-inspired story of creating a modern Turkmen nation within the larger, modern Muslim and Turkic worlds, an idea that continued more or less through 1930. The second story is the Soviet-inspired vision of converting Turkmen into a Soviet and socialist people and placing them in the socialist variant of modernity, embedded within the Soviet Union. These are two different visions of the future of Turkmen identity. Each one is about forging a Turkmen identity, but each is a very different type of Turkmen-ness and Turkmen future.

Chapter 3 also examines the introduction of a Cyrillic alphabet, which was infused with the capacity to situate the Turkmen within the Soviet Union. In the 1920s the transnational Latin alphabet was chosen specifically to modernize and internationalize Turkic peoples. By 1940 Turkmenistan's use of a Cyrillic-based writing system was emblematic of the *sliianie* (merging) of the Soviet peoples; Cyrillicization illustrated Russification of culture more broadly. The new Soviet person (*sovetskii chelovek/täze sowet adamy*) spoke at least some Russian and wrote their native language in the Russian script.⁴⁹

In chapter 4, we see that during the rest of the Soviet era, local dialects and Russian at times vied for dominance whereas at other times coexisted amicably in

Turkmenistan as well as throughout the USSR. This meant that the languages in which people learned to read and write gained or lost currency according to political standards. Identity, too, was closely linked to the politics of language. Local sentiment reflecting frustration with the status of the Russian language was based less on the republicwide use of Russian and more on its dominance in official arenas. Calls for parity between Russian and national languages were focused more on language status and prestige than on actual daily usage.⁵⁰ Russification swept across the Soviet Union. Turkmen continued to speak the Turkmen language in their private lives, but cultural capital was vested in the Russian language as the Soviet lingua franca and it held sway in official arenas and public spaces. Soviet language policy was permissive of many national languages, but Russification was real both as national languages were infused with Russian vocabulary and as there was a steady expansion of the teaching of Russian.

As chapter 5 illustrates, reforms in the 1980s allowed ordinary citizens to discuss publicly their positions on language status. Mikhail Gorbachev's rule made space for demands for cultural autonomy that led to a reevaluation of the role of the Russian language vis-à-vis local languages. Debates over which would be the language of instruction in schools, in each of the Soviet regions, represented a continuity of language considerations found in earlier eras. Appeals for change in the status of Turkmen during glasnost and after 1991 bore witness to the fact that the symbolic place of language and alphabet was just as important as actual language conventions. Turkmenistan's president, Saparmurat Nyýazow, was slow to reject the Soviet era, but once he did his policies reflected an intense nationalism.

In asking how the Soviet experience changed Turkmen language and learning and what continuities there were in the post-Soviet period, this study problematizes the history of independent Turkmenistan. Placing Nyýazow's policies of language and education in a broad historical context, this study does not reduce the Nyýazow period to the bizarre dictatorship of a megalomaniac as so many other studies do.⁵¹ In this way we see that his concepts were not without precedent.

Chapter 6 vividly illustrates the late 1990s and early 2000s when President Nyýazow took control over the appearance of the alphabet, content of textbooks, parameters of public speech, and content of academic research in Turkmenistan. Inspired by the power of information technology in the world, he formulated an alphabet that he believed would suit computers—changing the focus of literacy to computer literacy. Nyýazow developed a cult of personality around himself that pervaded public expression in newspapers, television, statues, and signage. Just a few years later, an intensification in the nationalism and Nyýazow's role in public, verbal, and visual discourse turned Turkmenification into Nyýazowization. Even after his death in 2006, Turkmen citizens could employ or express their alphabetic, political, and cultural literacies only within the parameters of Nyýazow's nation-building policies.

Chapter 7 highlights cultural policies of Turkmenistan's second president, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow (2007–present). The focus is primarily on education because the question of literacy was rarely a topic of discussion in this regime. Revealing a period of reform, this chapter suggests that although things in the education sector changed for the better in 2014 the country was still awaiting a Kru-shchevian “thaw.”

Becoming modern has been an extended process for the Turkmen nation. The conclusion in this history will revisit the book's major themes, underscoring that the Turkmen historical experience provides an example of the enduring connection between culture and power. Despite the historical development of the Turkmen nation, Turkmen have shared their quest to become modern with all nations; language and education reform have been crucial components in that experience.