Resurrection of the Temple. The Role of the State in Shaping Regional Political Identity

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Introduction

The disintegration of the USSR in 1991 left Russia's new leaders without a "defining idea" (Gill 2005:494); recently, the Russian political leadership has clearly demonstrated that religion should play a stronger role in the search for such. For example, at the 2012 pre-election meeting with the leaders of the "traditional religious communities", Vladimir Putin—then the Prime Minister and a presidential candidate—stated that, "since the collapse of the Soviet Union, our country has lived through turbulent times and, in moral questions, could not rely on anything else except for religious values". Putin then added, that the "primitive" Soviet understanding of the norm of separation of church and state must be replaced by "a completely different regime of relations—that of partnership, mutual assistance and support". Putin called for "active, direct, effective, daily participation of religious organizations in the life of society and state" (Russian Orthodox Church 2012).

These partnership relations have manifested most visibly in various projects to restore religious buildings, historic sites, and monuments, which thereby transformed the symbolic landscape of the post-socialist city. The resurrection of the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow has become the most prominent resurrection of a religious building during the post-socialist period (Sidorov 2000). Political and business elites have taken an active part in restoring religious buildings, looking to shape the national identity and expand a base of popular support.

Regional elites also implemented various symbolic projects, although different in scale and nature to those implemented in the center. Region-based political identity projects aim to create an alternative ethno-national identity and therefore actively exploit ethnic, linguistic, and religious differences between the center and provinces. According to Graney (2007), the city of Kazan, the capital of the Tatarstan Republic, "has undergone a remarkable transformation and 'repackaging' to serve the republic's goal of extending its sovereignty and institutionalizing greater ethno-cultural pluralism in the Russian Federation" (p. 18).

Although the political motivation behind these processes has been acknowl-

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edged, the role of the state in shaping regional political identities has received relatively modest academic reflection. This chapter seeks to contribute to the current debates by addressing the question of why, during the post-socialist period, the local state actively participates in the reconstruction of religious buildings. The chapter focuses on the reconstruction of religious buildings inside the Kazan Kremlin during the period 1995 to 2005.

Nationalism and Political Identity

The collapse of communism in Eastern Europe produced dramatic transformations of urban symbolic landscapes, which involved erasing traces of the "unwanted past", often by destroying material legacies associated with it (Leach 2002), accepting a once-rejected past (Frierson 2010), and celebrating national and religious identities via monumental art and architecture (Adams 2008).

According to nationalist doctrines, the nation-state is a 'natural' outcome of ethnic political mobilization based on a shared sense of belonging, common language and culture, and a shared vision of the past and future of the nation. In contrast to the essentialist conceptualizations of nationalism, Roeder (2007) argues that new nation-state projects emerge from pre-existing segmental states (e.g., federations) and require state resources to succeed. Apart from resources, the successful implementation of a nation-state project requires the establishment of political-identity hegemony, which "consists of both the relative predominance of a national identity within 'the people' and the relative empowerment of a cohort of politicians associated with that project within 'the homeland'" (Roeder 2007:83). In order to establish and strengthen political-identity hegemony, secessionist political leaders foster national cultures and use their powers "to create research centers that develop and write national histories; to maintain archives, libraries, and museums that preserve and display the monuments of this history" (Roeder 2007:149–150).

Everyday social practices play a central role in the formation of the "socio-spatial consciousness" that marks the perception of spatial belonging, and we-ness and other-ness. The socio-spatial consciousness is reinforced through education, culture, politics, economy, administration, communication, etc. (Paasi 1996:66). Dominant groups promote specific interpretations of the past, which became known in heritage studies as "the authorised heritage discourse" (Smith 2006). Identity and heritage are mutually reinforcing concepts, as the latter supports claims over territories and borders, and implies the right to interpret and use the past for the purposes of contemporary politics (Graham et al. 2000).

Despite its potential political significance, heritage has very little intrinsic worth apart from the value people attach to it through lenses such as nationality,

religion, or ethnicity (Graham and Howard 2008:2). Heritage as a discursive concept can help to analyze the transformation of symbolic landscapes, and to illuminate the relationship between political leaders, governing institutions, and ethnic and religious groups in interpreting the past and re-creating the meaning of cityscapes, monuments, and important sites (Harrison 2010; Littler and Naidoo 2005).

The role of the state in constructing the new political identity of the region has been particularly visible in Tatarstan, where the authorities have made considerable efforts to introduce a 'national component' into the cityscape (Hughes 2007). In Kazan, these efforts manifested most vividly in the post-socialist reconstruction of the Kazan Kremlin.

Reconstruction of the Kazan Kremlin

The Kazan Kremlin dates back to the pre-Russian period. In 1445, Kazan became the capital of the Kazan Khanate (1445–1552) following the disintegration of the Golden Horde. In 1552, Kazan was conquered by the Russian Tsar Ivan the Terrible; the Kazan Kremlin was ruined and most of the defenders and civilians were killed. The Russian period lasted until 1990, when Tatarstan declared its independence from the Russian Federation. In the early 1990s, Russia's ethnic republics started making claims for extended political and economic rights, first in the USSR and later in the Russian Federation. The main drivers of the 'sovereignty' movements were issues of political power, control of natural resources, and fiscal aspects of center–periphery relationships. During that period, regions and the federal center became engaged in a complex negotiation process, arranged on a one-to-one basis, to define mutually acceptable conditions of federalist relations (Dowley 1998).

The nationalist leaders of Russia's ethnic republics used national identity as a means to secure political support both inside the region and in front of the authorities of the central state. Nationalist elites in ethnic republics used ethnic and religious identification, in addition to memories of Russification and earlier deportation, to create new post-socialist identities (Johnson 2005:22). National identity was used "as a rallying banner to claim autonomy and threaten separatism in order to obtain special status and additional resources from Moscow" (Castells and Kiselyova 2000:177).

In Tatarstan, the authorities used several key components, including the discourses of ethnicity and post-colonialism, media and language policy, religion, architecture, and heritage to create the republic's new political identity (see Rolich 1999; Davies 2000; Yuzeev 2005).

Ambitions of secession gave rise to debates about rebuilding Kazan as the capital city of a 'sovereign' state. In November 1992, a group of Tatar nationalists

and Muslim activists published an open letter to then-President Shaimiev, claiming that "the churches in the Kazan Kremlin were built "on the graves of Tatars and the foundations of their mosques", and demanded that the authorities rebuild mosques inside the Kremlin walls" (cited in Graney 2007:21). Later, a group of architects proposed to commemorate the restoration of Tatarstani statehood by 'resurrecting' the historical Kul-Sharif Mosque that was destroyed as a result of the Russian invasion of 1552. The idea initially received a mixed reception, but later gained numerous supporters (Khalitov 1997:234).

The Kazan Kremlin became a prime site on which new political identities of semi-sovereign Tatarstan were staged. In 1994, the "State historical, architectural, and arts Museum-Reserve Kazan Kremlin"1 was established for the "preservation and development of historical and cultural heritages of the peoples of Tatarstan and revitalization of the Kazan Kremlin as the historical, cultural, and administrative center of the Tatarstan Republic" (President of Tatarstan 1994). Initially, it was proposed to restore the Kremlin on the basis of preservationist principles, using archival data and archaeological surveys (Aidarov and Khalikov 1994).

The Tatarstani Academy of Sciences responded negatively to the proposed concept, due to its alignment with the Soviet historiography tradition that saw the Kremlin as a "product" of Russian architecture. Architecture historian Niaz Khalitov—then Deputy Director of the Museum-Reserve—explained that the concept entirely excluded the idea of new construction in the Kremlin (Khalitov 1997:235). According to Khalitov, the proposed conservation approach inevitably raised the question as to what exactly had to be preserved (p. 235).

Adherence to the conservation approach implied restoration of only those buildings that could be verified by historical data. Such an approach would imply reconstruction of Russian churches and monasteries, which previously populated the Kremlin. However, that would be inappropriate on political and moral grounds, because the reconstructed churches would become "monuments to the barbaric demolition of buildings sacred for the Muslim population of Kazan: mosques, tombs of khans and the saints" (Khalitov 1996, 1997a:237). To avoid this, Khalitov suggested that the whole approach to historical heritage should be critically reviewed, because "reconstruction of the Kremlin as a stronghold of state power and a symbol of its state history today is not a mere architectural task but also a political act, and its necessity could not be doubted" (Khalitov 1997a:238–239).

Eventually, the issue was resolved when Mintimer Shaimiev—then President of Tatarstan—endorsed new construction in the Kremlin. The Presidential Decree "On the concept of preservation, development, and use of the ensemble of Kazan

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1 Museum-Reserve Kazan Kremlin web site: http://www.kazan-kremlin.ru/mzkk/

Kremlin" (1995) ordered the restoration of the Blagoveshchenskii (Annunciation) Cathedral (built 1556–1562) and the recreation of the Kul-Sharif Mosque (President of Tatarstan 1995).

In December 1995, the Tatarstani government announced a design contest for "the best project for the resurrection of the mosque (Kabinet Minisrov RT 1995). The design brief created many opportunities for design teams to interpret what ought to be built, but—at the same time—gave no clarity as to what the actual design would look like, and offered no information on possible sources of knowledge that might be used to collect information about the legendary mosque; it was left to the contestants to decide whether to align with the *conservation* approach and consider the Kremlin as predominantly Russian architectural ensemble, or to align with the *reconstruction* approach oriented more towards recreating the Kremlin as the center of the capital of the Tatarstan Republic.

The siege of 1552 left the Kazan Kremlin in ruins, making it difficult to find any reliable data about the pre-Russian period. The lack of information about the original mosque made its "resurrection" difficult. Not only was the appearance of the mosque unknown, but even its location within the Kremlin was yet to be found (Sitdikov 2006:110–111). The construction of a large mosque inside the Kremlin—already populated by Russian Orthodox churches and monasteries—raised questions about the impact of the new construction on the existing Russian heritage2. Finally, it was not clear what reaction the construction of a mosque at a predominantly Russian heritage site might cause in Moscow and among the Russian population of Tatarstan3.

Although the ambition was to make the Kremlin look "more Tatar", the Tatarstani political leaders were also cautious that Moscow might interpret the construction of the mosque as a sign of the region's growing Islamization. The proposal to restore both Christian and Muslim monuments was therefore intended to demonstrate a balanced approach. The language used in documents also emphasized preservation and restoration rather than new construction.

2 Interview with a professor at the Kazan School of Architecture, June 2007, Kazan.

3 Interview with a senior planner at a design institute, January 2007, Kazan.

Figure 6.1. The Kul-Sharif Mosque in the Kazan Kremlin. Destroyed in 1552, 'resurrected' in 1996–2005. Photo by the author, 2011.

After the grand opening on 24 June 2005, the Mosque became a part of the museum-reserve of the Kazan Kremlin, which had operational control of the building. To emphasize a broader cultural role of the building, a small museum of Islam was organized in its basement. The Muslim Religious Board of the Republic of Tatarstan opposed locating a museum in the Mosque building on the grounds that visitors to the museum might consume tobacco and alcohol during public receptions. The city's chief architect responded that the presidential decree made provisions for a museum, and it would therefore be built (Ivanicheva 1997b:4).

Despite the apparent loyalty of the Muslim clergy to the political regime, the authorities carefully measured out the level of influence the clergy could gain over such a symbolically important site as the Kazan Kremlin. According to the government decree, the use of the mosque for mass religious events was restricted to two festivals per year: *Uraza Bairam* and *Kurban Bairam*. During the rest of the year, the mosque would mainly be used as a museum (Kabinet Minisrov of Tatarstan 1995).

Figure 6.2. Blagoveshchenskii (Annunciation) Cathedral and Kul-Sharif Mosque in the Kazan Kremlin. The cathedral was built from 1556 to 1562, renovated in 1994–2005, except for the bell-tower demolished in 1928. Photo by the author, 2011.

On 24 July 2005 Blagoveshchenskii Cathedral was opened after a reconstruction that lasted nine years. Mintimer Shaimiev—then President of Tatarstan Republic—stated that the decision to work simultaneously on the two sacred sites, Russian Orthodox and Muslim, was a gesture of historic justice and harmony between two traditional for Tatarstan religions (Shaimiev 2005).

The way the authorities implemented the reconstruction of the Kazan Kremlin was not unanimously supported. Questions were raised as to whether the construction of a new huge Mosque inside the protected historic site of the Kremlin (although presented as the 'resurrection' of something previously in existence) could be justified: "the Mosque is being reconstructed despite the fact that the only thing known about it is the number of minarets. Why not restore the ancient Spasskii Cathedral from the 16th century, which has a perfectly preserved basement as well as all necessary archival data?" (Zhuravskii 1995).

The Russian community of Tatarstan expected that the reconstruction of the Kazan Kremlin in line with the presidential decree would have done more for the

Russian monuments—churches and monasteries—destroyed or damaged during the Communist period. For example, the reconstruction of Blagoveshchenskii Cathedral was only partial: while the interiors and facades were restored, its 50-meter tall bell-tower, which was demolished in 1928, was not reconstructed.

The Society of Russian Culture in Tatarstan Republic on numerous occasions approached the authorities in Tatarstan raising issues related to preservation of church buildings but have not received a satisfactory answer. At a conference titled *Russians in Modern Tatarstan: Status, Problems, and Search for Solutions* held in Kazan in 2011, Russian civil right activists complained about a "hostile decision" of the Tatarstani authorities to open the Museum of History of the Tatar Statehood inside one of the church buildings located in the Kremlin. The activists added, that it seems to be acceptable to have a Tatar museum in the former church building, but it would be unthinkable to use a mosque building to accommodate a museum of Russian history (Ordinsky 2011).

State–Religion Relations

Mintimer Shaimiev—then President of Tatarstan—stated that "the destiny of the mosque is the destiny of the people" (President of Tatarstan 2001). Not everyone regarded the active support for a mosque project by former communists as an unproblematic proposition. A chief research fellow at the Tatarstan Republic Academy of Sciences noted that Shaimiev supported the resurrection of the mosque for purely political reasons, "as a communist and post-communist political leader and an atheist at heart; as a symbol only, but without any religious or spiritual contents"4. A senior member of staff within the Tatarstani President Administration offered a more down-to-earth explanation of state involvement in the mosque project: "the context of the project was historical but the task was political"5.

During the 1990s, the main political task of the Tatarstani leadership was strengthening the special semi-sovereign status of Tatarstan within the Russian federation which created certain economic advantages not available to 'ordinary' regions. These advantages took the form of direct aid or fiscal privileges granted by the Russian government. Gaining these privileges could significantly affect regional economic prosperity (Valuev 2007). Competing for these privileges with other regions required the deployment of various techniques, including political bargaining and secessionist threats (Solnick 1998).

The mosque project helped to substantiate claims for larger political and eco-

4 Interview, January 2007, Kazan.

5 Interview, June 2007, Kazan.

nomic autonomy via its powerful image and location inside the predominantly Russian cultural landscape. One informant explained that:

The Mosque in the Kremlin was not about faith… It was selected as a symbol of threat—hostile threat… They exploited the weakness of the central state… Kazan used the possible disintegration of Russia as an opportunity to take advantage in the competition for federal financial flows… It was all about frightening and blackmailing a weak Russia…6.

The Tatarstani authorities only considered the nationalists useful when their claims were directed at the Russian authorities and not at the balance of power within the republic (Ponarin 2007). Once the special status of Tatarstan was established via a bilateral treaty in 1994, the Tatarstani authorities began to sideline nationalist leaders. While the authorities did everything to destroy the nationalist movement, they also made efforts "to organize the spiritual life of the wide Tatar masses on the basis of Islamic values… that is, linked to state support for the construction of mosques and the establishment of Russia's Islamic University" (Mukhametdinov 2006:84). The authorities considered mass mobilization around Islam to be more acceptable than that around the nationalist ideology because it was easier to establish political control over religious organizations than over the nationalists.

By getting involved in religious affairs, the authorities tried to 'kill two birds with one stone'. On one hand, they sought to contain the nationalist movement while on the other attempting to prevent the emergence of radical *Wahhabism* Islam in Tatarstan: In order to contain the threat of *Wahhabism*, the state offered the Muslin clergy of Tatarstan the approved version of Islam. The political advisor to the president actively theorized on the specifically Tatar version of Islam—*Djadidisme* or *Euroislam* (see Khakimov 2003, 2005). Euroislam was thought to be fundamentally important for securing inter-ethnic peace in the region where peoples of different nationalities and religious beliefs could peacefully coexist.

In Tatarstan, the Muslim clergy accepted such state involvement, resulting in "an unambiguously paternalistic" attitude of the Tatarstani authorities towards the clergy, and put the clergy in a dependent position in front of the state (Mukharyamov 2006:57). According to a Kazan-based journalist, in Tatarstan:

> Religion was used as an instrument of political marginalization of people and sacralization of the authorities. That is why the authorities were 'making advances' to the religious leaders. Long ago, religious leaders had been co-opted into the system of power. Both the Chair of the Muslim Religious Board of the Republic of Tatarstan (Gusman Hazrat) and the Archbishop of Kazan Anastasii were driven in cars with special registration plates issued only to top government officials.

6 Interview, January 2008, Kazan.

> They had been incorporated into the power structure and served that power. Effectively, they became government ministers—one for the Muslim religion, the one for the Russian Orthodox religion7.

In exchange for economic support, religious leaders offered loyalty to the political regime. According to Mukhametshin (2005), one of the leaders of the Tatar Muslim clergy officially opposed any involvement of Muslim religious organizations in politics, but at the same time urged believers to support the political authorities in their regions. He stated that political leaders, especially the presidents of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan, should be granted a lifelong term of office, and also called to prevent the alien ideas of democracy from penetrating public and political life (pp. 190–191).

The extent to which these strategies of creating a "state-authorized religion" worked remains an open question, especially in light of the terrorist attacks that shocked Tatarstan in 2012. Then, as a result of planned attacks, the Mufti of Tatarstan was injured and his deputy killed. Later, a special anti-terrorist unit met with armed response from a group of suspected Islamic terrorists after raiding their property in Kazan. The attacks showed that the authorities seriously miscalculated their level of influence over religion through the existing practices of co-optation and offering material stimulus in exchange for loyalty.

Creating the Post-Socialist Cultural Landscape

The choice to concentrate efforts on reconstruction of the Kazan Kremlin was not accidental. Kazan, once the capital of the Kazan Khanate, was conquered by the Russians in the 16th century, later rebuilt in the Russian architectural tradition, and became a symbol of colonization for many Tatars; conversely, among Russians, the Kazan Kremlin remains a symbol of national unity. This makes the Kremlin a symbolically important site for both dominant ethnic groups.

In order to reflect the region's multi-ethnic nature, the Tatarstani authorities adopted a comprehensive approach to reconstruction of the Kazan Kremlin, which implied resurrection of both the Kul-Sharif Mosque and also Russian monuments. A special administrative unit—the Museum-Reserve Kazan Kremlin—was created to oversee the reconstruction. The authorities mobilized financial resources from large government-controlled industries, the republic's oil production company, OAO 'Tatneft' that sponsored the resurrection of the Kul-Sharif Mosque and the OAO 'Kazan Helicopters' that paid for the reconstruction of Blagoveshchenskii Cathedral.

While there was no information on either the original location or appearance

7 Interview, June 2008, Kazan.

of the historical mosque, architects designed a new building in response to contemporary demands. The 'implanting' of the Mosque into the cultural landscape dominated by Russian Orthodox monuments helped to substantiate regional claims for sovereignty and strengthen ethnic and religious identities within the republic. The very close proximity of the resurrected mosque to Orthodox churches and monasteries acted to support the claims of harmonious coexistence of different peoples in the multiethnic Tatarstan, and promoted ethnic and religious tolerance as a fundamental component of Tatarstani national identity.

Despite the declared balanced approach, the Tatarstani authorities dedicated most effort to the completion of the Mosque project, doing as little as possible for the restoration of Russian heritage within the Kazan Kremlin: the Spaso-Preobrazhenskii (Savior-Transfiguration) Monastery still lies in ruins; Blagoveshchenskii Cathedral was only partially reconstructed. Although then-President Shaimiev denied that the Tatarstani state offered Muslim religious organizations preferential treatment, a prominent Tatarstani cleric claimed that "with no doubt, President Shaimiev should be given credit for having so many mosques constructed during such a short period of time" (Yakupov 2006:97).

The preferential treatment of Muslim religious organizations was also visible in other areas. While the Muslim Religious Board of the Republic of Tatarstan was settled in a refurbished building in the center of the city, the offices of The Kazan Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church were located in a remote area of the city (Ponarin 2007:214). The mechanism of 'voluntary donations' also worked in a specific way. As the deputy chair of the Russian Cultural Society explained, the Society approached several businessmen asking for charitable donations to support its cultural and educational projects. Although businesses would not refuse, in principle, to support a Russian charity, they had been ordered by the authorities to support numerous Tatar cultural activities and could not afford to support both Tatar and Russian projects. The businessmen said that if there had been an order from the authorities to also support Russian charities, they would have done so8.

Conclusions

Efforts by Tatarstani authorities to add more 'religious flavor' to the city's cultural landscape have revealed some important aspects of state–religion interaction during the post-socialist period. The rebuilding of the Kazan Kremlin took place after the communist ideology collapsed and Russia faced an 'ideological vacuum'. The return to "traditional values" based on ethnic, linguistic, and religious identities was

8 Interview, May 2008, Kazan.

by no means predefined or inevitable. The evidence from Kazan suggests that the process was far from being a ‘natural’ transition from communism to nationalism. The restoration of religious symbols was part of nationalist leaders’ strategic choice to employ religion to create a new political-identity hegemony required for the successful implementation of the state sovereignty project.

The political leadership of Tatarstan used religion to strengthen their claims for secession from Russia. These claims were used to extend the economic, fiscal, and political privileges of Tatarstan *vis-à-vis* the central authorities. Claims for cultural revival were always accompanied by those for economic and political autonomy. The leaders also used symbolic architectural projects to strengthen their legitimacy with the central state and the population of Tatarstan. The transformations of the cultural landscape delivered a clear message to the central government in Moscow: that Tatarstan was different from the rest of Russia and was seeking greater autonomy. The resurrection of the mosque was one of the symbolic attributes of a nation—along with the declaration of state sovereignty, the constitution, the presidency, and monumental art and architecture. The simultaneous reconstruction of the Russian Orthodox Cathedral showed that the political leaders of Tatarstan were also prepared to respect the rights of Tatarstan’s Russian population.

The transformations of the cultural landscape contributed to debates on the relationship between religion and state. The political authorities clearly took the lead, whereas religious authorities were generally compliant and subsumed into the structure of political power and economic relations. The resurrection of the mosque did not mean that the Muslim clergy were permitted to exercise any degree of power within the Kremlin: the group for whom the mosque was ostensibly provided was only allowed to use it by permission of the landlord—the government-controlled Museum-Preserve Kazan Kremlin.

The Kul-Sharif Mosque became a symbol of Tatarstan’s ‘official version’ of Islam: insulated from local politics, loyal to the authorities and supported by the regional government. The authorities carefully nourished the state-sponsored religion trying to contain popular nationalism and prevent the spread of radical Islam within the region. Terrorist attacks in Kazan during 2012, in which two moderate Muslim clerics were attacked and one of them killed, raised concerns about whether the Tatarstani authorities managed to ‘kill two birds with one stone’ or, indeed, missed both. The publicly-acknowledged failure of the authorities to recognize and contain the threat of emergence of radical Islam in Tatarstan has rendered the previous claims of religious peace and harmony less credible.

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