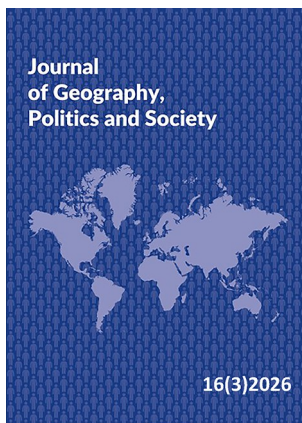




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TERRITORIAL CHANGE AND ISLAMIC EXPRESSION IN POST-SOVIET TATARSTAN

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Abstract

The Republic of Tatarstan is often portrayed as a model of moderate Islam within the Russian Federation, with its stability commonly attributed to the liberal traditions of Tatar Islam and interfaith coexistence. This article argues that such explanations overlook the political-geographical contexts within which competing expressions of Islam emerge and acquire public legitimacy. Drawing on qualitative historical and interpretive analysis of public discourse, institutional publications, official documents, and symbolic landscape, it examines how changing territorial conditions reshaped competing expressions of Islam in post-Soviet Tatarstan. The article first reconstructs an intellectual history of debates among nationalist organizations, intellectuals, religious leaders, and state institutions concerning the relationship between Islam and homeland before examining how those changing expressions found material form in the symbolic landscape of the Kazan Kremlin. The findings demonstrate that changing territorial conditions reshaped the discursive, institutional, and material expression of Islam as Tatarstan moved from republican sovereignty toward accommodation within a recentralized multinational Russian state.

Key words

Tatarstan; Islam; territoriality; nationalism; Russia; political geography.

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1. Introduction

Over the past few decades, Islam has assumed an increasingly visible place in the public life of the Russian Federation. Home to one of Europe's largest Muslim populations, Russia has witnessed the expansion of religious institutions, the construction of thousands of new mosques, and renewed public debates regarding the place of Islam within a multinational state (Laruelle, 2007; Malashenko, 2007, 2008; Almazova, Akhunov, 2019; Sibgatullina, 2024). While Islam is officially recognized as one of Russia's "traditional religions," questions remain regarding

which forms of Islamic belief and practice are considered legitimate and how those definitions relate to competing understandings of Russian identity (Laruelle, 2009; Almazova, Akhunov, 2019; Sibgatullina, 2025).

The Republic of Tatarstan occupies a particularly important place within these debates. Located in the Middle Volga region and home to one of Russia's largest Muslim populations, Tatarstan emerged during the 1990s as a prominent example of accommodation between Islamic revival, ethnic nationalism, and political stability. Unlike Chechnya, where competing claims to sovereignty culminated in violent conflict, Tatarstan pursued extensive political autonomy while

maintaining comparatively peaceful relations with Moscow (Derrick, 2008; Graney, 2009). Observers frequently attributed this outcome to the supposedly liberal character of Tatar Islam, emphasizing the legacy of Jadidism, traditions of religious tolerance, and the region's reputation for interfaith coexistence (Rorlich, 1999; Laruelle, 2007; Bekkin, 2020).

Although existing scholarship has produced rich accounts of Tatar nationalism, Islamic revival, and Russian federalism (Laruelle, 2007; Graney, 2009; Almazova, Akhunov, 2019), it has paid less attention to the relationship between changing territorial arrangements and competing understandings of Islam. And so, this article asks the question: How did changing territorial conditions reshape competing expressions of Islam in post-Soviet Tatarstan? More specifically, it examines how shifts in Tatarstan's territorial relationship with the Russian Federation altered the political contexts within which competing understandings of Islam emerged, acquired institutional authority, and found material expression in the symbolic landscape of the Kazan Kremlin.

Religious ideas undoubtedly matter, but their social and political significance is shaped within specific territorial contexts. Institutions, symbolic landscapes, and political projects all contribute to defining which expressions of religion become publicly legitimate and how they are connected to particular understandings of homeland.

This article argues that changing territorial conditions reshaped the political contexts within which competing expressions of Islam emerged in post-Soviet Tatarstan. During the republic's sovereignty movement of the 1990s, influential political leaders, intellectuals, and religious institutions promoted understandings of Islam that complemented narratives of Tatar nationhood and historical statehood. Under conditions of Putin-era federal recentralization, officially supported expressions of Islam increasingly emphasized historical continuity, traditional religion, and Tatarstan's place within a multinational Russian Federation. The changing relationship between Kazan and Moscow therefore reshaped not religious belief itself, but the socially and politically legitimate ways Islam was understood, institutionalized, and materially expressed.

The article contributes to scholarship on religion and political geography by demonstrating how changing territorial conditions reshape the political contexts within which competing expressions of religion emerge and acquire legitimacy. Rather than treating Islamic revival as the rediscovery of inherited traditions, it shows how religious meaning is continually renegotiated through changing

relationships among territory, institutions, historical memory, and homeland.

Empirically, the article traces this process through two complementary forms of evidence. It first reconstructs an intellectual history of competing expressions of Islam through the writings of nationalist organizations, intellectuals, and religious leaders as they debated the relationship between Islam and homeland in post-Soviet Tatarstan. It then examines how those changing expressions found material form in the symbolic landscape of the Kazan Kremlin. Together, these analyses demonstrate how changing territorial conditions reshaped both the discursive and material expression of Islam in post-Soviet Tatarstan.

By situating Islam within changing territorial contexts, this article demonstrates that the relationship between religion and homeland is historically contingent rather than fixed. Competing expressions of Islam emerged, acquired institutional authority, and found material expression as political actors sought to redefine Tatarstan's place within the post-Soviet territorial order. The case of Tatarstan therefore illustrates how territorial change reshapes not only political institutions but also the socially legitimate ways religion is understood and publicly expressed.

2. Territory, Homeland, and Religious Expression: An Analytical Framework

Political geographers have long argued that territory is more than a bounded container of political life. Territorial arrangements organize political authority, define the spatial boundaries of belonging, and provide the framework through which collective identities are negotiated and legitimized (Sack, 1986; Paasi, 1996; Murphy, 2002; Elden, 2013). Because territorial arrangements are historically contingent rather than fixed, changes in territorial organization alter not only political institutions but also the contexts within which communities understand themselves and their relationship to political space.

The concept of homeland provides an important bridge between territorial organization and collective identity. Homelands are not simply geographical territories but political and cultural constructions that connect populations to particular understandings of history, memory, and legitimacy (Murphy, 2005; Antonsich, 2010; Shelef, 2020; Koulos, 2021). Competing understandings of homeland therefore reflect competing visions of political community. Political actors seek to legitimize these visions through institutions, historical narratives, and symbolic landscapes that naturalize particular territorial arrangements while marginalizing alternative

understandings of belonging (Herb, Kaplan, 1999; Murphy, 2005).

Religion frequently becomes one of the principal cultural resources through which these competing understandings of homeland are articulated. Religious institutions, sacred sites, historical narratives, and collective memories all contribute to the legitimization of territorial projects (Kong, 2001, 2010; Brace et al., 2006). Yet the relationship operates in the opposite direction as well. Changing territorial conditions reshape the political contexts within which competing expressions of religion emerge, compete, and acquire public legitimacy. Religious traditions themselves may remain relatively stable, while the meanings attached to them—and the ways they are publicly expressed, institutionalized, and materialized—change alongside shifting territorial circumstances.

This article adopts that reciprocal relationship as its analytical framework. It does not argue that territorial change determines religious belief or doctrine. Rather, it argues that changing territorial conditions reshape the political contexts within which political leaders, nationalist organizations, religious institutions, and intellectuals negotiate the relationship between religion and homeland. Under changing territorial circumstances, competing expressions of religion become linked to competing understandings of political community, historical memory, and legitimate authority. The analytical focus therefore falls not on theology itself but on the changing discursive, institutional, and material expressions through which religion becomes publicly meaningful.

The post-Soviet transformation of Tatarstan provides a particularly revealing setting in which to examine these dynamics. During the 1990s, the republic's pursuit of sovereignty created political conditions that encouraged expressions of Islam closely associated with Tatar nationhood, historical statehood, and republican autonomy. Federal recentralization under Vladimir Putin fundamentally altered those territorial conditions. As the relationship between Kazan and Moscow changed, so too did the politically legitimate expressions of Islam promoted by intellectuals, religious institutions, and republican authorities. Rather than treating these developments as isolated changes in religious thought or institutional organization, this article interprets them as successive responses to changing territorial conditions.

The analysis proceeds through two complementary forms of evidence. It first reconstructs an intellectual history of competing expressions of Islam through debates surrounding the Muslim Spiritual Board of the Republic of Tatarstan (DUMRT). It then examines how

those changing expressions found material form in the symbolic landscape of the Kazan Kremlin. Together, these analyses demonstrate that changing territorial conditions reshaped both the discursive and material expression of Islam in post-Soviet Tatarstan.

3. Data and Methods

This article employs qualitative historical and interpretive methods to examine how changing territorial conditions reshaped competing expressions of Islam in post-Soviet Tatarstan. The analysis draws primarily on public texts produced between the early 1990s and 2010, a period spanning the republic's pursuit of sovereignty and the subsequent recentralization of the Russian Federation. These materials include books, pamphlets, institutional publications, presidential decrees, public speeches, newspaper articles, museum publications, and other documents produced by political leaders, religious institutions, intellectuals, and nationalist organizations engaged in debates concerning Islam, homeland, and political identity in Tatarstan.

Rather than treating these texts as neutral descriptions of social reality, the analysis approaches them as political interventions through which competing actors sought to define the legitimate relationship between Islam and homeland. Particular attention is given to how different authors and institutions constructed competing expressions of Islam under changing territorial conditions. The analysis therefore focuses less on theological content than on the political meanings attached to Islam and the ways those meanings changed as Tatarstan's territorial relationship with the Russian Federation evolved.

The principal documentary sources include publications produced by the Muslim Spiritual Board of the Republic of Tatarstan (DUMRT), the Marjani Institute of History, nationalist organizations such as the Tatar Public Center (TOTs) and Ittifik, and the writings of influential intellectuals including Rafael Khakimov, Damir Iskhakov, Valiulla Iakupov, Rafik Mukhametshin, and Ramil Amirkhanov. These materials are supplemented by official documents—including presidential decrees, speeches, and planning documents relating to the reconstruction of the Kazan Kremlin—which provide insight into the changing public representation of Islam under differing political-territorial conditions.

The article also incorporates an interpretive analysis of the Kazan Kremlin as a symbolic landscape. Rather than examining architecture as an object of

aesthetic inquiry, the Kremlin is analyzed as a material expression of changing political understandings of Islam and homeland. Attention is directed not only to physical interventions such as the reconstruction of the Kul-Sharif Mosque but also to the official narratives through which those interventions were interpreted and publicly represented (see Cosgrove, Daniels, 1988; Duncan, 1990; Mitchell, 2002 on symbolic landscape).

Taken together, these materials make it possible to reconstruct both the discursive and material expressions of Islam that emerged under changing territorial conditions. Combining intellectual history with interpretive landscape analysis allows the article to trace how competing understandings of Islam developed, acquired institutional authority, and ultimately found material expression in post-Soviet Tatarstan.

4. Historical Context: From Sovereignty to Recentralization

The post-Soviet transformation of Islam in Tatarstan unfolded within two distinct territorial contexts. During the 1990s, republican leaders pursued extensive political autonomy from Moscow and promoted Tatarstan as the sovereign historic homeland of the Tatar people. After 2000, Putin-era federal recentralization substantially altered the republic's political position within the Russian Federation and encouraged new understandings of territorial belonging. These changing territorial conditions provide the historical context for the competing expressions of Islam examined in the following sections.

Located in the Middle Volga region, Tatarstan occupies a distinctive position within the Russian Federation as one of its largest Muslim republics and an important historical center of Tatar culture. Historical narratives concerning the Volga Bulgars, the Khanate of Kazan, and the Russian conquest of 1552 have long shaped understandings of Tatar homeland and political identity (Rorlich, 1986; Iskhakov, 1997a; Graney, 2009; Bekkin, 2020). These narratives acquired renewed political significance during the final years of the Soviet Union as political leaders, intellectuals, and nationalist organizations increasingly advocated sovereignty, cultural revival, and republican self-government.

The republic's Declaration of State Sovereignty in 1990 and the subsequent power-sharing treaty signed with the Russian Federation in 1994 created unprecedented opportunities for republican institution-building (Treisman, 1997; Derrick, 2008; Graney, 2009). Political leaders promoted Tatarstan as a distinct political community with its own historical trajectory

and legitimate claims to autonomy. Within this territorial context, the revival of Islam became closely associated with projects of national renewal, historical restoration, and republican statehood. Religious institutions expanded rapidly, new mosques were constructed, and debates concerning Islamic authority became intertwined with broader discussions of homeland and political legitimacy (Yemelianova, 1999; Mukhametshin, 2005; Bekkin, 2020).

This territorial context changed substantially after Vladimir Putin assumed the Russian presidency in 2000. Federal reforms strengthened central authority, reduced regional autonomy, and gradually dismantled many of the asymmetrical arrangements negotiated during the 1990s (Stoner-Weiss, 2006; Gel'man, 2015; Petrov et al., 2014). Although Tatarstan retained greater influence than many other republics, its political relationship with Moscow increasingly became defined by participation within a more centralized federal state (Graney, 2009; Derrick, 2009; Sharafutdinova, 2020).

Recentralization also transformed the political language through which territorial belonging was understood. Federal authorities increasingly promoted the concept of a multinational Russian nation united by common statehood while recognizing Islam as one of Russia's traditional religions (Putin, 2003; Laruelle, 2009; Malashenko, 2007, 2008). These changing territorial conditions did not simply alter the republic's constitutional position. They also reshaped the political contexts within which competing expressions of Islam acquired legitimacy. It is within this transition—from sovereignty to recentralization, roughly spanning two decades (1990-2010)—that the competing discourses reconstructed in the following section should be understood.

5. Competing Discourses of Islam and Homeland in Post-Soviet Tatarstan

The collapse of the Soviet Union transformed not only the political geography of the Russian Federation but also the political questions confronting Muslims in Tatarstan. As republican leaders pursued sovereignty and later confronted federal recentralization, competing actors sought to redefine the relationship between Islam, nation, and homeland. These efforts did not produce a single, coherent understanding of Islam. Rather, they generated a succession of competing discourses that reflected changing political-territorial circumstances and competing visions of Tatarstan's future.

The analysis that follows traces this process as an intellectual history of the territorial production of religious meaning. By this, I do not suggest that territorial change determined religious belief or

doctrine. Rather, changing territorial circumstances created new political contexts in which intellectuals, nationalist organizations, religious leaders, and state institutions sought to define the social and political meanings attached to Islam. These competing understandings were first articulated through political movements, elaborated by intellectuals, reimagined as territorial circumstances changed, and ultimately institutionalized through religious authority. The following discussion traces that process through the changing discourses of Islam that emerged in post-Soviet Tatarstan.

5.1. Searching for a Republican Islam

The first sustained effort to redefine the relationship between Islam and homeland emerged within the Tatar nationalist movement rather than among the established religious hierarchy. During the final years of the Soviet Union and the early sovereignty period, organizations such as the Tatar Public Center (TOTs), Ittifik, and later the Milli Mejlis confronted a question that was simultaneously political and religious: If Tatarstan were to become a self-governing republic, what kind of Islam belonged within that republic? Their concern was therefore not simply the revival of religious belief after decades of Soviet atheism. Rather, they sought to redefine the institutional and intellectual foundations of Islam in ways that corresponded to the territorial aspirations of the emerging republic.

The earliest expressions of this search focused as much on religious institutions as on religious ideas. The 1991 TOTs platform argued that the Muslim Spiritual Board should be transferred from Ufa to Kazan, thereby aligning religious authority with the territorial aspirations of the republic. The same document called for the revival of the “noble traditions of Jadidism,” criticized the existing religious establishment for failing to meet “the demands of modernity,” and promoted *ijtihad* as a means of recovering Tatar Islam’s reformist heritage (TOTs, 1991). Rather than treating these as separate objectives, TOTs brought them together within a single anti-imperial discourse that linked political sovereignty, institutional autonomy, and Islamic reform. Religion was thus imagined not simply as a matter of belief, but as one of the institutional and intellectual foundations of a sovereign homeland.

The territorial implications of this discourse were explicit. TOTs maintained that the existing Muslim Spiritual Board in Ufa, in neighboring Bashkortostan, reflected an earlier imperial and Soviet political order rather than the realities of a self-governing republic, arguing that religious jurisdiction should become

coterminous with republican territory. This territorial reconfiguration was accompanied by a broader effort to reinterpret the historical foundations of Tatar Islam.

Rather than presenting Jadidism simply as a nineteenth-century reform movement, nationalist writers recast it as an indigenous intellectual tradition capable of reconciling Islam with modernity, national revival, and political self-government. Europe consequently functioned less as a geographical destination than as a political and civilizational orientation through which Tatarstan could simultaneously modernize, preserve its national identity, and distinguish itself from both the institutional legacy of Soviet rule and the forms of Islamic fundamentalism emerging elsewhere in the post-Soviet space. Similar themes appeared in publications of the Ittifik movement, where Islamic renewal was consistently linked to political self-determination, national revival, and the recovery of Tatar statehood (Ittifik, 1991).

Viewed collectively, these texts reveal that the earliest post-Soviet discourse concerning Islam was fundamentally a search for an understanding of religion appropriate to a new territorial order. Viewed collectively, these texts reveal that nationalist organizations constructed an anti-imperial discourse in which an independent muftiate, coterminous with the political borders of Tatarstan, became an essential attribute of republican sovereignty. Yet these organizations raised more questions than they answered.

They identified the need for a republican Islam and outlined its institutional and political contours, but they did not fully explain why such an understanding of Islam should be regarded as historically authentic or intellectually coherent. That task would fall to a group of Tatar intellectuals who transformed the political aspirations of the sovereignty movement into a broader interpretation of Tatar history, Islamic reform, and national identity.

5.2. Elaborating Republican Islam

If nationalist organizations such as TOTs and Ittifik identified the political need for a republican Islam, a group of Tatar intellectuals sought to explain why that understanding of Islam should be regarded as historically authentic. Their task was not to invent a new Islamic tradition but to reconstruct the Tatar past in ways that rendered the aspirations of the sovereignty movement historically legitimate. Among these intellectuals, Rafael Khakimov and Damir Iskhakov played particularly important and complementary roles.

Rather than presenting Jadidism simply as a nineteenth-century educational reform movement, Khakimov (1998a, 1998b, 2008, 2010) reinterpreted it as the defining intellectual tradition of Tatar Islam and the historical foundation upon which contemporary national revival should be built. In Khakimov's reconstruction, the reformist commitment to *ijtihad*, intellectual openness, and educational renewal demonstrated that Tatar Islam had long possessed the resources necessary to engage modernity without abandoning its own religious traditions. Islam therefore did not require external reform or secularization in order to coexist with democracy, pluralism, or scientific progress. Those qualities were already embedded within the historical experience of the Tatars.

Khakimov's formulation of "Euro-Islam" should be understood within this broader intellectual project. Euro-Islam was not presented as the adoption of European values by Muslims, but as the recovery of an indigenous Tatar tradition whose historical development naturally connected the Volga-Ural region to Europe. As Khakimov argued, "Euro-Islam" represented a reformed Islam rooted in the Jadid tradition rather than an imported model of Europeanization (Khakimov, 1998a, 2008). Europe functioned less as a geographical destination than as a civilizational orientation through which Tatarstan could distinguish itself simultaneously from the imperial legacy of Moscow and from contemporary currents of Islamic fundamentalism. By recovering Jadidism as the authentic intellectual heritage of the Tatars, Khakimov transformed the political aspirations of the sovereignty movement into a broader philosophy of national development in which Islam became both a marker of historical continuity and a resource for imagining Tatarstan's future.

Whereas Khakimov reconstructed the philosophical foundations of republican Islam, Iskhakov sought to demonstrate its historical continuity (1997a, 1997b, 2002). Rather than treating the emergence of new Islamic institutions as an isolated religious phenomenon, he situated them within the broader trajectory of the national movement, arguing that the Muslim Spiritual Board of Tatarstan had "developed as a faction of the national movement in the 1990s" (Iskhakov, 1997a). This interpretation reinforced the claim that changes in religious authority could not be understood independently of changes in political authority. In Iskhakov's account, the revival of Islam, the reconstruction of republican institutions, and the recovery of Tatar historical agency formed mutually reinforcing components of the same national project.

Together, Khakimov and Iskhakov transformed the political search initiated by the nationalist movement into a coherent historical discourse. Republican Islam emerged not as a new theology, but as an interpretation of Tatar history that identified Jadidism, reform, and intellectual openness as the authentic traditions through which Islam and homeland should be understood. Amirkhanov's writings reinforced this interpretation by arguing that Islam could fill the ideological vacuum left by the collapse of the Soviet Union and serve the nation during its struggle for sovereignty (Amirkhanov, 1994, 1996). Republican Islam therefore represented a shared intellectual project rather than the work of any single thinker.

The political question had not changed. What changed after 2000 was the territorial context within which it was asked.

5.3. *Reimagining Islam under Recentralization*

The political circumstances that had sustained republican Islam changed dramatically following Vladimir Putin's ascent to the presidency in 2000. As federal authorities reasserted control over Russia's regions and the political space for republican sovereignty narrowed, the central question confronting Tatar Muslim intellectuals also changed. The issue was no longer how Islam might contribute to the construction of a sovereign republic, but what kind of Islam could legitimately represent Tatarstan within an increasingly centralized multinational Russian state. This changing territorial context did not diminish the importance of history or tradition. Rather, it generated a new debate over which historical traditions should define the relationship between Islam, nation, and homeland.

The most influential response came from Valiulla Iakupov, whose writings challenged the historical narrative advanced by Khakimov and other advocates of republican Islam. Iakupov did not reject appeals to tradition; instead, he rejected the particular tradition that reformist intellectuals had elevated. Whereas Khakimov located the future of Tatar Islam in the reformist legacy of Jadidism and *ijtihad*, Iakupov argued that authentic religious authority rested in the inherited Hanafi tradition of the Volga-Ural region. In *Neofitsial'nyi Islam v Tatarstane*, he criticized reformists for their faith in "progress" and described the revival of *ijtihad* as a "battle against religion" (Iakupov, 2003, p. 29). Likewise, in *K Prorocheskomu Islamu*, he argued that the rejection of the madhhabs united reformist projects such as Euro-Islam with Wahhabism itself, observing that "Wahhabites also reject the madhhabs" (Iakupov,

2006, p. 39). The central disagreement, therefore, was not whether tradition mattered, but which traditions possessed legitimate authority. Both discourses grounded their claims in Tatar history and tradition. Their disagreement concerned not whether tradition mattered, but which traditions should be understood as authoritative in defining the relationship between Islam and homeland.

Iakupov's reconstruction of tradition remained deeply connected to questions of homeland and national identity. Rather than opposing Islam to Tatar nationhood, he argued that the survival of the nation depended upon preserving its inherited religious tradition. "Tatar culture," he wrote, "is connected with a specific form of spiritual life—Hanafi Islam. If our Islam is destroyed, then our culture itself is destroyed" (Iakupov, 2006, p. 367). Elsewhere he maintained that traditional Islam must "fulfill the task of preserving the Tatar nation" (Iakupov, 2006, p. 25). These arguments did not abandon the relationship between Islam and homeland established during the sovereignty movement. Rather, they reimagined that relationship by locating the legitimacy of the homeland in historical continuity rather than reformist renewal.

Rafik Mukhametshin (1997, 2005, 2006a, 2006b) complemented this reconstruction by placing greater emphasis on historical continuity and institutional development than on theological polemic. His studies of Islam in twentieth- and twenty-first-century Tatarstan traced the evolution of religious institutions, education, and the Muslim clergy, arguing that Islamic revival should be understood through the historical experience of the Volga-Ural region rather than through imported ideological categories (Mukhametshin, 1997, 2005). Although Mukhametshin shared Iakupov's commitment to Hanafi tradition and indigenous religious authority, his writings also reflected the changing political environment of the Putin era. Rather than presenting Islam as the ideological foundation of republican sovereignty, he increasingly emphasized its role as one of Russia's traditional religions and as a stabilizing component of the multinational Russian state. Even in his discussion of Wahhabism, Mukhametshin distinguished between moderate and radical currents, suggesting a more differentiated approach than the sharper polemics found in Iakupov's writings (Minvaleev, 2004).

Taken together, Iakupov and Mukhametshin did not simply replace one understanding of Islam with another. They advanced a competing construction of tradition. If Khakimov and Iskhakov had sought to recover Jadidism as the authentic intellectual heritage

of Tatar Islam, Iakupov and Mukhametshin instead privileged inherited Hanafi practice, established religious authority, and historical continuity. Both discourses appealed to the Tatar past; they differed over which past should define the future. As territorial circumstances changed, the question remained the same—what kind of Islam belongs in the homeland?—but the answer increasingly shifted from reformist renewal toward inherited tradition and historical rootedness. It was this latter discourse that would gradually acquire institutional authority through the Muslim Spiritual Board of the Republic of Tatarstan.

5.4. Institutionalizing Dominant Discourse

The competing understandings of Islam reconstructed above did not remain confined to intellectual debate. During the first decade of the twenty-first century, one particular understanding increasingly acquired institutional authority through the Muslim Spiritual Board of the Republic of Tatarstan (DUMRT). The significance of DUMRT therefore lay not in generating a new discourse of Islam but in transforming one competing interpretation into the republic's official religious orthodoxy. The institution became the principal mechanism through which particular understandings of Islam, nation, and homeland were authorized, reproduced, and disseminated.

This process unfolded through a wide range of institutional practices. DUMRT assumed responsibility for appointing imams, supervising religious education, certifying clergy, publishing religious literature, and coordinating the activities of local Muslim communities. These practices did more than regulate religious life. They established the institutional boundaries of legitimate religious authority by determining which historical traditions, educational lineages, and theological interpretations would be recognized as authentic expressions of Islam in Tatarstan. The distinction between "traditional" and "non-traditional" Islam therefore became embedded not only in public discourse but also in the organizational structure of religious life itself.

The discourse institutionalized by DUMRT drew heavily upon the writings of Iakupov, Mukhametshin, and other advocates of traditional Islam. Religious publications increasingly portrayed Hanafi Islam as the indigenous religious tradition of the Volga-Ural region while classifying alternative interpretations as foreign, imported, or historically disconnected from Tatar society (Iakupov, 2003, 2006). Through educational initiatives, publishing programs, and clerical appointments, DUMRT reinforced this understanding

of religious authenticity, transforming what had begun as an intellectual argument into the normative framework through which official Islam was defined.

Viewed from a political-geographical perspective, this development represented more than the consolidation of religious authority. It marked the institutionalization of a particular answer to the question that had animated post-Soviet Islamic discourse from the beginning: What kind of Islam belongs in the homeland? During the 1990s-era sovereignty movement, nationalist organizations and intellectuals had answered that question through the language of Jadidism, reform, and republican nation-building. Under conditions of federal recentralization, DUMRT increasingly authorized a different answer, one grounded in Hanafi continuity, inherited religious authority, and Islam's place among Russia's traditional religions. DUMRT did not create a dominant discourse; it transformed one competing understanding of Islam into institutional authority.

Institutions, however, do not exhaust the territorial production of religious meaning. Discourses also acquire political durability through the symbolic landscapes that naturalize particular understandings of history, identity, and belonging. The following section examines how the competing understandings of Islam reconstructed above became materialized within the Kazan Kremlin.

6. Materializing Homeland

If the previous section examined how changing territorial circumstances reshaped competing discourses of Islam and homeland, this section examines how those changing understandings found expression in the symbolic landscape of the Kazan Kremlin (see Figure 1). As Tatarstan's territorial relationship with the Russian Federation shifted from the pursuit of republican sovereignty to accommodation within a recentralized federal state, the material expression of Islam likewise changed. The Kazan Kremlin provides a particularly revealing site through which to observe this transformation because it remained physically continuous while the political meanings attached to it were fundamentally reinterpreted.

Long associated with the conquest of the Kazan Khanate by the forces of Ivan IV in 1552, the Kremlin occupied a central place in Tatar historical memory. During the post-Soviet period, it became the republic's most symbolically significant landscape because competing actors sought to redefine its historical meaning in light of changing territorial circumstances. The following discussion compares how Islam was publicly expressed through the Kremlin during the sovereignty movement of the 1990s and after the federal recentralization of the early 2000s.

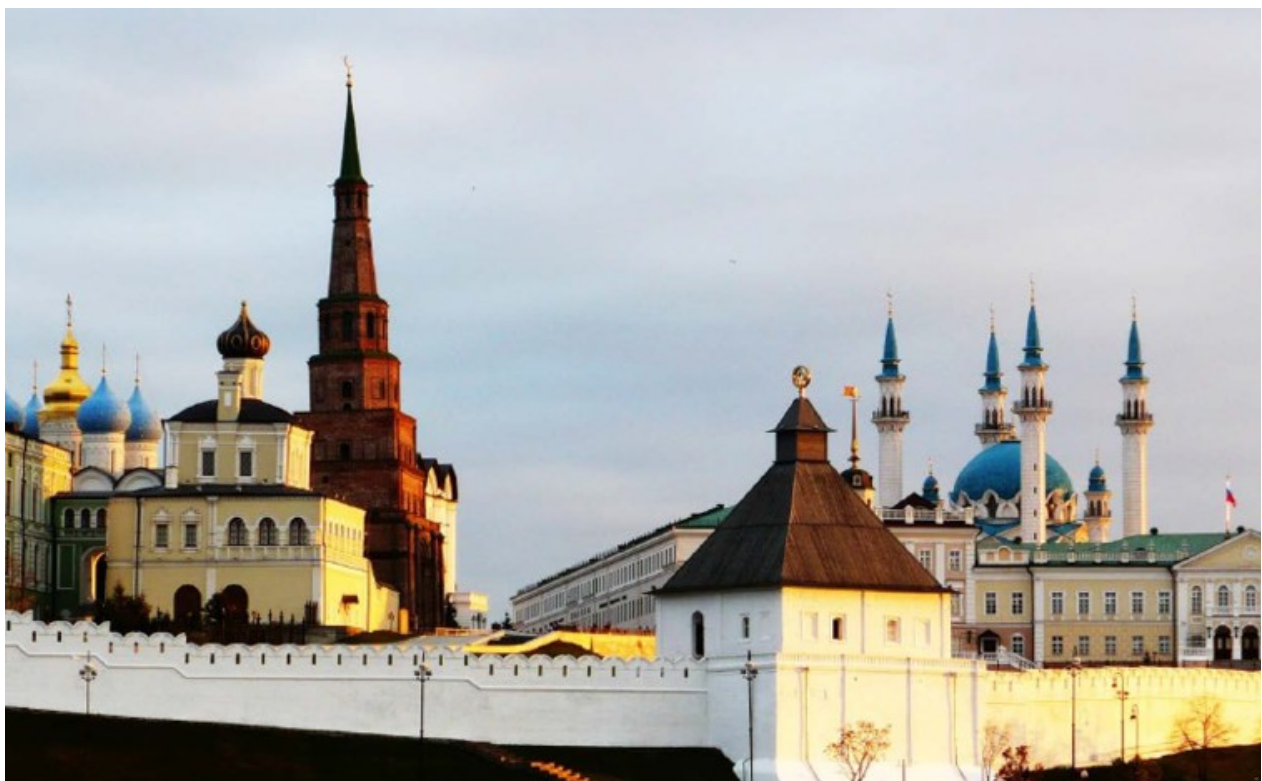


Fig. 1. The landscape of the Kazan Kremlin as it is today. Far left is the Annunciation Cathedral. Far right is the Kul-Sharif Mosque. The Siuumbike Tower stands between them.

Source: photo by author.

6.1. Islamic Expression under Sovereignty

The changing territorial relationship between Kazan and Moscow during the 1990s was accompanied by a corresponding transformation in the public expression of Islam. As Tatarstan pursued sovereignty, political leaders sought to redefine the symbolic geography of the republic by restoring an Islamic presence within the Kazan Kremlin. The reconstruction of the Kul-Sharif Mosque formed part of this broader project, not simply as the construction of a religious building, but as the symbolic recovery of the republic's historical landscape.

This relationship between territorial politics and Islamic expression is clearly visible in the official documents authorizing the reconstruction. In November 1995, President Mintimer Shaimiev issued the decree *On the Concept of the Preservation, Development, and Use of the Ensemble of the Kazan Kremlin* (Ukaz, 1995). While the decree called for the restoration of both the Annunciation Cathedral and the Kul-Sharif Mosque, it identified the reconstruction as part of the preservation of the Kremlin's historical continuity. The accompanying concept document was even more explicit, describing the resurrection of the Kul-Sharif Mosque as a "symbol of the statehood" of the Republic of Tatarstan (Osnovnye, 1995).

Contemporary commentary reinforced this interpretation. Writing as deputy director of the Kazan Kremlin Museum, Niiaz Khalit argued that the reconstruction represented "a fundamental break in the consciousness of our people" after "450 years of a slave's existence in an Orthodox empire." As the ancient citadel of Kazan once again acquired "a Tatar image," Khalit insisted that Kul-Sharif was "not just a mosque" but "the main center for the entire Tatar diaspora" (Khalit, 1997). Public debate likewise focused on the mosque's location within the Kremlin ensemble, emphasizing its visibility as the dominant architectural symbol of Kazan and Tatarstan.

Taken together, these documents demonstrate that the reconstruction of the Kul-Sharif Mosque was conceived as much more than an act of religious revival. Under the territorial conditions created by Tatarstan's sovereignty campaign, Islam was publicly expressed through the language of historical restoration, political continuity, and recovered statehood. The reconstructed mosque materially expressed the republican understanding of Islam reconstructed in the previous section.

6.2. Islamic Expression under Recentralization

The reconstruction of the Kul-Sharif Mosque continued after the political circumstances that had

inspired the project had fundamentally changed. As federal recentralization under Vladimir Putin narrowed the political space for republican sovereignty, the official meaning attached to the Kremlin was correspondingly reformulated. The physical landscape remained largely unchanged, but the material expression of Islam increasingly reflected Tatarstan's place within the multinational Russian Federation rather than its aspirations for expanded sovereignty.

This transformation is clearly visible in the official discourse surrounding the opening of the Kul-Sharif Mosque in June 2005. Whereas the reconstruction had originally been justified through the language of republican statehood (Ukaz, 1995; Osnovnye, 1995), President Mintimer Shaimiev now employed a markedly different vocabulary. Describing the completion of the Kremlin ensemble as the restoration of "historical justice," he simultaneously celebrated it as "a symbol of the unity of the peoples living in Tatarstan" and as evidence of harmony between Islam and Orthodoxy (Shaimiev, 2005). The symbolic emphasis had shifted from recovering the political legacy of the Kazan Khanate to demonstrating Tatarstan's distinctive model of peaceful coexistence within the Russian Federation.

This reinterpretation was reproduced through official representations of the Kremlin. Museum exhibitions, government publications, and presidential press materials increasingly presented the juxtaposition of the Kul-Sharif Mosque and the Annunciation Cathedral as the defining image of contemporary Tatarstan. Foreign delegations—including representatives of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, and U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton—were routinely introduced to the Kremlin through this narrative of interreligious dialogue and coexistence rather than republican sovereignty.

Alternative interpretations nevertheless persisted. Annual commemorations of the conquest of Kazan in 1552, nationalist publications, and continuing public debate demonstrated that earlier understandings of the Kremlin as a symbol of lost statehood had not disappeared. Yet it was the discourse of interfaith harmony that increasingly acquired official visibility through state ceremonies, museum exhibitions, and international diplomacy. The symbolic landscape that had once expressed the aspirations of republican sovereignty now publicly represented Tatarstan's accommodation within a multinational Russian state.

The transformation of the Kazan Kremlin therefore paralleled the broader political and intellectual developments reconstructed in the previous section.

As changing territorial conditions altered the politically legitimate relationship between Islam and homeland, they also altered the ways in which Islam was publicly expressed in the republic's most symbolically significant landscape. The Kremlin thus demonstrates that changing territorial circumstances shaped not only competing discourses of Islam but also their material expression in public space.

7. Conclusion

This article began with a simple question: How did changing territorial conditions reshape competing expressions of Islam in post-Soviet Tatarstan? By examining both the intellectual debates surrounding the Muslim Spiritual Board of the Republic of Tatarstan and the symbolic landscape of the Kazan Kremlin, it has argued that the transformation of Islam in the republic cannot be understood apart from changing political-territorial circumstances. Rather than producing a single or inevitable form of Islam, successive territorial contexts created new political conditions within which competing understandings of religion emerged, acquired institutional authority, and found material expression.

The analysis demonstrates that the transition from republican sovereignty during the 1990s to federal recentralization after 2000 fundamentally altered the political relationship between Kazan and Moscow. These changing territorial conditions reshaped not religious doctrine itself but the socially and politically legitimate expressions of Islam. During the sovereignty period, influential political leaders, nationalist

organizations, and intellectuals articulated forms of Islam closely associated with Tatar nationhood, historical statehood, and republican autonomy. Under conditions of recentralization, religious institutions and political authorities increasingly promoted expressions of Islam grounded in historical continuity, traditional religion, and Tatarstan's place within a multinational Russian Federation.

The case of Tatarstan therefore illustrates a broader point about the relationship between territory and religion. Religious traditions are not simply inherited or rediscovered. Their public meanings are continually negotiated through changing territorial arrangements, political institutions, historical narratives, and symbolic landscapes. Territorial change did not determine religious belief, but it reshaped the political contexts within which competing expressions of Islam acquired legitimacy and public authority.

This perspective also contributes to political geography. Studies of religion have often emphasized doctrine, identity, or institutional development, while political geographers have focused on territory, nationalism, and state-building. The experience of post-Soviet Tatarstan suggests that these processes are best understood together. As territorial relationships changed, so too did the ways Islam was articulated by intellectuals, institutionalized through religious authority, and materially expressed in symbolic space. Understanding religious change therefore requires attention not only to theological traditions or political institutions but also to the changing territorial contexts within which religious meanings are negotiated and publicly expressed.

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