

**The Reconstruction of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour:  
Public Space and National Identity in Post-Soviet Moscow**  
Katherine Eady, University of Toronto

In 1997, during the celebration of Moscow's 850<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the reconstruction project of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour was honoured in a public ceremony attended by the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church, Aleksii II, then-President Boris Yeltsin, and the Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov. The original cathedral had been destroyed in 1931 in order to build the Palace of Soviets, and it was, according to Yeltsin, a "national sacred place and must be reborn."<sup>i</sup> With it, he claimed, "it will be easier to find the path to social accord, the creation of goodness, and a life in which there will be less room for sin."<sup>ii</sup> In this paper, I consider how the new Cathedral was rebuilt as a national heritage site meant to embody a Russian collective memory that honours the imperial, rather than the Soviet, past. The history of the Cathedral, the call for its reconstruction, and the actual rebuilding project undertaken in the mid-1990s will be discussed. I will also consider some of the public and academic responses to the new Cathedral in order to look at the debates that emerged regarding the site's reconstruction, and to examine how these debates relate to larger discussions of Russian national identity.

Recent scholarship on the Cathedral's reconstruction has focused on the site as an example of the continuation in the post-Soviet period of the imperial and Soviet practices of "place manipulation."<sup>iii</sup> The Cathedral is considered in these arguments to be a symbol of the autocratic leadership characteristic to Russia, setting the region apart from the West.<sup>iv</sup> I wish to suggest, however, that while the cathedral is a symbol of Russian nationalism, the process

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<sup>i</sup> Kathleen E. Smith, *Mythmaking in the New Russia: Politics and Mythmaking during the Yeltsin Era*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 2002), 124.

<sup>ii</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>iii</sup> Dmitri Sidorov, "National Monumentalization and the Politics of Scale: The Resurrections of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 90.3 (2000): 550.

<sup>iv</sup> Andrew Gentes, "The Life, Death and Resurrection of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour," *History Workshop Journal* 46 (1998): 89.

whereby it symbolizes the nation – through both a popular and official concern with national heritage and history – is not unique to post-Soviet Russia. Rather, as geographer David Lowenthal proclaimed in 1996, “all at once heritage is everywhere ... one can barely move without bumping into a heritage site.”<sup>v</sup> While this paper is concerned with the specific context of the reconstruction project in Moscow in the 1990s, a consideration of the cathedral within the broader terms of what Lowenthal calls the ‘heritage crusade’ offers insight into the ways in which the rebuilding project resembles nation-building processes taking place in other areas of the world. While I do not wish to de-emphasize the significance of the post-Soviet Russian context, Lowenthal’s observation provides a useful lens through which to view the cathedral in a way that underscores the important links between heritage, history and identity.

### The Reconstruction Project in Context

In the years following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the new Russian Federation was faced with what scholars have dubbed an ‘identity crisis.’<sup>vi</sup> Russia emerged at the end of 1991 as an independent state with a long imperial history. It had historical claims to both the tsarist and the Soviet periods, and what constituted a Russian national identity was, at the time, fervently debated. Furthermore, as Manuel Castells and Emma Kiselyova observed in 1995, the Russian people “will have to muddle through the reconstruction of their collective identity, in the midst of a world where the flows of power and money are trying to piecemeal the emerging economic and social institutions before they come into being, so to swallow them in their global

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<sup>v</sup> David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), xiii.

<sup>vi</sup> K. Smith, 158.

Ilya Prizel, *National Identity and Foreign Policy: Nationalism and Leadership in Poland, Russia and Ukraine*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 10.

Hans Bagger, “The Study of History in Russia during the Post-Soviet Identity Crisis,” *Scando-Slavica* 53 (2007): 109-125.

networks.”<sup>vii</sup> As the new symbols of capitalism rapidly filled Russian public space, politicians, intellectuals and policy makers turned to the past for inspiration in their attempts to define a Russian national identity. Post-Soviet rebuilding projects are places where history serves present economic, political and cultural needs, altering cultural landscapes and framing issues of identity and heritage in deliberate and specific ways. The Cathedral of Christ the Saviour is just one of many projects undertaken in Moscow during the 1990s that sought to reinstate sites that had been destroyed during the Soviet period back into the city’s cultural landscape.

Cultural geographer Richard Schein describes the term ‘cultural landscape’ as that which is both a material thing and a “conceptual framing of the world ... an entrée into ideas and ideals.”<sup>viii</sup> The landscape, then, is not innocent, but has a role in “mediating social and cultural reproduction ... through its ability to stand for something: norms, values, fears and so on.”<sup>ix</sup> The cultural landscape is inherently political. It is a space through which collective identities can be articulated and mediated. The Cathedral of Christ the Saviour is considered here in these terms. Rich with symbolism and representative of a number of phases of Russian history, what the cathedral stands for depends on whom you ask. Despite its symbolic ambiguity, however, the cathedral undoubtedly stands for something beyond its simple form and function. Furthermore, the site raises important questions about when issues of national identity come to the fore, and about how these issues are articulated and mediated in the cultural landscape. As historian and

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<sup>vii</sup> Manuel Castells and Emma Kiselyova, *The Collapse of Soviet Communism: A View from the Information Society*, (Berkeley, CA: International and Area Studies, University of California, 1995), 76.

<sup>viii</sup> Richard H. Schein, “Race and Landscape in the United States,” in *Landscape and Race in the United States*, ed. Richard H. Schein, (New York: Routledge, 2006), 5.

<sup>ix</sup> John W. Wylie, *Landscape*, (London: Routledge, 2007), 191.

architect Dolores Hayden argues, urban landscapes are storehouses for social memories.<sup>x</sup> She notes that

decades of ‘urban renewal’ and ‘redevelopment’ of a savage kind have taught many communities that when the urban landscape is battered, important collective memories are obliterated. Yet even totally bulldozed places can be marked to restore some shared public meaning, a recognition of the experience of spatial conflict, or bitterness, or despair.<sup>xi</sup>

The bulldozed cathedral was more than marked in Moscow; it was rebuilt in its entirety. And, following Hayden’s observations, the reconstruction in Moscow sought to restore a shared meaning of the cathedral, encouraging public remembrance of the cathedral’s original symbolism and its fate, but also purging the site of the spatialized conflict that took place there during the Soviet period. As a centrepiece for the Moscow 850<sup>th</sup> celebrations, the cathedral was officially cast in nationalistic terms. In the celebration catalogue, for example, the cathedral is declared to be a “symbol of Russia’s revival ... pro[of] again that Good always defeats Evil.”<sup>xii</sup> In official rhetoric, then, the fate of the cathedral is tied to the fate of Russia during the Soviet period. This symbolic connection between the site and the nation is achieved by the promotion of a version of history according to which the Soviet Union is an aberration from Russia’s natural historical path.

The case of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour fits nicely into Lowenthal’s discussion of the distinction between history and heritage, or rather, the use of history for the pursuit of heritage. Lowenthal argues that heritage reorganizes history by privileging present aims over past events, deciding what is praiseworthy, and “bowdlerizing or consigning to oblivion what is

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<sup>x</sup> Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes As Public History*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), 9.

<sup>xi</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>xii</sup> Eduard Zhigailov, *Moskva 850*, (Moscow: Izdatelskii Dom AOZT Komsomolskaia Pravda, 1996), 8.

not.”<sup>xiii</sup> The impulse to alter the cultural landscape by rebuilding sites destroyed by the former regime indicates a desire in Russia in the immediate post-Soviet period to create distance between present circumstances and recent history, while at the same time realigning the new order with a different, more distant, past. This was not simply a process driven by elites, although the speed with which rebuilding projects were taken over by state authorities is significant. Instead, the multilayered symbolism of the original cathedral allowed for an array of different reconstruction proposals from a number of sources.

### A History of the Cathedral’s Symbolism

The original Cathedral of Christ the Saviour was built to commemorate the Russian victory in 1812 over Napoleon’s army during the first ‘Patriotic War’. In 1813, Tsar Alexander I issued a decree calling for the construction of a cathedral-monument in honour of Christ, the Saviour of Russia. Geographer Dmitri Sidorov argues that the Russian victory in the war of 1812 was celebrated less as a victory of the state and more as a triumph of the people and their steadfast religious faith.<sup>xiv</sup> The winning architectural design for the cathedral-monument by Alexander Vitberg was to be built in Moscow, the former capital city and the centre of the Russian Orthodox Church. Vitberg broke with traditional Russian Orthodox Church architecture and designed a classically-influenced structure that, on a symbolic level, was to serve the people and not the state.<sup>xv</sup> The design blended classical and Romantic elements, consisting of three domed tiers stacked vertically one over another, symbolizing the Holy Trinity.<sup>xvi</sup> The largest cupola topping the design was to be fifty metres across. Similar in its classical style to other

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<sup>xiii</sup> Lowenthal, 147.

<sup>xiv</sup> Dmitri Sidorov, 553.

<sup>xv</sup> E. I. Kirichenko, *Khram Khrista Spasitelia v Moskve*, (Moscow: Planeta, 1992), 31.

<sup>xvi</sup> *Ibid.*, 28-29.

architectural structures commissioned by Alexander I<sup>xvii</sup>, Vitberg's cathedral was to be one hundred seventy metres in height, visible to all of Moscow from its perch on Sparrow Hills, just outside the city.<sup>xviii</sup> Although Alexander's successor, Tsar Nicholas I, abandoned this plan, the stylistic differences between Vitberg's original design and the design chosen in a new competition reveal an ideological shift that took place in Russian society during the nineteenth century.<sup>xix</sup>

Nicholas I called for the new design competition in 1829. The winning plan was by architect Konstantin Ton, a young favourite of the Tsar who had received his formal training in France and Italy. Unlike Vitberg, Ton drew inspiration from Byzantine and traditional Russian religious architecture. His new design was, according to Sidorov, part of a greater "national regeneration, understood largely as a return to ancient Russian architecture."<sup>xx</sup> The centralized plan of the cathedral featured four bell towers and an enormous central cupola, measuring nearly thirty metres across.<sup>xxi</sup> Relief sculptures of Old Testament allegories and imagery of the monarchy and the Napoleonic war were featured in the decorative program on the façade.<sup>xxii</sup> Inside the massive structure, renowned Russian painters contributed to the large murals on the interior walls and the twenty-six metres-tall iconostasis.<sup>xxiii</sup> Construction of Ton's cathedral began in 1839 on a new site in the centre of Moscow next to the Kremlin. The three-hundred year old Alekseevskii Monastery was razed to make way for the new structure, which was not consecrated until 1883 during the coronation of Tsar Alexander III.<sup>xxiv</sup> When finally completed,

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<sup>xvii</sup> Gentes, 66.

<sup>xviii</sup> Kirichenko, 31.

<sup>xix</sup> Sidorov, 548-572.

<sup>xx</sup> Ibid., 558.

<sup>xxi</sup> Gentes, 72.

<sup>xxii</sup> Ibid., 69-83.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Kirichenko, 102.

<sup>xxiv</sup> Ibid., 69.

Ton's cathedral was an imposing monument to Russian victory and strength, dominating the Moscow cityscape into the Soviet era.

On December 5, 1931, the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour was destroyed by the Soviet authorities to make room for the Palace of Soviets. This planned structure's height was to surpass that of the former cathedral fourfold, with the deliberate intention of making it taller than the Empire State Building.<sup>xxv</sup> Topped by a massive statue of Lenin, the Palace of Soviets would have been a shining example of the new Soviet architectural style of the 1930s, had the project ever come to fruition. Instead, the steel foundations of the new Palace were melted down in 1941 for use in the Second World War.<sup>xxvi</sup> Although a new design competition was held after the war, the entire project was eventually scrapped, and in 1960 a large outdoor heated swimming pool was built on the site.

Ton's original cathedral was symbolic both as originally intended, and as an object of Soviet destruction. The cathedral "sent a message of gratitude to God and reinforced the notion that Russian people had a special destiny."<sup>xxvii</sup> At the same time, the immense scale of the original cathedral functioned as a visible reminder of the power of Russia and of the nation's triumph in the threat of foreign invasion. Yet in everyday practical terms, the cathedral-monument was a centre for contact between parishioners and the Russian Orthodox Church. Finally, as Kathleen E. Smith points out, the construction of a monument to Tsar Alexander III and plans for monuments dedicated to Alexander I and Nicholas I also on the site made a visual connection between church and state.<sup>xxviii</sup> The use of the cathedral for official ceremonies during the Imperial period, and in Russia today, further promotes this connection between the sacred

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<sup>xxv</sup> Sidorov, 560.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xxvii</sup> K. Smith 118.

<sup>xxviii</sup> Ibid, 119.

and the secular. During the 1990s, the cathedral was to take on additional symbolic significance, and was officially described as Russia's 'Cathedral-Martyr.'<sup>xxix</sup>

The cathedral's symbolism, though, reached beyond the actual Moscow cultural landscape. In her book from 1992 on the history of the cathedral, Evgeniia Kirichenko reveals the many ways in which images of the cathedral circulated in Russia and beyond during the Imperial period. The familiar silhouette of Ton's design was reproduced again and again on postcards, prints, maps, and in photographs. With the cathedral's reconstruction, images of the structure were circulated once again for public consumption. The opportunity arose in the 1980s to tell the history of the cathedral within a larger Russian historical narrative of the Soviet period. In her introductory essay to an album of samizdat photographs published 1988, titled *The Destruction of the Church of Christ the Saviour*, Irina Ilovaiskaya-Alberti frames the destruction as an injustice committed by the Soviets.<sup>xxx</sup> On the cover of the album, the cathedral stands in the shadow of a large hammer, caught in the instant before it is crushed.

### *Perestroika: Rebuilding and Redefining the Sacred*

The popular interest in the cathedral's reconstruction was framed in nationalist and religious terms. As Kathleen E. Smith notes, the impetus for the cathedral's restoration originally arose in the late 1980s from the work of a group of academics and writers called the Preservationists.<sup>xxxi</sup> Support for the conservation of historic buildings was symbolic in and of itself during the last years of the Soviet Union, since to defend and call for the restoration of

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<sup>xxix</sup> This expression is used in the English version of a letter from the Patriarch Aleksii II posted on the Cathedral's website: <http://xyc.ru/english/>.

<sup>xxx</sup> Irina Ilovaiskaya-Alberti, *The Destruction of the Church of Christ the Saviour: Samizdat Photographs*, (London: Overseas Publications, 1988).

<sup>xxxi</sup> K. Smith, 120.

derelict estates and churches was, effectively, to criticize the Soviet regime.<sup>xxxii</sup> As is clear from Smith's analysis of the various groups petitioning for the cathedral's reconstruction, the Preservationists were among those who employed Russian nationalistic, and often anti-Soviet, arguments in their proposals that the cathedral be reconstructed. Some Preservationists anticipated that the cathedral would be rebuilt as a monument to both the Napoleonic and the Second World Wars. A similar proposal came from Russian nationalists working at the newspaper *Literaturnaia Rossiia*. As noted by Smith, this group's emphasis increasingly shifted from the idea of the cathedral-monument as a memorial to military service, to more extreme nationalist views. Russian nationalists drew on a perceived sense of past cultural homogeneity that they hoped to revive in the present. The cathedral represented for them a time in history when Russians were united by Orthodoxy in a powerful empire. A further call for the reconstruction of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour came from the religious community. In 1990, the Russian Orthodox Church officially recognized a group of believers who had begun raising funds for the rebuilding project, and sought the return of the sacred space where the cathedral once stood.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

Mayor Luzhkov did not officially endorse the reconstruction project until 1994, and, as historian Zoe Knox points out, the Russian government's involvement in the project was at the time quite controversial. Allying himself with the Moscow Patriarchate, Luzhkov declared at the official opening of the cathedral in October, 2000, that the site would "help generate Orthodoxy and spirituality in Russia."<sup>xxxiv</sup> A planning council and fundraising committee were set up under the Mayor's office, which had the endorsement of then-President Yeltsin. Despite publically

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<sup>xxxii</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> K. Smith, 120-21.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> Zoe Knox, "The Symphonic Ideal: The Moscow Patriarchate's Post-Soviet Leadership," *Europe-Asia Studies* 55, no 4 (2003): 586.

stating that no city or state money had been spent on the project,<sup>xxxv</sup> the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour Council requested and was granted federal subsidies and tax breaks for large donors.<sup>xxxvi</sup> Although the original initiative to rebuild the cathedral came from popular discourses, the actual reconstruction ignored much of the public discussion on the matter, and the Moscow government controlled decision-making from 1994 onwards.<sup>xxxvii</sup> The overall goal of the project was officially proclaimed as being “to break with the Soviet past, with its antireligious and antinational practices, and to re-establish connection with the lost cultural heritage of the country.”<sup>xxxviii</sup> Suggestions for less costly monuments on the former site, and popular arguments that reconstructing the cathedral with a design faithful to the original would imply that the Soviet past could be easily erased were not taken into consideration.<sup>xxxix</sup>

Lowenthal likens the modern concern with heritage to religious devotion or to a spiritual calling. In his words, “to neglect heritage is a cardinal sin, to invoke it a national duty.”<sup>xl</sup> In no place do we see this play out more than in the catalogue published in 1996 by the new Russian state in celebration of both Moscow’s 850<sup>th</sup> anniversary and of the cathedral’s reopening. After the introductory remarks by Mayor Luzhkov, the first images in this publication are of the destruction of the cathedral in 1931, juxtaposed with a photograph of the site during reconstruction in the 1990s. The demolition is remembered here as a “monstrous crime,”<sup>xli</sup> while the cathedral’s renewal is a “duty.”<sup>xlii</sup> Luzhkov took on the task of transforming “socialist

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<sup>xxxv</sup> Zhigailov, 8.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> K. Smith, 122.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> Sidorov, 562.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> Sidorov, 563.

<sup>xxxix</sup> K. Smith, 124.

<sup>xl</sup> Lowenthal, xiii.

<sup>xli</sup> Zhigailov, 6.

<sup>xlii</sup> Idem, 5.

Moscow into a civilized world capital”<sup>xliii</sup> in time for the city’s 850<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations by drawing on the pre-existing built heritage of the city. His reconstruction projects, centred on the cathedral but not limited to it, emerged out of popular interest in reviving pre-revolutionary symbols in the city’s cultural landscape, and also in presenting a new, post-Soviet, Moscow to Russians and the world. The cathedral, then, shows us an important moment when questions of identity surfaced and a ‘heritage crusade’ was required. As Lowenthal argues, “those poised between two worlds, two ways of thinking and acting, find heritage of crucial import.”<sup>xliv</sup>

The spatial qualities of the cathedral itself lead to the contested symbolism of the site. Urban historian M. Christine Boyer considers the ways in which nineteenth-century representational views of city building influence contemporary building projects. She notes that what drives many architectural reconstruction and restoration projects are the particular roles of history and memory in contemporary society. The Cathedral of Christ the Saviour exemplifies the problems of employing nineteenth-century representational views in a twenty-first century context. As Boyer argues, “when juxtaposed against the contemporary city of disruption and disarray, the detached appearance of these historically detailed compositions becomes even more exaggerated and attenuated.”<sup>xlv</sup> Boyer’s observation allows us to understand the effect of seeing a site like the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour re-emerge in the cultural landscape. Visually dominating the city with its enormous height and gold domes, the cathedral alters the landscape and presents a specific yet contested Russian identity and history, in contrast to the many remaining Soviet-era Moscow landmarks.

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<sup>xliii</sup> Thanos Pagonis and Andy Thornley, “Urban development projects in Moscow: Market/State Relations in the New Russia,” *European Planning Studies* 8, no 6 (2000): 753. Pagonis is quoting V. Korchagina’s 31 December 1996 article in the Moscow Times, “Civilized world capital: goal of city’s constructivist Mayor”.

<sup>xliv</sup> Lowenthal, 9.

<sup>xlv</sup> M. Christine Boyer, *The City of Collective Memory*, (Cambridge MA.: MIT Press, 1996), 1-2.

To add credence to the rebuilt site, priority was placed on authenticity in the cathedral's reconstruction. According to the cathedral's official website, the architects for the rebuilding project sought to reconstruct the site as faithfully as possible to Ton's original design, using "every available source to research the original construction."<sup>xlvi</sup> While a number of different building materials were used and an expansion to the original design was executed at the base of the structure, the perceived authenticity of the new cathedral is an important element of its value as a heritage site. The main and two side-altars inside the cathedral are dedicated to the birth of Christ and to Saints Nicholas and Alexander Nevsky, respectively, maintaining a decorative program like the original that honours both Orthodoxy and nationalism. Unlike the slow pace of construction and decoration in the nineteenth-century, the new cathedral was completed in just a few years. The interior frescos were painted in nine months, according to the reconstruction chronology on the official cathedral website<sup>xlvi</sup>, and the Moscow 850<sup>th</sup> celebration catalogue boasts that the rebuilding project was completed in just two years.<sup>xlviii</sup> An important site for official photo-ops, the cathedral's rapid realization is once again indicative of the notion of a 'heritage crusade' and the need of a new cultural landscape through which the nascent state could swiftly showcase its legitimacy.

The immense physical scale and financial cost of the new cathedral to both municipal and national elites in Russia further demonstrates its significance. With an official price tag of \$340 million, the financial loss of the project is noted by Theonis Pagonis and Andy Thornley as being irrelevant, since the site served a greater social and cultural function.<sup>xlix</sup> Pagonis and Thornley argue that the costs of the reconstruction project include the time and resources spent by the

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<sup>xlvi</sup> Cathedral of Christ the Saviour official website: <http://www.xxc.ru/english/complex/xxc/index.htm>.

<sup>xlvi</sup> Cathedral of Christ the Saviour official website: <http://www.xxc.ru/english/reconst/stage/index.htm>

<sup>xlvi</sup> Zhigailov, 8.

<sup>xlix</sup> Pagonis and Thornley, 758.

federal and municipal governments that could have been used elsewhere, plus the loss of an important amenity—the swimming pool—that served on average 15,000 bathers a day.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, once a monument, particularly of this scale, is constructed, it must be maintained, both physically and symbolically. Indeed, the cost of this endeavour was a source of significant controversy among the Russian public in the 1990s. As Russian writer Tatyana Tolstaya states, “the cathedral is considered a ‘symbol,’ and it is indeed: of senseless luxury in the midst of poverty, of despotism, of vainglory, of antidemocracy.”<sup>ii</sup> The Cathedral of Christ the Saviour that exists today is officially a national war memorial commemorating the two ‘Patriotic Wars’, a functional Russian Orthodox church, a monument dedicated to pre-Soviet Russian heritage, a popular tourist destination, and a symbol of contemporary Russia. Unofficially, as Tolstaya’s comments suggest, this site allows for other interpretations as well.

#### Popular Reactions to the Reconstruction of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour

One of the most prominent features in the Moscow landscape, the new cathedral was intended to be a national symbol of the break with the Soviet past.<sup>iii</sup> However, as Anthony D. Smith argues, “given the multiplicity of interests, needs and outlooks of members of any community, the likelihood of a single, unified version of the communal past emerging in any relatively free society must be minimal.”<sup>liii</sup> The rebuilt cathedral symbolically emphasizes the centrality of both pre-revolutionary heritage and the Orthodox Church in the new Russian identity of the post-Soviet period. On the other hand, however, the cathedral is to some a massive ever-present reminder of the ineffective Russian leadership of the 1990s—a time when

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>ii</sup> Tatyana Tolstaya, *Pushkin’s Children: Writings on Russia and Russians*. (New York: Mariner Books, 2003), 177.

<sup>iii</sup> Sidorov, 548.

<sup>liii</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 16.

“the new Russian national state ha[d] largely been unable to fulfill the primary responsibilities of any state, such as the provision of economic, political, and cultural security to its citizens.”<sup>liv</sup>

In his discussion of the cathedral, Sidorov notes that an official poll conducted by the Russian Orthodox Church during the reconstruction revealed that many average Russians were opposed to the project on religious grounds. Respondents said, for example, that “to waste millions of dollars in a country with millions of homeless is a sin,”<sup>lv</sup> and that “church construction in Russia always is associated with corruption.”<sup>lvi</sup> Others pointed out that many existing churches in Moscow were often half-empty due to low levels of church attendance, even on important holidays.<sup>lvii</sup> The Priest conducting the survey, Sidorov reveals, was himself in favour of the reconstruction project, but not at such a “Bolshevik pace.”<sup>lviii</sup> Similarly seeing the reconstruction as a repetition of past injustices, a *Moscow Times* article claimed that the cathedral was “the most prominent manifestation of Tsarist Chauvinism”<sup>lix</sup> and went on to question the motives of the project given the current economic state of the new country. Interestingly, both arguments in favour of and in opposition to the reconstruction of the cathedral were framed in Russian historical terms. In evoking the past, Russians made sense of the cathedral and the event of its reconstruction in the present.

This paper considers just one example of the many changes to the Moscow cultural landscape undertaken since Russia became an independent state in the early 1990s. I have suggested that the concern with heritage seen in this case study is not unique to post-Soviet Russia, and that the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour raises important questions that go beyond

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<sup>liv</sup> Sidorov, 18.

<sup>lv</sup> Ibid.

<sup>lvi</sup> Ibid.

<sup>lvii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>lviii</sup> Ibid.

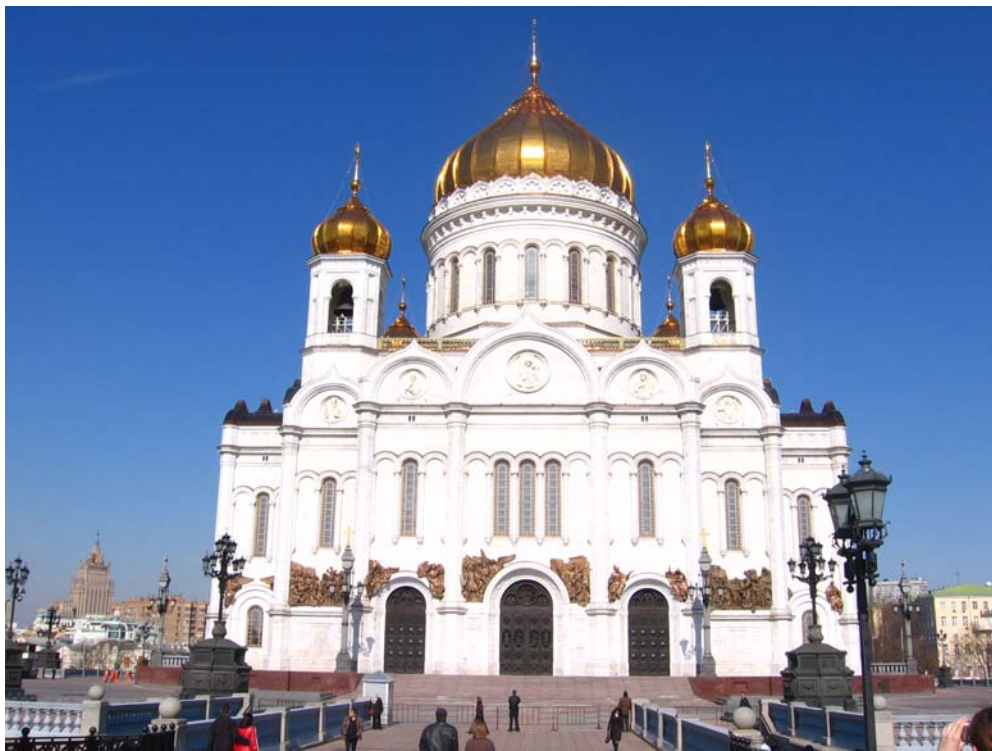
<sup>lix</sup> Pagonis, 759.

Russian borders about the links between history, heritage and identity. The cathedral commemorates a Russian Imperial heritage, rather than a Soviet past. In understanding how and why it does so, Lowenthal's concept of a 'heritage crusade' is useful. Heritage, according to Lowenthal, is "not an inquiry into the past but a celebration of it, not an effort to know what actually happened, but a profession of faith in a past tailored to present-day purposes."<sup>lx</sup> Svetlana Boym noted in her reflections on the post-Soviet capital that, "in the case of Moscow architecture we have a revealing example of a historicist style that actively collaborated in forgetting the country's recent history."<sup>lxi</sup> This process of erasure, observed by Boym in Moscow, is also noted by Lowenthal as being a marker of heritage itself. Interestingly, though, the history that is erased from one site on the Moscow cultural landscape remains in other places, and within a single city, heritage takes many forms.

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<sup>lx</sup> Lowenthal, x.

<sup>lxi</sup> Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 99.



The Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, Moscow, Russia. April, 2006.  
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