

ASTANA'S ARCHITECTURE AS A REPRESENTATION OF THE NEW KAZAKHSTAN

Political Reading of Astana's Built Environment



Zanna Veronica Ivanainen

Master's Thesis

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Abstract

In my Master's thesis I explore the political reasons behind Kazakhstan's Almaty Astana capital relocation and the creation of the new capital Astana with new and futuristic architecture. The strategy is to analyse Kazakhstan's capital relocation and Astana's creation and beautification by applying Kenneth Burke's concepts of the Dramatistic Pentad and the Idea of the Negative. Through Astana's three most prominent new pieces of architecture, the Baiterek Tower, the Palace of Peace and Reconciliation and Khan Shatyr shopping and entertainment centre, I analyse Kazakhstan's political aspirations and new representational practises. Through Astana's architecture and Burke's Dramatistic Pentad and the Idea of the Negative I enquire political messages and symbols in Astana's new architecture and built environment. Additionally, to get a more comprehensive picture on Kazakhstan's politics and aspirations, I employ Kazakhstan's government's publications on the new capital, speeches and works of Kazakhstan's president Nursultan Nazarbayev, and western and Kazakh newspaper articles on Kazakhstani capital relocation and Astana's mental and physical creation. In my thesis I argue that Kazakhstan's capital relocation and the Astana project are political acts; they are meant to impress national and international audiences, attract foreign investment, to put Astana and Kazakhstan on the map, and to add Astana and Kazakhstan's prestige in the world. Kazakhstan's authoritarian president Nazarbayev has been promoting Astana and Kazakhstan's mental image around the world; he has been advertising Kazakhstan as a modern and developed country, and he has been utilizing Astana's development and new architecture to do so. In my thesis I asked, what are the political messages in Astana's new architecture, and what does Astana's urban symbolism and architecture reveal about the aspirations and desires of Kazakhstan and Kazakhstan's authoritarian president Nazarbayev. I found that Astana's new architecture, particularly on the Left Bank of the Ishim River that splits the city in half, is part of president Nazarbayev's state- and nation building efforts; it enacts Nazarbayev's vision of Kazakhstan's post Soviet modernity and establishes the state as the agent of modernity and constructor of the Kazakh nation-state. However, much of the change in Astana and Kazakhstan has been very superficial, and the hypermodern image of the Left Bank, propagated nationally and internationally, does not match the rest of the capital or the country.

Keywords: Astana, Kazakhstan, Politics, Architecture, Kenneth Burke, Nation building, Image- and Prestige building

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1. INTRODUCTION

During the last 15 years, Kazakhstan's new capital Astana has changed a lot. It has become a peculiar combination of futuristic design and Soviet style standardized architecture. Additionally, it has become a combination of tradition and modernity as Kazakhstan has managed to include in Astana's cityscape new symbols of glory combined with traditions, myths, and symbols of Kazakhstan and Kazakhstan's past¹.

The construction of Astana began in the late 1990s, and the building process continues to this day mainly due to Kazakhstan's large oil revenues. During this time, Astana's territory has expanded significantly, and its population has become threefold; today over 800 000² Kazakhstanis live in Astana the whole population of Kazakhstan being approximately 17 million³. During this time, Astana's architectural image has changed a lot featuring today extremely modernistic and futuristic architecture, especially on the Left Bank of the Ishim River that splits the city in half. The new architecture in the new administrative centre looks much like "a space station in the steppes"⁴, an apt description made by Rowan Moore⁵ in his piece in the Guardian, 2010, and much like "Tomorrowland", a name given to Astana by John Lancaster in his piece in the National Geographic Magazine, 2012⁶. Astana's administrative centre certainly reminds a space station as it does a futuristic city pictured in cartoons and Star Wars movies.

Astana's futuristic architecture was planned to include both the past and the future⁷. It tells a story either of Kazakh mythology, history and traditions or the world history, symbolizing the important local and global aspects for Kazakhstanis and Kazakhstan. The meaning and symbolism behind Astana's architecture and city plan –the story they tell–

¹ Williamson Erin 2012: "At a Crossroads: Astana, Kazakhstan", *Urban Times*, 5 April, <http://urbantimes.co/2012/04/astana-kazakhstan/> [23.9.2014]

² Interfax-Kazakhstan, Kazakhstan News Agency: https://www.interfax.kz/?lang=eng&int_id=expert_opinions&news_id=7512 [12.2.2015]

³ "Post-Soviet world: what you need to know about Kazakhstan", *the Guardian/New East Network*, 9 June 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/09/-sp-post-soviet-world-need-to-know-kazakhstan> [26.9.2014]; Country meters Kazakhstan Population, <http://countrymeters.info/en/Kazakhstan> [12.2.2015]

⁴ Moore Rowan 2010, "Astana, Kazakhstan: the space station in the steppes", *the Guardian/the Observer*, 8 August <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/aug/08/astana-kazakhstan-space-station-steppes> [26.9.2014]

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Lancaster John 2012, "Tomorrowland", *National Geographic*, February <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2012/02/astana/lancaster-text> [14.9.2014]

⁷ Williamson 2012 Ibid

when planning and building Astana and its new architecture, was particularly important for the president of the country, Nursultan Nazarbayev.

Nursultan Nazarbayev has been the president of Kazakhstan since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and he has had a huge impact on the new capital and its design. In 1991, when Kazakhstan became independent, he was elected as the president of Kazakhstan with an impressive 91,5 % of the vote⁸. His winning trend has continued his entire career⁹, and now, in April 2015, he was again re-elected with an even more impressive 97,7 % of the vote¹⁰. His presidency will thus last at least another five year¹¹. According to Kazakhstan's Constitution, a person can be elected as the president of Kazakhstan two times in a row, but this does not apply to president Nazarbayev, "the First President of the Republic of Kazakhstan"¹².

According to Kazakhstan's Constitution, Kazakhstan is "a unitary state with a presidential form of government"¹³. Although it is clearly stated that the people are the source of state power, and that they exercise their power through free elections¹⁴, there has not been an election in Kazakhstan that would have been judged free or fair by the West¹⁵. Furthermore, so far there have been no potential rival candidates to Nazarbayev in Kazakhstan's presidential elections¹⁶. President Nazarbayev is "the head of state, its highest official"¹⁷. He "is elevated above all the structures of power in order to serve as "the guarantor of the republic's unity and the constancy of the Constitution and of the citizens' rights and freedoms"¹⁸, and his power has continuously been increased; at

⁸ Kazakhstan, Heart of Eurasia 2013, 46. "Kazakhstan, Heart of Eurasia" –leaflet, produced by the support of the Consulate General of the Republic of Kazakhstan in Hong Kong and Macao Special Administrative Regions in 2013. Acquired from the Embassy of Kazakhstan in Helsinki in January 2014.

⁹ According to Brill Olcott 2010, 93 Nazarbayev has won all the elections with 90 something per cent of the vote (Brill Olcott Martha 2010, *Kazakhstan, Unfulfilled Promise?* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, United Book Press)

¹⁰ Hannula Tommi and Niemeläinen Jussi 2015, "Kazakstanin presidentti sai vaaleissa 97,7 prosentin kannatuksen", *Helsingin Sanomat*, 26 April, <http://www.hs.fi/ulkomaat/a1430018268764#> [27.4.2015]

¹¹ Official site of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, "The Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan", Article 41, §1, <http://www.akorda.kz/en/category/konstituciya> [1.9.2014]

¹² The Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan Ibid, Article 42, §5

¹³ The Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan Ibid, Article 2, §1

¹⁴ The Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan Ibid, Article 3, §1 and §2

¹⁵ Pannier Bruce 2015, "Kazakhstan's long term president to run in snap election – again", *the Guardian/New East Network*, 11 March, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/11/kazakhstan-president-early-election-nursultan-nazarbayev> [10.5.2015]

¹⁶ Hannula and Niemeläinen 2015

¹⁷ The Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan Ibid, Article 40, §1

¹⁸ Brill Olcott 2010, 62

the moment there is no institution in Kazakhstan to balance his power¹⁹. The president, his honour and dignity are inviolable²⁰, and the president is “the symbol and guarantor of the unity of the people and the state power”²¹.

President Nazarbayev has legitimized his authoritarian power by arguing that the Kazakhs have never had democracy; the “popular rule [in Kazakhstan] could empower nationalist demagogues, secessionists, communists, or Islamic radicals and put the future of the nation -- at risk”²²; “the tradition and temperament of the Asian people make them little suited to democracy”²³. For now it is thus ‘safer’ to have authoritarianism in Kazakhstan and to consolidate the power to the very few in Kazakhstan²⁴. The West is afraid to pressure Kazakhstan to make political and economic reforms for fear of losing the access to Kazakhstan’s many natural resources²⁵. Still, despite all the corruption, authoritarianism, and favouring, president Nazarbayev has always been the most popular politician of Kazakhstan²⁶.

In many ways, Astana represents Nazarbayev’s ambitions and desires of how he would like the world to see Astana and Kazakhstan. Natalie Koch (2014)²⁷, among others²⁸, has argued that Astana, and especially Astana’s new administrative and commercial centre, is Nazarbayev’s pet project, his new city²⁹. Nazarbayev decided and partly designed the look of the new city and its main architecture, and he observed and supervised the planning and building processes so that they would correspond to his vision of them. According to Nazarbayev, Astana symbolizes Kazakhstan’s aspirations for the future in combination

¹⁹ Brill Olcott 2010, 29 and Chapter 4

²⁰ The Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan Ibid, Article 46, §1

²¹ The Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan Ibid, Article 40, §2

²² Brill Olcott 2010, 89

²³ Brill Olcott 2010, 8

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Brill Olcott 2010, 2

²⁶ Brill Olcott 2010, 26

²⁷ Koch Natalie 2014, “Bordering on the modern: power, practice and exclusion in Astana”, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, Vol. 39, No. 3, pp. 432–443.

²⁸ See for example Schatz Edward 2004, “What capital cities say about state and nation building”, *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, Vol. 9, No. 4, pp. 111-140 Taylor & Francis Inc.

²⁹ Koch 2014

with Kazakhstan's history, culture and attitude³⁰. For him, Astana is the heart of Kazakhstan and the symbol of Kazakhstan's independence³¹.

According to Yacher (2011), capital relocation is “an opportunity for the state to create a new or different expression of the current self-view at the time of its creation”³². Astana was created “to fulfil a symbolic function, to be a “national” city and to overcome the rivalries of pre-existing settings”³³, just like Brasilia, Canberra, Washington D.C., and others were.³⁴

However, without a political will of a leader, there would not have been a capital relocation, not in Kazakhstan nor in the US, Brazil, or Turkey.³⁵ In Kazakhstan, the president Nazarbayev has been represented as the main actor behind the capital relocation, the Astana project, and in a nutshell, everything that has taken place in Kazakhstan since country's independence.

For Nazarbayev and Kazakhstan, Astana's symbolic importance exceeds its physical structures. Kazakhstan's capital relocation symbolizes change and new beginning; by relocating the capital and constructing Astana the state has alienated the country from its Soviet past and symbolically led it to its future.³⁶ Astana's astonishing architecture and its unique futuristic design has a similar function: in addition to impressing, it alienates Kazakhstan from the past, and leads it to its future. If Astana, as the capital, is a “national” city, built to represent the country, then, according to Yacher (2011) “we may be seeing the construction of a new Kazakhstan”^{37, 38}.

State led urban development projects such as urban planning, organization and reorganization of space, architecture, monuments, and statues are some of the most visible

³⁰ Nursultan Nazarbayev in “Astana, The Heart of Kazakhstan” [Info booklet about Astana produced by «Жарқын Ко» Полиграфический центр, Астана]

³¹ Ibid

³² Yacher Leon 2011, “Astana, Kazakhstan: Megadream, Megacity, Megadestiny?” in Brunn Stanley D. (Ed.) 2011, *Engineering Earth: The Impacts of Megaengineering Projects*, Springer Science & Business Media, Vol. 1, p. 1004

³³ Ibid

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ Yacher 2011, 1003

³⁷ Yacher 2011, 1010

³⁸ Ibid

actions performed by the state; they are symbolic actions that create urban symbolism. Emotions tied to architecture, monuments and street names (historical, traditional, and mythical connotations) can dominate the city and its image and create national pride and identity. State led projects can be used for city branding and marketing, propaganda, political manipulation, and expression of a civic pride.³⁹

Moreover, urban symbolism and architecture affect the appearance of a city and influence its local, national and international conceptions. Therefore, urban symbolism and architecture can promote or hinder national, regional and global interests of a city and a state. State led projects affect the perception of the state and its priorities, which is why the appearance of a city and especially of a capital city can tell a lot of the state and its ambitions. In Kazakhstan, Astana's urban symbolism and architecture are part of Kazakhstan's nation and state building efforts; they enact president Nazarbayev's vision of Kazakhstan's post-Soviet modernity⁴⁰. Therefore, it is both politically interesting and important to look at those messages and symbols behind Astana's architecture and analyse what can architecture rhetorically tell about today's Kazakhstan both nationally and internationally.

The phenomenon I am researching is thus the creation and expansion of Kazakhstan's new post-Soviet capital. Astana has become the symbol of Kazakhstan's development and modernity; it has become the center of Kazakhstan's cultural creativity and architectural experimentation. As such, it provides a prospect on Kazakhstan's and Nazarbayev's ambitions and goals for the country. This is why I chose to research Astana and to read Astana's new architecture politically. I wanted to see, what can political reading of architecture reveal about goals and ambitions that Kazakhstan and president Nazarbayev have for the future.

³⁹ Nas Peter J.M., de Groot Marlies and Schut Michelle 2011, "Introduction, Variety of Symbols", pp. 7-9, 19-20 in Nas Peter J.M. (Ed.) 2011, *Cities Full of Symbols. A Theory of Urban Space and Culture*, Leiden University Press, ISBN978 90 8964 125 0, e-ISBN978 94 0060 044 7

⁴⁰ Koch 2014, 432-443

1.1 Architecture and Politics

Architecture can be very political and tell a lot about intentions and ambitions of a ruler, especially in an authoritarian context. According to Nas, de Groot and Schut⁴¹, city's urban symbolism is important for city's identity, image, and attraction, and the architecture forms an important part of this, even though city's urban symbolism is not limited to architecture alone⁴². However, since the new architecture is the most visible symbol and image bearer of Astana and the main way the government and the president differentiate Astana and Kazakhstan from the other cities and states, I will concentrate on architecture, the visible material symbolism of Astana⁴³.

Nas, de Groot and Shut have identified architecture as one of the symbol bearers. According to them, various phenomena express the urban symbolism, such as, for example, the layout of a city, its architecture, statues, street and place names, festivities, myths and poems, and they all can be identified as symbol bearers and important parts of urban symbolism. Even though most cities have many symbol bearers, there is usually only one that is the dominant one.⁴⁴ Since I see architecture as the dominant symbol bearer in Astana, I will concentrate on it.

The symbol bearers can dominate city's image and be perceived and manipulated in many ways. Rulers might use the symbol bearers to create the official image for the city and exploit them for nation-building and patriotism purposes or for example for improving city's tourism. Therefore, the symbol bearers are usually connected to emotions and traditions.⁴⁵

City's symbolism can be used for branding and marketing too, in order to create a positive and desirable image for a city⁴⁶, and if the city is a capital city, to the entire country, as cities and countries struggle to differentiate from another. This has happened in Astana,

⁴¹ Nas, de Groot and Schut 2011, 7-9, 19-20

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ According to Nas, de Groot and Schut, there are four types of symbol bearers: material, discursive, iconic, and behavioural (Nas, de Groot and Schut 2011, 9). In this study I will concentrate on the material symbol bearers.

⁴⁴ Nas, de Groot and Schut 2011, 9

⁴⁵ Nas, de Groot and Schut 2011, 7-9, 19-20

⁴⁶ Ibid

where architecture, as the dominant symbol bearer, has disseminated the new desired image of Astana and Kazakhstan.

However, until recently, symbolic dimension of a city has been largely ignored. During the last decades, the situation has improved with urban anthropology and urban symbolism attracting more and more attention. Among the research concentrating on urban symbolism, topics like *Emotion in the Symbolic Spectrum of Colombo, Sri Lanka* (Michelle Schut, Peter Nas and Siri Hettige⁴⁷), *City marketing on urban symbolism in Ghent, Belgium* (Rose-Anne Vermeer⁴⁸), *Urban Symbolism in Yogyakarta* (Pierpaolo De Giosa⁴⁹), *the Changing Image of Gdansk, Poland* (Barbara Bossak-Herbst⁵⁰), *Urban Symbolism of Buenos Aires* (Lars Bakker⁵¹) *Imagining Modernity: Memory, Space and Symbolism of The Hague* (Jialing Luo⁵²), *Urban Symbolism and the New Urbanism of Indonesia* (Hans-Dieter Evers⁵³) have been studied fairly recently (Cited in Nas, de Groot and Schut 2011).

The study of urban symbolism and its cultural symbolic aspect has widened the scope of urban studies and created a new approach within them. Urban symbols and rituals are increasingly seen as essential in forming local identity and attaching citizens socially to their city; they foster citizens' mental bonding to their city and make it feel homey. Moreover, participation in city's festivities and rituals create a bond between the citizens and contribute to social cohesion and citizens' identification with their city.⁵⁴

Another aspect in urban studies a part from urban symbolism has been the research on capital relocation that has concentrated particularly on postcolonial capital relocation in

⁴⁷ Schut Michelle, Nas Peter J.M., and Hettige Siri T. 2011, "Emotion in the Symbolic Spectrum of Colombo, Sri Lanka", pp. 27-54 in Nas Peter J.M. (Ed.) 2011, *Cities Full of Symbols. A Theory of Urban Space and Culture*, Leiden University Press

⁴⁸ Vermeer Rose-Anne 2011, "Squares, Water and Historic Buildings: The Transforming Power of City Marketing on Urban Symbolism in Ghent, Belgium", pp. 55-84 in Nas (Ed.) 2011

⁴⁹ De Giosa Pierpaolo 2011, "Urban Symbolism in Yogyakarta: In Search of the Lost Symbol", pp. 85-106 in Nas (Ed.) 2011

⁵⁰ Bossak-Herbst Barbara 2011, "The Changing Image of Gdansk, Poland: From Regained Homeland to Multi-cultural City", pp. 107-126 in Nas (Ed.) 2011

⁵¹ Bakker Lars 2011, "Obelisk and Axis: Urban Symbolism of Buenos Aires", pp. 127-152 in Nas (Ed.) 2011

⁵² Luo Jialing 2011, "Imagining Modernity: Memory, Space and Symbolism of The Hague", pp. 173-186 in Nas (Ed.) 2011

⁵³ Evers Hans-Dieter 2011, "Urban Symbolism and the New Urbanism of Indonesia", pp. 187-196 in Nas (Ed.) 2011

⁵⁴ Nas Peter J.M. and De Giosa Pierpaolo 2011, "Conclusion: Feeling at Home in the City and the Codification of Urban Symbolism Research", pp. 283-286 in Nas (Ed.) 2011

Africa. In relation to African cases, Allen Armstrong (1985)⁵⁵ studied the decision of the Ivory Coast to transfer its capital to a new inland city, Yamoussoukro, Jonathan Moore (1984)⁵⁶ the political reasons behind the relocation of the Nigerian capital from Lagos to Abuja, and Deborah Potts (1985)⁵⁷ the capital relocation in Malawi from Zomba to Lilongwe. In addition to African studies, the creation of a new capital in Brazil has been a highly covered theme for research; John Augelli⁵⁸ examined the emergence of Brasília already in 1960s (1963), and Farret Ricardo⁵⁹ the political-economic justifications of Brasília in 1980s (1983). Also the Turkish capital relocation from Istanbul to Ankara has received attention from researchers; Kacar Duygu (2010)⁶⁰ has researched Ankara's transformation from a small town to Turkey's capital, and Natalie Koch (2013)⁶¹ has compared the Turkish capital relocation with the Kazakhstani one. All in all, also the research both in and out of Kazakhstan has revolved around the Kazakhstani capital relocation and the reasons and justifications behind it.

The first studies on independent Kazakhstan concentrated on political and geographic motives related to the Kazakhstani capital relocation from Almaty to Astana. Richard Wolfel (2002)⁶², among others, examined the nationalistic motives that seemed to prevail all the other motives related to the Kazakhstani capital relocation, and Shonin Anacker (2004)⁶³ the Kazakhstani capital relocation and the development of the official nationalism connected to it.

⁵⁵ Armstrong Allen 1985, "Ivory Coast: another new capital for Africa", *Geography*, Vol. 70, No. 1, pp. 72-74. Published by Geographical Association.

⁵⁶ Moore Jonathan 1984, "The Political History of Nigeria's New Capital", *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 01, pp. 167-175

⁵⁷ Potts Deborah 1985, "Capital Relocation in Africa: The Case of Lilongwe in Malawi", *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 151, No. 2, pp. 182-196

⁵⁸ Augelli John P. 1963, "Brasilia: The Emergence of a national Capital", *Journal of Geography*, Vol. 62, No. 6, pp. 241-252

⁵⁹ Farret Ricardo L. 1983, "The Justification of Brasilia. A Political-Economic Approach", *Third World Planning Review*, Vol. 5, No. 2, pp. 137- 148

⁶⁰ Kacar Duygu 2010, "Ankara, a Small Town, Transformed to a Nation's Capital", *Journal of Planning History*, Vol. 9, No. 1, pp. 43-65

⁶¹ Koch Natalie 2013a, "Why not a world city? Astana, Ankara, and geopolitical scripts in urban networks", *Urban Geography*, Vol. 34, No. 1, pp. 109-130

⁶² Wolfel Richard L. 2002, "North to Astana: Nationalistic motives for the movement of the Kazakh(stani) capital", *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 30, No. 3, pp. 485-506

⁶³ Anacker Shonin 2004, "Geographies of Power in Nazarbayev's Astana", *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, Vol. 45, No. 7, pp. 515-533

In addition to them, Edward Schatz and Natalie Koch⁶⁴ have examined the post-Soviet changes in Kazakhstan. Their research has been fascinated particularly by the political geography and geopolitical imaginary of Kazakhstan. In addition, they have researched the peaceful coexistence of the many ethnicities that live in Kazakhstan more peacefully than anyone could originally have imagined right after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Koch (2010, 2012, 2013)⁶⁵ has focused particularly on the Kazakh capital change discourse and the geopolitical imaginary both in and of Astana, and Schatz (2004)⁶⁶ on the political reasons behind the Kazakhstani capital relocation, which he has compared in many ways to African capital relocations that he has seen more similar to the Kazakhstani one than any of Latin American, European or Asian ones.

Kazakhstan's capital relocation and Astana's urban development have been among the most researched topics on the post Soviet Kazakhstan. For instance Koch's⁶⁷ research on Astana's urban development –the voices and wishes of the average Kazakhs on the capital relocation and the Astana project–, Schatz's⁶⁸ research on the Kazakh capital relocation in relation to Kazakh state and nation building, and Leon Yacher's⁶⁹ research on geographic perspectives of the Kazakh capital relocation –what the relocation and Astana represent for Kazakhstan– represent the research conducted on Kazakhstan in general.

The research revolving around Kazakhstan has thus focused on Kazakhstan's capital relocation and Astana's urban development. However, so far Astana's built environment and Astana's (or any other Kazakhstani or Central Asian city's) architecture and urban symbolism have not had much attention per se, and even the Kazakhstani capital relocation

⁶⁴ Schatz Edward 2004, "What capital cities say about state and nation building", *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, Vol. 9, No. 4, pp. 111-140; Koch Natalie 2012a, "The City and the Steppe: Territory, Technologies of Government, and Kazakhstan's New Capital" PhD dissertation, Department of Geography, University of Colorado, Boulder, CO; Koch Natalie 2013b, "The 'heart' of Eurasia? Kazakhstan's centrally located capital city", *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 32, No. 2, pp. 134-147; and Koch Natalie 2014, "Bordering on the modern: Power, practice and exclusion in Astana", *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, Vol. 39, No. 3, pp. 432-443

⁶⁵ Koch Natalie 2010, "The Monumental and the Miniature: Imagining 'Modernity' in Astana", *Social & Cultural Geography*, Vol. 11, No. 8, pp. 769-787; Koch 2012a; Koch 2013b

⁶⁶ Schatz 2004

⁶⁷ Koch 2014; See also Koch's previous studies on Kazakhstan's urban development (See the References).

⁶⁸ Schatz 2004

⁶⁹ Yacher Leon 2011, "Astana, Kazakhstan: Megadream, Megacity, Megadestiny?" in Brunn Stanley D. (Ed.) 2011, *Engineering Earth: The Impacts of Megaengineering Projects*, Springer Science & Business Media, Vol. 1, pp. 1001-1020

has been researched relatively little⁷⁰. Therefore, as I felt that there has not been enough attention on the political aspect of Astana and Astana's new architecture and symbolism, I chose Astana and its new architecture as the subject of my study. Accordingly, I read Astana's new architecture and urban symbolism politically in order to see, what can a political reading of Astana's architecture and urban symbolism tell about national and international aspirations and ambitions that Kazakhstan and its authoritarian president Nazarbayev are pursuing more generally.

1.2 The Research Question

I see Astana's architecture as a political mean to impress, to put Astana and Kazakhstan on the map, and to add Astana's and Kazakhstan's prestige in the world –in other words, to impact the image that people have about Kazakhstan and the role it has in the globalized post Soviet world. My research question relates thus to the political meaning of architecture and the role the architecture has in provoking specific image of the city and the state both nationally and internationally.

In my study I ask, what kind of political messages can be read from Astana's urban symbolism and its new architecture, and what can a political reading of architecture tell us about the aspirations and desires that Kazakhstan and its authoritarian president Nazarbayev have. The research questions I intend to answer are thus:

- 1) What messages does the new architecture of Astana articulate?
- 2) What does Astana's urban symbolism and architecture reveal about Astana, Kazakhstan, and Kazakhstan's authoritarian president Nazarbayev?

⁷⁰ Compared for instance with African cases, African capital moves have had more attention than the Kazakhstani one (even though it is important to note here that the Kazakhstani move is still fairly new compared to African and other capital moves.). For capital moves, in addition to those already mentioned, see for example Nwafor's (1980) research on Nigeria's capital move, Hoyle's (1979) research on Tanzanian capital relocation, and Stephenson's (1970) research on Islamabad and Brasilia (See the References).

To answer the research questions, I read Astana's new architecture politically by using Kenneth Burke's⁷¹ conceptions of the Dramatistic Pentad and the Idea of the Negative⁷². In Chapter 2 I introduce Burke's methods that I employ for reading Astana's new architecture; I explain how I will use them and why did I choose them. Thereafter I introduce my research material. In Chapter 3 I make a Burkean analysis on Kazakhstani capital relocation and the Astana project in addition to providing some background information on them. In Chapters 4, 5, and 6 I scrutinize the selected pieces of Astana's new architecture and conduct a Burkean political reading of them. I have chosen three pieces of architecture that I believe to represent Astana's new urban symbolism comprehensively. With Burke's methods I read them politically to find the political messages and aspirations within them.

⁷¹ Burke Kenneth 1989, *On Symbols and Society*, Chapter 2, "The Human Actor: Definition of Man", pp. 56-74. Edited by Joseph Gusfield, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago; Burke Kenneth 1978, "Questions and Answers about the Pentad", *College composition and Communication*, Vol. 29, No. 4, pp. 330-335. Published by National Council of Teachers of English; Burke Kenneth 1969, *A Grammar of Motives*, "Introduction" and Chapter I, "Container and Thing Contained", XV-XXIII, 3-20. The University of California Press, Berkeley; Burke Kenneth 1962, *A Grammar of Motives and A Rhetoric of Motives*, Cleveland: World Publishing Company. Meridian Books; Appel Edward C. 1993, "Implications and Importance of the Negative in Burke's Dramatistic Philosophy of Language", *Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 1, pp. 51-65; Overington Michael A. 1977, "Kenneth Burke and the Method of Dramatism", *Theory and Society*, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 131-156

⁷² Ibid

2. BURKE'S METHODS FOR READING ASTANA'S ARCHITECTURE

Architects and designers, like all artists, strive to impact spectators with their work. Therefore, there is a meaning behind architecture, a reason behind certain choices made when planning and building a building, a piece of architecture, particularly a monumental one. According to Kenneth Burke (1962)⁷³, “wherever there is persuasion, there is rhetoric. And whenever there is ‘meaning’ there is ‘persuasion’ ”⁷⁴. Therefore, since there is meaning behind architecture and built environment, there must be persuasion behind them, too.

Architects and designers, just like rhetors and orators, strive to persuade their audience. However, so far Burke's methods have been used par excellence for analysing public speeches and rhetorics, particularly presidential- and other influential political speeches. For instance, Jason Thompson (2011)⁷⁵ employed Kenneth Burke's review on Hitler's Main Kampf to analyse the early 9/11 oratory of George W. Bush and compare it with Hitler's rhetoric, Bobbitt David (2004)⁷⁶ employed Kenneth Burke's theories of symbolic action and guilt-purification-redemption –cycle to analyse Martin Luther King, Jr.'s 'I Have a Dream' speech, and its legacy, implications and impacts for civil rights discourse in the US over time, and Birdsell David (1987)⁷⁷ used Kenneth Burke's Pentad for analysing Ronald Reagan's speech on Lebanon and Grenada to isolate persuasive recourses in the speech. Furthermore, Rountree Clarke (2001)⁷⁸ employed Burke's Pentad for analysing the judicial discourse in *Korematsu v. United States* Supreme Court case on violating the evacuation and the resettlement order that the War Relocation Authority had ordered on the resettlement of Japanese-Americans to internment camps.

⁷³ Burke Kenneth 1962, *A Grammar of Motives and A Rhetoric of Motives*, Cleveland: World Publishing Company. Meridian Books

⁷⁴ Burke 1962, 696

⁷⁵ Thompson Jason 2011, “Magic for a People Trained in Pragmatism: Kenneth Burke, Mein Kampf, and the Early 9/11 Oratory of George W. Bush”, *Rhetoric Review*, Vol. 30, No. 4, pp. 350-371. Accessed through <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/07350198.2011.604608> [24.2.2015]

⁷⁶ Bobbitt David A. 2004, *The Rhetoric of Redemption: Kenneth Burke's Redemption Drama and Martin Luther King, Jr.'s 'I Have a Dream' Speech*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Communications, Media, and Politics Series, New York

⁷⁷ Birdsell David S. 1987, “Ronald Reagan on Lebanon and Grenada: Flexibility and Interpretation in the Application of Kenneth Burke's Pentad”, *The Quarterly Journal of Speech*, Vol. 73, No. 3, pp. 267-279

⁷⁸ Rountree Clarke 2001, “Instantiating “The Law” and its Dissents in *Korematsu v. United States*: A Dramatistic Analysis of Judicial Discourse”, *The Quarterly Journal of Speech*, Vol. 87, No. 1, pp. 1-24

However, even though Burke's methods have been applied mainly for political speeches and rhetorics, I do not see why they could not be applied for art and architecture as well. A picture, an image –a photograph–, after all, according to an old proverb, is worth a thousand words. Therefore, I want to advance Burke's methods to a political reading of art and architecture. To answer to my research questions, I will employ two Burke's methods to analyse the political dimensions of the Astana project and Astana's new architecture. In addition to answering to my research questions I am interested to see, how can Burke's concepts help to analyse art and architecture, and in this case, the politics and the political aspects of Astana's new architecture and the Astana project. In other words, I am interested to see, how Burke's concepts can methodologically help to read art and architecture politically, and what can political reading of Astana's new architecture tell about Astana and Kazakhstan in general.

Next I will describe shortly the two methods I will employ in my study, the Idea of the Negative and the Dramatistic Pentad⁷⁹, and explain how I will use them in my analysis. Then I will proceed to introduce my research material. After that I will start my analysis, first of the Astana project, and then of Astana's new architecture, which is the main focus of my study.

The Negative and the Pentad

In my effort to conduct a political reading of the Astana project and of the new architecture of Astana, I draw on Burke's conceptualizations of the Idea of the Negative and the Dramatistic Pentad. According to Kenneth Burke (1989)⁸⁰, humans construct the reality by way of symbols, particularly by way of language. Humans use language and symbols to represent the world, to understand it. However, to be able to understand the world and the

⁷⁹ Burke Kenneth 1989, *On Symbols and Society*, Chapter 2, "The Human Actor: Definition of Man", pp. 56-74. Edited by Joseph Gusfield, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago; Burke Kenneth 1978, "Questions and Answers about the Pentad", *College composition and Communication*, Vol. 29, No. 4, pp. 330-335. Published by National Council of Teachers of English; Burke Kenneth 1969, *A Grammar of Motives*, "Introduction" and Chapter I, "Container and Thing Contained", XV-XXIII, 3-20, The University of California Press, Berkeley; Burke Kenneth 1962, *A Grammar of Motives and A Rhetoric of Motives*, Cleveland: World Publishing Company. Meridian Books; Appel Edward C. 1993, "Implications and Importance of the Negative in Burke's Dramatistic Philosophy of Language", *Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 1, pp. 51-65; Overington Michael A. 1977, "Kenneth Burke and the Method of Dramatism", *Theory and Society*, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 131-156

⁸⁰ Burke 1989, 56-74

language and the symbols that represent it, it is essential to know, what the things and phenomena we are talking about are, and what they are not.⁸¹ The reality is thus constructed by way of positives and negatives that represent it.

According to Burke's⁸² definition, a man is

“the symbol-using (symbol-making, symbol-misusing) animal, [and the] inventor of the negative (or moralized by negative)--“⁸³

The negative is essential to men and their understanding of the world; in order to know what the things we are talking about are, we need to know, what they are not. The desirability and the overall image of certain issues, phenomena, and places are directly connected to this, to what we associate them with, and to what we associate them with not. By way of architecture, Astana and Kazakhstan are actively distancing themselves from their old Soviet associations, from being associated with being Soviet, standardized, and backward. Language, as symbolic action, makes definitions possible, and in the case of Astana, it is important to emphasize the importance of the definitions that relate to Astana's new image and new associations –of being new, modern and futuristic–, made by the way of Astana's new architecture and built environment, and pursued by the president and his administration.

Additionally, Burke's Dramatistic Pentad provides a methodological perspective to analyse the rhetorics of the Astana project and the new architecture of Astana. In *A Grammar of Motives*, Burke asks

“What is involved, when we say what people are doing and why they are doing it?”⁸⁴

Burke asks about the motive, the explanation, the rationalization that people give for their action, their motive⁸⁵. According to him,

“In any rounded statement about motives, you must have some word that names the act (names what took place, in thought or deed), and another that names the scene (the background of the act, the situation on which it occurred); also, you must

⁸¹ Burke 1989, 56-74; Tilli Jouni's lecture 11.9.2012

⁸² Burke 1989

⁸³ Burke 1989, 70

⁸⁴ Burke 1969, XV

⁸⁵ Overington Michael A. 1977, “Kenneth Burke and the Method of Dramatism”, *Theory and Society*, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 131-156, here 133-135

indicate what person or kind of person (agent) performed the act, what means or instruments he used (agency), and the purpose.”⁸⁶

Burke introduces thus the five terms of the Pentad, *Act, Scene, Agent, Agency, and Purpose*⁸⁷ that are always present in a symbolic action. The terms provide answers to motives behind actions and help to analyse, what was really behind the decision, when the decision to perform the act was taken, and what was behind the act itself. These five terms help to find out, what was really going on, what was the purpose of the act after the act has already been performed.⁸⁸ The Pentad is thus telling the analyser what to ask when making the analysis (what happened, with what kind of instrument, to what end)⁸⁹.

However, the main goal of the Pentad is not just naming the different terms but evaluating *ratios* or correlations between them that help to explain the action, to identify the main aspects of the political objects and to analyse how they work⁹⁰. Moreover, the ratios, “the linguistically based expectancies”⁹¹, help to explain the explanations of the action. The Scene→Act –ratio, for instance, presumes that “particular acts correlate with particular scenes”⁹², and if the explanation of the act is to be reasonable, the nature of the act must be consistent with the nature of the scene. Similarly, the Scene→Agent –ratio presumes consistency between agents and scenes; in other words, the act in the Scene→Agent –ratio is the result of the interaction between the agent and the scene.⁹³

Hence, the principle of drama supposes that the nature of the act and the agent is consistent with the nature of the scene: “the scene contains the act” and the agent, and it expresses “in fixed properties the same quality that the action expresses in terms of development”⁹⁴.

⁸⁶ Burke 1969, XV; in other words, who (agent), what (act), where and when (scene), how (agency), and why (purpose) (Overington 1977, 141).

⁸⁷ What took place? Where, when, or in what sort of a situation (background character (society, environment), situation, place, era)? Who/what kind of agent did it? How, or by what means, it was done? And why? (Burke 1969, XV; Tilli 26.09.2012; Burke 1978, 330-335; Overington 1977, 141)

⁸⁸ Burke 1969, XV-XXIII; Tilli 26.09.2012; Burke 1978

⁸⁹ Burke 1978, 332

⁹⁰ Burke 1969, 3; Overington 1977, 141-142

⁹¹ Overington 1977, 143

⁹² Overington 1977, 142

⁹³ Burke 1969, 3; Overington 1977, 141-142

⁹⁴ Burke 1969, 3

Therefore, natural scene, environment or specific circumstances may provide sufficient motivation for an act or explain human behaviour and development. In reasonable cases, there is consistency between the scene and the act, and the quality of the act can be deduced from the quality of the scene. Acts correspond to existing contexts, and acts that follow adapt to the changing or changed context. Respectively, scene and agent, or a person and a place, are usually consistent with each other: specific context, background or situation requires specific agents. Thus, the scene-act ratio requires acts to be consistent with the scene, and the scene-agent ratio agents to be consistent with the scene.⁹⁵ According to Burke (1969), “a certain policy had to be [or should be] adopted in a certain situation”⁹⁶.

The application of the ratios can be reverse, too, and require the scene to be consistent with the act and the agent. Anyhow, according to Burke, there is always a background or a setting, a situation, in which the act(s) occurs and/or the agent(s) acts, and there is always a certain formal interrelationship between these terms.⁹⁷ However, usually, when the scene is modified to contain the act, when the scenic changes have occurred, the scene tends to re-emerge as the motivator of the following behaviour and acts.⁹⁸

Hence, the scene [or situation] is often used as a ground of motives, as a *purpose*, too, especially in politically motivated acts⁹⁹. In Kazakhstani case, one of the reasons articulated for the Kazakhstani capital relocation and the Astana project (the political acts) was that the new state needed a new capital (scene→act→scene). With the capital relocation Kazakhstan distanced itself from its old Soviet capital and hence its Soviet past, at least symbolically, and started its independent path with its new capital. The unusual and futuristic architecture of Astana emphasizes this separation and Kazakhstan’s orientation towards its new future.

Furthermore, also the other terms of the Pentad correlate with each other; there is always a purpose behind an act because there would not be a meaningful act if there were no purpose behind it; an act without a purpose would be a sheer motion. The same applies to

⁹⁵ Burke 1969, 11; Tilli’s lecture 26.09.2012; Burke 1978

⁹⁶ Burke 1969, 13

⁹⁷ Burke 1969, XV-XXIII; Tilli’s lecture 26.09.2012; Burke 1978

⁹⁸ Burke 1969, 11; Tilli’s lecture 26.09.2012; Burke 1978

⁹⁹ Burke 1969, XV-XXIII; Burke 1978

an agent, who needs to have a purpose behind his or her act. Moreover, there is a method or a medium, an agency that relates to the scene and the agent, and that penetrates the Scene→Act– and the Scene→Agent –ratios¹⁰⁰ (an agency refers thus to the instrument used by the agent in the scene-agent –ratio, or to a mean to an end in the scene-act –ratio).

Dramatism, according to Kenneth Burke, is thus a method to analyse human relationships¹⁰¹. It

“addresses the empirical questions of how persons explain their actions to themselves and others, what the cultural and social structural influences on these explanations might be, and what effect connotational links among the explanatory (motivational) terms might have on these explanations, and hence, on action itself”¹⁰².

Dramatism intends thus to be “a logic of inquiry, an instrumental logic which may be used to investigate hypotheses about particular problems”¹⁰³.

To conclude, in what follows, I will use Burke’s Dramatistic Pentad and the Idea of the Negative to inquire the Astana project and the new architecture of Astana. I argue that architecture and built environment, particularly specific monumental buildings, built to impress and to distinct the city, contain symbolism, messages, rhetorics and persuasion. Using Burke’s conceptions I will analyse the messages and the rhetorics of the Astana project and the new architecture of Astana. I will use Burke’s methodologies to form a picture of Astana and Kazakhstan, since, as I see it, for Kazakhstan Astana symbolises both the capital and the country. Therefore, I argue that the image provided by Astana is the way Kazakhstan wants to be seen home and abroad. Hence, I will read the Astana project and Astana’s new architecture politically to analyse what they stand for.

Architecture, as a way to impress, affects the way we see the city, the state, and the nation, the way we picture it. Therefore, I will analyse Astana’s new architecture focusing especially on its symbolic aspects. I will concentrate on architecture as an agency, as a way to make an impression, to pursue the ambitions of the country and its president, who is the main agent of Kazakhstan’s post-independent development. However, in the case of

¹⁰⁰ Burke 1969, 13-20; Tilli’s lecture 26.09.2012; Burke 1978

¹⁰¹ Overington 1977, 132

¹⁰² Overington 1977, 133

¹⁰³ Overington 1977, 133

Astana, the project and the architecture can be seen as purposes in themselves, too, in changing the image and the associations of the new capital and the country, and as acts of the president, the agent, in getting to a new scene that is as distinct from its Soviet past as possible. The main focus of the study will be on the architecture as an agency in getting to the new scene, and on the president of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev as the agent of the Astana project, the act of the study.

2.1 The Research Material

In order to answer my research questions, I will use two kinds of research material. In chapter 3 I will analyse ‘the Astana project’ mainly on the basis of the secondary research material. This includes Koch’s (2010, 2012, 2013)¹⁰⁴ and Schatz’s (2004)¹⁰⁵ research on the Kazakhstani capital relocation, Kazakhstan’s president Nazarbayev’s works on Astana and Kazakhstan (2006, 2010)¹⁰⁶, BBC News -, the Guardian - and the Astana times¹⁰⁷ articles on Astana and Kazakhstan, and information and articles provided on Kazakhstan’s government’s and Kazakhstan’s e-history web pages¹⁰⁸. Chapter 3 provides thus some background information on Kazakhstan’s capital relocation and the Astana project in addition to the Burkean political analysis conducted in it.

In the remaining Chapters I will analyse three selected pieces of Astana’s architecture through the photographs I took during my stay in Astana in the first part of the year 2014. Additionally, I chose some photographs for the study from the Foster + Partners’ web pages¹⁰⁹ and National Geographic article (2/2012)¹¹⁰ on Astana in order to get a bird’s eye view on Astana’s architecture I was not able to get myself. Newspaper articles, leaflets and

¹⁰⁴ Koch 2010; Koch 2012a; Koch 2013a; Koch 2013b; Koch 2014

¹⁰⁵ Schatz 2004

¹⁰⁶ Назарбаев Нурсултан Абишевич 2006, *Казахстанский Путь* [The Path of Kazakhstan] Караганда ISBN 9965-442-61-4; Назарбаев Нурсултан Абишевич 2010, *В сердце Евразии* [In the Heart of Eurasia] Алматы “Жибек жолы” ISBN 978-601-294-002-2

¹⁰⁷ <http://news.bbc.co.uk>; <http://www.theguardian.com>; <http://urbantimes.com>; www.astanatimes.com

¹⁰⁸ <http://www.akorda.kz>; <http://www.expo2017astana.com>; <http://e-history.kz>

¹⁰⁹ Foster & Partners, <http://www.fosterandpartners.com/projects/palace-of-peace-and-reconciliation/>; Foster & Partners, <http://www.fosterandpartners.com/projects/khan-shatyr-entertainment-centre/> [6.10.2014]

¹¹⁰ Lancaster 2012; Gerd Ludwig 2012, “Tomorrowland”, *National Geographic*, February, <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2012/02/astana/ludwig-photography#/04-baiterek-monument-observation-deck-670.jpg> [3.10.2014]

political ‘announcements’ that promote the image of Astana and Kazakhstan provide an additional research material and help to analyse the architecture I selected for the study.

I chose three pieces of architecture that I, according to my preliminary research¹¹¹, saw as the main architectural urban symbol bearers of Astana: the Baiterek tower, the Palace of Peace and Reconciliation, and the Khan Shatyr entertainment centre. The architecture chosen for the study consists of Astana’s most prominent and eye-catching new architecture situated on the main axis of the new administrative centre of the new capital¹¹². It was chosen for its extravagance and its apparent importance for Astana and Kazakhstan’s image building project. All the pieces of the architecture chosen for the study are planned and built in Astana during the early 21st century. Most of the research materials are from the early 21st century too, which makes the time period of the study the early 21st century and more precisely, the time after Kazakhstan’s capital was relocated from Almaty to Astana in 1997.

However, none of the chosen pieces of architecture represents the general appearance of the capital or the country outside the new administrative centre. Still, I chose the image this small area disseminates as the main research material for my study because it represents the image that president Nursultan Nazarbayev attempts to disseminate, the way he wants Astana and the new Kazakhstan to be perceived both home and abroad. The chosen architecture represents thus the image Astana is meant to disseminate, which is why it was chosen for the political reading of Astana’s new architecture –to read from the architecture the aspirations and desires of the independent Kazakhstan and its authoritarian president.

¹¹¹ My preliminary research included mainly searching information on the Internet and reading the news and articles on Astana found in Kazakhstan’s government’s web pages Akorda.kz and various newspaper articles on the Internet, such as the Guardian, BBC News, Urban times and others. It also included visiting some tourist information pages for seeing the most prominent tourist destinations in Astana (Advantour, Lonely Planet, and others) and contemplating on the picture of Astana that these Internet pages disseminate.

¹¹² The axis of the new administrative and commercial centre on the Left Bank of Astana from the air: <https://www.google.com/maps/@51.1300386,71.4313344,14z> [6.10.2014]

3. POLITICAL READING OF ‘THE ASTANA PROJECT’

In the wake of Kazakhstan’s independence Astana, as a barren Central Eurasian steppe town was “imagined as empty and boundless space”¹¹³. It was described as a blank slate, as a discursive “tabula rasa”¹¹⁴, which made different kinds of state interventions possible and legitimate. As such, Astana was perfect for becoming the new capital of the newly independent state – it was perfect for realizing the new vision that the Kazakh elite had about the new capital and the new state; the Astana project became an opportunity for the ruling elite to establish the state as an agent of modernity and as a constructor of the nation and the state.¹¹⁵

However, in reality Astana was of course not a depopulated steppe town; nomads and ancient Turkic tribes populated the space for over a thousand years¹¹⁶. The first shelters of the ancient town of Bozok, that was the first town to locate on the territory of today’s Astana, were constructed in the 7th and 8th centuries AD. Bozok was a fortress-town and a military headquarter of the ancient Turkic tribes, and it connected the East and the West as Astana is now intending to do.¹¹⁷ In a more recent history, in 1824, a unit of Siberian Cossacks founded a Russian military post in the region of today’s Astana, and the region became a commercial and economic center of the steppe. Later, during the Soviet era, in 1950s and 1960s, the city became the centre of the Soviet Virgin Lands Campaign led by Nikita Khrushchev to increase the grain production of the Soviet Union. The Campaign led to Russian immigration and hence to increase of the ethnic Russians in the northern part of Kazakhstan, which later led to ethnic tensions in the region.¹¹⁸

In 1991, when the Soviet Union scattered, Kazakhstan became an independent state. Back then Tselinograd¹¹⁹ (today’s Astana) was a small and unremarkable industrial town in the

¹¹³ Koch 2013a, 114-115; Koch 2013b, 139

¹¹⁴ Ibid

¹¹⁵ Koch 2012a, 119-120; Koch 2013b, 139; Koch 2013b

¹¹⁶ Koch 2013b; Koch 2012a, 119; “History of Astana”, History of Kazakhstan, <http://e-history.kz/en/contents/view/380> [10.10.2014]

¹¹⁷ “History of Astana”, History of Kazakhstan, Ibid

¹¹⁸ Reference.com, <http://www.reference.com/browse/astana> [9.3.2015]

¹¹⁹ Today’s Astana has had many name variations: during the tsarist autocracy and early Soviet times, the city was called Akmolinsk. In 1961, during the Soviet Union’s Virgin Lands Campaign, the city was renamed Tselinograd (*tselina* means virgin soil; Tselinograd, the capital of Virgin Lands Campaign), and in 1991, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and ‘Kazakhization’ of Kazakhstan’s city- and street names, Akmola

northern part of Kazakhstan.¹²⁰ Since then, the city has experienced remarkable transformation; in late 1997, the city, at tremendous expense¹²¹, became the new capital of the newly independent state. The decision to move the capital came from the president of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Ä. Nazarbayev, and in 1998 the capital was renamed Astana, which means capital in Kazakh.¹²²

During the last 65 years, only 13 states have relocated their capitals due to expensive and risky nature of the capital relocation process¹²³. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the whole Kazakhstan was in crisis; industrial and agricultural output was plummeting, unemployment rising, and education and healthcare systems were collapsing. Despite this situation, the president took the expensive decision to relocate the capital, and the capital was relocated. The decision seemed extremely ill timed and rooted in president's whim alone; president Nazarbayev's authoritarian tendencies, preferences, and his personalistic style of rule seemed to be the cogent reasons behind the Kazakh capital relocation.¹²⁴

According to Schatz (2004), colonial capitals are very often ill suited for creating national loyalty and control in a post-colonial context, which is why many post-colonial elites create, and sometimes relocate, their capital cities. Capital relocation, the strategy to move the capital from one place to another, usually to a more central one, is thus a way to address particularly acute state and nation building challenges and control the state territory; it is a response to the challenges caused by cultural, ethnical and religious geography of a state, and a tool to build a nation and a state.¹²⁵

(“History of Astana”, History of Kazakhstan, Ibid). Many Kazakhstans both in Astana and Almaty and probably elsewhere in Kazakhstan too, find it sometimes difficult to find the right addresses because so many street names have been changed fairly recently. For locals, especially for older ones, streets and places are still known by their Soviet names. (Conversations with locals, especially with ‘taxi’ drivers, carried out by the author during the spring and summer of 2014 in Astana and Almaty)

¹²⁰ Koch 2010, 1

¹²¹ According to Schatz (2004), the estimated cost of the relocation started with \$400 million. Soon, however, the cost estimations increased even though president Nazarbayev affirmed that the costs would not be covered from the state budget. (Schatz 2004, 111)

¹²² Koch 2012a, 120; Koch 2010, 769; Koch 2013a; Schatz 2004, 111; Akorda 2007, 41 (Akorda 2007. The Kazakhstan photo album Akorda has been published on the orders of the Administration of the Kazakh President with the involvement of the Protocol Service of the Kazakh President, and the Press Service of the Kazakh President, ISBN 9965-9270-8-1)

¹²³ Schatz 2004, 113, 116

¹²⁴ Schatz 2004, 111-112; Vykhodchenko Ludmila 2014, “Decisive battle for the beautiful”, History of Kazakhstan, 11 July, <http://e-history.kz/en/publications/view/669> [10.10.2014]; See also Akorda 2007, 31

¹²⁵ Schatz 2004, 111-112, 115-117; Koch 2013 b

Next, in the first part of the analysis, I will conduct a Burkean analysis of the Astana project; I will use selected research material and secondary research material to analyse the Kazakhstani capital relocation and the Astana project. In accordance with Burke's Pentad and the principle of drama that supposes coherency and consistency between the terms of the Pentad, I will analyse the scene, in which the act occurs and the agent acts, and try to find the motive behind the action, as, according to Burke, "Implicit in the idea of an act there is the idea of an agent; and for an agent to act there must be a scene"¹²⁶.

In the case of Kazakhstan's capital relocation and the Astana project, the *Scene* → *Act* – and the *Scene* → *Agent* –ratios seem to be the most appropriate ones, in other words, "an agent acting in a situation"¹²⁷. These are also the ratios that Kenneth Burke used in most of his analyses.¹²⁸ Anyhow, both ratios have a strong *Purpose* in them inasmuch as there would not be a meaningful act or an agent performing an act if there were no purpose behind it. Both ratios have a strong and very perceptible *Agency* in them, too, the new architecture of Astana that is used to change the mental image of the city and the state. Astana's architecture, as I see it, is the very way that Kazakhstan is trying to create its new scene, its New Kazakhstan.

The role of president Nursultan Nazarbayev is such an exceptional both in the capital relocation and the Astana project that he could be interpreted as the *Agent* of both of them. He could even be interpreted as the *Agent* of everything that has taken place in the independent Kazakhstan. According to him, Astana symbolizes Kazakhstan's "aspiration for the future" and connects it to Kazakhstan's "history, culture, and attitude"¹²⁹. For Nazarbayev, and for many Kazakhstanis, Astana is the heart of Kazakhstan and Kazakhstan the heart of Eurasia¹³⁰, which is why I chose Astana and its architecture as the subject of my study. Astana's 'Eurasian' architecture, the *Agency*, corresponds to Nazarbayev's ideas and symbolizes them.

¹²⁶ Burke 1978, 335

¹²⁷ Overington 1977, 143

¹²⁸ Ibid

¹²⁹ Назарбаев Нурсултан Абишевич in Astana, The Heart of Kazakhstan. Жаркын Ко, Полиграфия Орталығы Қазақстан Республикасы, 010000, Астана қ., Абая данғ. 57/1, р. 1

¹³⁰ Назарбаев 2010; See also Koch 2012a, Chapter 5, particularly p. 118; and "Kazakhstan, Heart of Eurasia" – and "The World Revolves around Kazakhstan" –leaflets 2013 ("Kazakhstan, Heart of Eurasia" –and "The World Revolves around Astana" –leaflets are both produced by the support of the Consulate General of the Republic of Kazakhstan in Hong Kong and Macao Special Administrative Regions in 2013. Acquired from the Embassy of Kazakhstan in Helsinki in January 2014)

According to Burke, humans construct the reality by way of symbols that represent the world. For Nazarbayev and Kazakhstanis, Astana is the symbol that represents the new world, the new Kazakhstan, in contrast to the old, Soviet, Kazakhstan. Therefore, next I will analyse the formation of this new Kazakhstan by way of Burke's Pentad and the Scene→Act – and the Scene→Agent –ratios.

3.1 From 'Tabula Rasa' to a World City¹³¹



Vladimir Kurilov 2013, «Astana – the city of dream»¹³²

¹³¹ In July 1999, UNESCO awarded Astana with a World City –title (Назарбаев 2006, 355); Official site of the Republic of Kazakhstan, “Astana - the capital of the Republic of Kazakhstan” <http://www.akorda.kz/en/category/astana> [14.11.2014]

¹³² Vladimir Kurilov is a famous Kazakhstani photographer who has dedicated his career in picturing Astana. His photographs tell about the development of today's Astana as seen by someone who has seen the change and the development of the city from its Soviet times to today's “fairy city, city of a dream”, which was the name that was given to his personal exhibition on Astana. This view was shot in 2013 from a rooftop of a high building, which got him an unusual perspective and lighting. (Kuzmenko I. 2014, “Exhibition ‘Astana - the city of dream’, 29th of July 2013”, 9 June, <http://e-history.kz/en/publications/view/18%20Originally%20published%20in%20Russian> [10.10.2014], originally published in Russian 29.7.2013; Akimat of Astana, Events announcement, <http://astana.gov.kz/en/modules/material/1701> [8.11.2014])

Astana has changed remarkably since the 1990s, particularly on the ‘Left Bank’ of the Ishim River, and during the 21st century the city’s transformation has accelerated; the size of the city has expanded and its population become three- or fourfold¹³³. Today futuristic –even utopian¹³⁴– and shiny glass-covered buildings sprawl across the Left Bank of the city.

Astana’s new architecture and its aesthetics strive to combine the ‘modern’ ‘European’ architecture with colourful ‘Eastern’ ‘domelike’ architecture, to embody ‘Eurasian’ architecture and hence to express the favourite metaphor of the president Nazarbayev, the metaphor of Kazakhstan being the bridge between Europe and Asia; Astana’s aesthetics bear thus Nazarbayev’s personal preferences.¹³⁵ Moreover, Astana’s architecture represents Kazakhstan’s future in the present; it promises a particular future and effectively creates it in doing so¹³⁶; Astana’s architecture strives thus to realize Nazarbayev’s vision of “Kazakhstan’s path to the stars”¹³⁷.

However, much of the change in Astana has been very superficial. Astana’s new and modern image is mostly an illusion accomplished with colourful facades; behind the facades, hidden from the public, at least in most of the cases, the old Soviet structures remain. Nevertheless, Astana’s new architecture helps to legitimize state’s functions and ideology; through Astana’s shiny architecture, Nazarbayev’s administration reflects an image of economic prosperity and modernity both home and abroad.¹³⁸ Architecture is thus an agency, a tool to create a mental image of a modern Kazakhstan. It is a tool for Astana and Kazakhstan to leave behind the associations with the Soviet past, the associations with the Soviet Union and the ‘Stans’ of post Soviet Central Asia.

Since 1994, since the decision to move the capital from Almaty to Astana was taken, there has been speculation in Kazakhstan and elsewhere about the relocation and the reasons

¹³³ Akorda 2007, 41

¹³⁴ Western press and foreign observers often label Astana’s architecture utopian, futuristic, and modernistic. See for example Moore 2010; and Carrington Daisy 2012a, “Astana: The world’s weirdest capital city”, CNN 13 July, <http://edition.cnn.com/2012/07/13/world/asia/eye-on-kazakhstan-astana/> [10.3.2015]

¹³⁵ Author’s observations 2014; Koch 2010, and particularly Koch 2010, 775-776

¹³⁶ Koch 2010, 776

¹³⁷ Назарбаев 2006, 305

¹³⁸ Koch 2010, 774

behind it¹³⁹. Especially Schatz and Koch's research¹⁴⁰ on Kazakhstan's capital relocation and the geopolitics of the Astana project are very helpful in explaining at least some of the motives and strategies behind Kazakhstan's capital relocation and the importance that the Astana project has, particularly for president Nazarbayev. This is essential in understanding the importance that Astana's architecture has for Astana and Kazakhstan (as a mean to impress and to change the mental image of the country). Therefore first, before going to Astana's architecture I will analyse Kazakhstan's capital relocation and the Astana project¹⁴¹, and the importance president Nazarbayev has in both of them.

Scenes and Acts and the Agent

According to Burke, a historical situation and specific circumstances may explain human behaviour and provide sufficient motivation for an act, and an agent to act. And, since 'sensible' explanations of the ratios presume particular acts to correlate with particular scenes, in a rational situation, the scenes and their acts, and the scenes and their agents are consistent and coherent with each other. The same applies to the agencies and to the purposes. Therefore, in a rational situation, the quality of the act can be deducted from the quality of the setting; acts correspond to existing context, and acts that follow adapt to the new context. And the same applies to the other ratios, too.

In his book *Казахстанский Путь* [The Path of Kazakhstan], president Nazarbayev (2006) justifies his unilateral decision to relocate Kazakhstan's capital from Almaty to Astana with four following motives that, according to him, in particular affected the relocation decision he made. Firstly, the relocation was needed to strengthen Kazakhstan geopolitically, which is why the central location of the new capital was emphasized; Astana lies in the centre of Kazakhstan and Eurasia; it connects Europe and Asia, and it is equally open for all the points of the compass. Secondly, the relocation was essential for security reasons; the capital of the independent state should situate as far from its external

¹³⁹ Even though the official decision to move the capital was taken in 1994, in his book *Казахстанский Путь* (2006), president Nazarbayev tells that he had the idea to relocate the capital and to rebuild and to recreate the new capital already in 1992.

¹⁴⁰ Koch 2010, 2012, 2013; Schatz 2004

¹⁴¹ For an extensive analysis on the Kazakhstani capital relocation and elite and non-elite narratives surrounding it see Koch 2012a.

borders as possible and have as central location as possible. Thirdly, the relocation was needed to revitalize the Kazakh economy by producing a multiplier effect through the Astana project; and fourthly, the relocation was required to reassert the stable and polyethnic nature of Kazakhstan's government by moving the capital to a very multinational region.¹⁴²

It is remarkable how similar Nazarbayev's justifications to relocate the capital from Almaty to Astana are with Alexandre Le Maître's utopia *La Métropolitaine*, written in 1682; Nazarbayev and Le Maître's criteria that a proper capital city should meet are very alike. First of all, Le Maître highlighted the importance of geographically centrally located capital. According to him, the best way for a monarch to show his power was to plan and build his kingdom –in other words the whole territory under his power– according to symmetrical and geometrical structure. For Le Maître, the ideal kingdom would thus be round, and the ideal capital in its geographical centre.¹⁴³ However, Kazakhstan did not move its capital 'just' to the geographical centre of Kazakhstan but to the geographical centre of Eurasia, which I see as a part of Kazakhstan's attempt to reposition and reimagine itself in the middle of Eurasia, in the geographical and symbolical rendezvous of Europe and Asia, in the 'heart' of Eurasia.

Secondly, according to Le Maître, the central location was not only politically important but also economically profitable. In the centrally located capital the monarch would be able to better take care and control everything that is taking place in his kingdom (from practicing of art to science, trade and transport) since in centrally located capital everything would go through the centre. Indeed, a central location fascinates still today; also the big businesses, when they choose the location for their headquarters, pay a careful attention to the location.¹⁴⁴ Le Maître's reasoning is thus very close to Nazarbayev's economical justifications for relocating the capital of Kazakhstan.

¹⁴² Назарбаев 2006, 344. See also Назарбаев 2006, Назарбаев 2010, Koch 2012a (Chapter 5), Koch 2013b, Koch 2010, and Vykhodchenko Ludmila 2014, "It was not easy, but in 1997 we transferred the capital", 8 July, <http://e-history.kz/en/publications/view/667> [10.10.2014]

¹⁴³ Rabinow 1982, 15-16 (Rabinow Paul 1982, "Kaupunkitalan sääteley" in Foucault Michel, Rabinow Paul 1989, *Kaupunki, tila, valta*. Yhdyskuntasuunnittelun laitos, Tampereen teknillinen korkeakoulu, Arkkitehtuurin osasto. ISBN 951-721-364-6 ISSN 0783-6554. Originally published in Rabinow Paul 1982, "Ordonnance, Discipline, Regulation: Some Reflections on Urbanism", *Humanities in Society*, Vol. 5, No. 3 & 4 University of Southern California, Center for the Humanities. ISSN 0163-4461)

¹⁴⁴ Rabinow 1982, 15-16

Schatz (2004) too notes that with a capital relocation, new economic and political opportunities build up. When the state apparatus is relocated to a new area, investment rate to the area increases as well as area's dweller's access to political power. Employment situation and area's services better and regional public comes to identify itself more strongly with the national identity represented by the elite of the state.¹⁴⁵ Economic and administrative reasons are thus the usual official justifications for postcolonial capital relocations because

“[A] city that was designed to serve the commercial and geo-strategic interests of the colonizing power is ill-equipped for the economic and administrative challenges of independent statehood. A new capital must be (re) located to serve as a hub for economic exchange, the central node for infrastructure, and the model of effective administration. Starting from scratch will allow the new city to quickly bypass old economic, transportation, and administrative challenges”.¹⁴⁶

Almaty's location in the southeastern corner of Kazakhstan was indeed poor for effective administration of and providing services to the entire Kazakhstani territory. The official justifications to generate economic growth and improve administrative efficiency are hence reasonable but hardly enough to explain Kazakhstan's capital relocation.

In addition to Nazarbayev's motives and official narratives, Almaty's location in the middle of Alatau Mountains prevented the urban expansion necessary for the capital growth, and trapped airborne contaminants in the city causing city's occasionally severe air pollution. Almaty's location in the southeastern corner of Kazakhstan seemed to be unable to link Kazakhstani regions and cities under the state apparatus, which was an important issue for the newly independent state to consider. Moreover, the security reason were pressing: Almaty's proximity to Chinese border caused insecurity to Kazakhstan's government, and the capital relocation to Astana brought Russian border closer to the Kazakhstani state apparatus.¹⁴⁷

The relocation also marginalized the rivals to Kazakhstan's so far only president Nursultan Nazarbayev and reinforced his allies. The Soviet legacy of the patronage culture was well

¹⁴⁵ Schatz 2004, 121-122

¹⁴⁶ Schatz 2004, 118

¹⁴⁷ Schatz 2004, 122-123

in place in Kazakhstan, and Nazarbayev used the capital relocation to remould Kazakhstan's patronage system to his favour. He used International Financial Institutions' (IFI) prescriptions of macroeconomic and institutional reform to test the loyalty of his patronage clients. By accepting IFI's terms Nazarbayev reduced the size of the overstuffed state apparatus, selected the most loyal cadres, and solidified his patronage structure. He moved the state apparatus from Almaty to Astana and strengthened his new patron-client ties, especially regarding Kazakhstan's emerging oil, gas and mineral extraction industries. In addition, with mass privatization and opening Kazakhstan for foreign direct investment, Nazarbayev promoted the political reach of his family. Hence, the Astana move consolidated Nazarbayev's position in power, eliminated his rivals, and reworded the elite that stayed loyal to him.¹⁴⁸

Furthermore, the relocation of the capital brought the state apparatus closer to the Russian dominated northern Kazakhstan and thus closer to the perceived unrest offsetting the Russian dominance there and showing government's readiness to answer the unrest and possible threats swiftly, and to persuade the ethnic Kazakhs to move to the northern parts of Kazakhstan efficiently 'Kazakhizing' the north.¹⁴⁹

However, according to the official rhetoric, the northern part of Kazakhstan is particularly diverse and multinational region. By choosing Astana as the new capital, the government affirmed its position as a polyethnic state that preserves and promotes the rights of the many ethnicities and religions cohabiting in Kazakhstan.¹⁵⁰ In spite of this multinational rhetoric, in *Казахстанский Путь*, the president Nazarbayev (2006) states increasing the proportion of ethnic Kazakhs in the north as one of the reasons of moving the capital to Astana; he sees the move as a way to relieve the unemployment in the south¹⁵¹ but also as a way to entrench the southern influence in the north, and as a whole, to reassert the Kazakh control in the Russified north¹⁵². Kazakhstan's ethnic diversity, a liability and a threat to Kazakhstan's elites, has thus been treated by an intent to homogenize the country; Kazakhstan's concern of ethnic diversity is connected to fear of separatism and

¹⁴⁸ Schatz 2004, 124-126

¹⁴⁹ Koch 2012a, 137-138; Koch 2013b; Koch 2010; Schatz 2004, 128-129

¹⁵⁰ Koch 2012a, 137-138; Koch 2013b; Koch 2010

¹⁵¹ Назарбаев 2006, 345

¹⁵² Koch 2012a, 137-139; Koch 2013b; Koch 2010 769-771

irredentism, even though it is almost entirely absent from official rhetoric.¹⁵³

In addition to this homogenization process, potentially destabilizing sub-ethnic divisions among Kazakhs were dealt too, by creating symbols that would appeal to all Kazakhstanis and create a minimum loyalty among them.¹⁵⁴ This symbolism is most apparent in government's discursive use of 'Eurasianism' that intends to transcend ethnic differences and divisions between nationalities and clans by referring to Kazakhstanis as Eurasians, which is normatively appealing to all Kazakhstanis. Moreover, the Eurasianist rhetoric promotes Kazakhstan as a state that fosters interethnic peace. With the capital relocation and the rhetoric surrounding it, the government places Kazakhstan, its capital, and its population at the geographic centre of the continent¹⁵⁵, narrating itself as the "bridge between the two subcontinents"¹⁵⁶, as the "integrator standing for the unification of Eurasian peoples"¹⁵⁷, and as the agent consolidating "the links between East and West"¹⁵⁸.

In Kazakhstan, the capital relocation was thus necessary for the state building purposes, for undermining rivalries in the north and for bringing the locus of power, the viable state institutions, in other words, the state's coercive apparatus, closer to the rivalries, which made their governing and controlling more effective. Moreover, the capital relocation strengthened president's patronage networks. However, Kazakhstan's capital relocation and state building process were not just about the state apparatus; they were also about symbolic order and persuasion: the ruling elites needed to affirm their political legitimacy and integrity to rule to the entire nation.¹⁵⁹

Behind the art of city planning and architecture –symbolism and aesthetics– lay politics and power relations. Already Le Maître emphasized the importance of showing the power relations in the city planning; according to him it was necessary to show national and international audiences the power of the sovereign and the social status of his subjects. Hence, he emphasized that the capital should be planned and built so that the power relations of the people would be directly seen from the architecture and the layout of the

¹⁵³ Koch 2013b; Schatz 2004, 128-129

¹⁵⁴ Schatz 2004, 121, 129-130

¹⁵⁵ Schatz 2004, 130

¹⁵⁶ Akorda 2007, 34

¹⁵⁷ Ibid

¹⁵⁸ Ibid

¹⁵⁹ Schatz 2004, 119-122

city.¹⁶⁰ In Astana, the will to impress and to produce and to reproduce the power relations is omnipresent; the power of the authoritarian president is everywhere¹⁶¹, and it is very well apparent in the architecture on the Left Bank of the Ishim River that “represents the heart of President Nazarbayev’s vision for his new republic”¹⁶², his New Kazakhstan.

To sum up, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan was in a very weak scene; Almaty was too close to the southern borders, especially to the Chinese border, which caused insecurity to Kazakhstan. Almaty’s urban expansion necessary for the capital growth was not possible either, and its location in the Southeast corner of Kazakhstan made the efficient uniting of Kazakhstan’s regions and cities under the state control very difficult; Kazakhstan needed to be strengthened geopolitically.

Moreover, the dissolution of the Soviet Union caused a deep recession in Kazakhstan. To revitalize the economy and to strengthen Kazakhstan geopolitically, to change the scene, the president of Kazakhstan, the agent, relocated the capital and initiated the Astana project (the acts). In pursuance of these acts, he got rid of the overstaffed state apparatus and strengthened his position in power. By moving the capital to a multinational region he also reasserted the stable and polyethnic nature of the Kazakh government, and, with the discursive use of Eurasianism brought about a stronger identification with the Kazakhstani identity represented by the elite of the state. Furthermore, by moving the coercive state apparatus to the northern part of Kazakhstan, he increased government’s ability to control the Russified north by kazakhstanizing it; he redistributed the Kazakh population from the south reasserting the Kazakh control over the area and changing its ethnic and political demography¹⁶³. With this one act, the agent got everything he needed for his new scene, his New Kazakhstan.

In other words, the Kazakhstani post Soviet scene needed the act (scene → act) and the agent to act (scene → agent). Just like Burke said, specific context, background or situation

¹⁶⁰ Rabinow 1982, 15-16

¹⁶¹ During the first weeks of my stay in Astana, I was amazed by the amount of posters representing president Nazarbayev. It felt like he was everywhere and that he had done everything that had any relevance for Astana and Kazakhstan. It truly felt like I entered the scene of the Soviet propaganda. However, I want to emphasize that this was my personal experience even though this is similar to what Koch describes in her studies on Kazakhstan (see the References).

¹⁶² Embassy of Kazakhstan in Malaysia, Astana – Capital City
http://www.kazembassy.org.my/astana_leftbank.htm [12.11.2014]

¹⁶³ Koch 2013b; Schatz 2004, 121-122

requires specific agents and acts consistent with the scene. In Kazakhstan, the capital relocation and the Astana project were the acts and the president the agent that the scene required to Kazakhstan to get to the new and better scene, the New Kazakhstan. Next I will concentrate more on Astana and on the Astana project as the new face of the New Kazakhstan.

Astana, the New Face of the New Kazakhstan

During the Soviet times, the Communist Manifesto¹⁶⁴, written by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, inspired greatly the urban planning. In Manifesto, Marx and Engels spoke of towns and cities as rescuers of “a considerable part of the population from the idiocy of rural life”¹⁶⁵.¹⁶⁶ When Bolsheviks gained power, the Soviet cities were imagined as embodiment of progress and modernity; they were tasked to produce “new urban citizens”¹⁶⁷, who would live according to “the Soviet way of life”¹⁶⁸.¹⁶⁹ According to Koch (2012a), “urban development projects are a central way in which state-scale actors inscribe their authority and territorial visions”¹⁷⁰, and she believes that “such has been the case for the Astana project”¹⁷¹.

The capital has always had a privileged position in articulating national identity –and this is where lies its symbolism. Through the capital the national identity is projected to ‘imagined communities’¹⁷², both to national and international ones. The capital is thus part of the state building effort. According to Koch and Gritsai and van der Wusten, during the Soviet times, the

¹⁶⁴ Marx Karl, and Engels Friedrich 2008, *The Communist Manifesto*, (From an 1888 edition). The Floating Press. ISBN 978-1-775412-43-4

¹⁶⁵ Marx and Engels 2008, 13

¹⁶⁶ See also Alexander Catherine and Buchli Victor, 2007, “Introduction” in *Urban Life in Post-Soviet Asia*, edited by Alexander Catherine, Buchli Victor, and Humphrey Caroline. University College London Press, p. 8); and Koch 2012a, 113-117

¹⁶⁷ Koch 2012a, 114

¹⁶⁸ Kotkin Stephen 1995, 34 in Koch 2012a, 114

¹⁶⁹ Koch 2012a, 114

¹⁷⁰ Koch 2012a, 113

¹⁷¹ Ibid

¹⁷² I refer here to Benedict Anderson’s idea of ‘imagined communities’ in which people, who may never face each other, come to identify themselves as a part of the same community (Anderson Benedict 1991, *Imagined Communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, London: Verso).

“[C]apital city served nationalist aims, and to that end, visions and visualisations of Moscow were instrumental to the state’s geopolitical aims. Moscow was meant to be a “propagandistic shopwindow” and the center of the worldwide communist movement”.¹⁷³

Astana’s new administrative centre serves similar aims¹⁷⁴. During the Soviet times, the capital city centres of the Soviet Republics were modernized and the buildings and streets were rebuilt so that they would suit the capital. Before international visits, the capital city centres were beautified, which is still common in Kazakhstan¹⁷⁵; before major national holidays, international events and visits, the central streets and places in Astana get new painting, illumination, repairs and all kinds of decorations suitable for the event, in most cases lots of artificial flowers. For instance during the international women’s day and the Nauryz holiday¹⁷⁶, the main streets and Ishim’s riverside are decorated with artificial flowers, colour changing lights and congratulatory placards. During the Astana Day¹⁷⁷ the festivities are to the full; there are concerts and fairs, decorations and posters congratulating Astana, and on the last day of the 3-day celebrations, the sky is filled with fireworks that honour the birthday of the capital [and the president].¹⁷⁸ Astana and its citizens, like Moscow and its citizens before, serve nationalistic aims; the city with its citizens is built to be a “propagandistic shop window”¹⁷⁹, the “face” of Kazakhstan, its “business card”^{180 181}.

¹⁷³ Gritsai and van der Wusten 2000, 39 in Koch 2012a, 115

¹⁷⁴ At least this is the impression one gets of the geopolitical aims of Kazakhstan when one visits the new administrative centre of the new capital Astana (Observations made by the author and conclusions taken by the author from various discussions with citizens and visitors of Astana in their 20s and 30s).

¹⁷⁵ Stronski 2010, 238 in Koch 2012a, 116; See also Koch 2012a, 116

¹⁷⁶ Nauryz is the Kazakh New Year celebration celebrated in the middle of March that determines the coming of the spring and the renewal of nature. Today, Nauryz is celebrated by variety of peoples (peoples from the Middle East, Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, India, Pakistan and China, and by Muslims of the Balkans, particularly Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Russia). For Kazakhs it is the symbol of spring renewal, love, fertility, and unity of people. (Nurazkhan Moldir 2013, “Nauryz, A Holiday of Unity of the People of Kazakhstan”, *Kazakh World*, 14 March, <http://kazakhworld.com/nauryz-a-holiday-of-unity-of-the-people-of-kazakhstan/> [23.10.14])

¹⁷⁷ The Astana Day is the birthday of the capital. In Kazakhstan every city has its birthday; for the birthday, streets get decorations, and there might be different kinds of festivities and even a fair to celebrate the city. Of course the celebrations of Astana’s birthday are the biggest and the most impressive ones. Observations made by the author during the seven months stay in Astana, Kazakhstan (from February until August 2014).

¹⁷⁸ Ibid

¹⁷⁹ Gritsai and van der Wusten 2000, 39 in Koch 2012a, 115

¹⁸⁰ Назарбаев 2006, 351

¹⁸¹ Назарбаев (2006) tells in his book *Казахстанский Путь* how it was necessary to ‘educate’ the people of Astana to be the ‘face’ of the nation (Назарбаев 2006, 351).

Astana is thus the centre of Kazakhstan and president Nazarbayev's nation-building project, and Astana's central location both in Kazakhstan and Eurasia provides the government the tools to propagandize Astana as "the centre of Eurasia"¹⁸² and "the heart of Eurasia"¹⁸³, and thus Kazakhstan as the "Heart of Eurasia"¹⁸⁴. According to Koch (2013b), the capital, when referred to as the heart of the nation, symbolizes national unity even when the country is riven with differences¹⁸⁵, which is why this representation was likely chosen for the extremely multi-ethnic and –religious Kazakhstan.

Kazakhstan's geographic orientation and Nazarbayev's nation building effort (Kazakhstan as the centre of Eurasia) is thus very strongly present, at least in the governmental material that produces and disseminates the new mental image of Kazakhstan pursued by the state. According to Nazarbayev (2006), Astana "reflects the spirit and soul of the whole country"¹⁸⁶, which makes Astana certainly Kazakhstan's image building project as well as Kazakhstan's nationalistic project.

In addition to Astana and Kazakhstan's geographic location and Kazakhstan's government's discursive use of Eurasianism, Astana's monumental architecture is being described 'Eurasian', too¹⁸⁷. However, despite the official Eurasianist identity project and stable and multi-ethnic state rhetoric, the structures of power are being 'nativized' by kazakhstanizing the north and enacting laws that require mastering Kazakh language in Kazakhstan's civil service office. This privileges ethnic, Kazakh speaking Kazakhs, and excludes other nationalities from the state office.¹⁸⁸ Indeed, mainly influential Kazakhs, who have good relations with the ruling elite and president Nazarbayev's family, occupy strategically important governmental posts¹⁸⁹, which makes the official state rhetoric rather artificial and made-up.

Still, the Nazarbayev administration invests in Eurasianism and its stable and multi-ethnic state rhetoric, and it exploits Astana's central location rhetorically to do so. According to

¹⁸² Назарбаев 2010; See also Koch 2012a, Chapter 5, and particularly the page 118, and Koch 2010

¹⁸³ Ibid

¹⁸⁴ "Kazakhstan, Heart of Eurasia" –leaflet 2013

¹⁸⁵ The heart symbolizes the organic unity of a nation (Koch 2013b).

¹⁸⁶ "Наша столица отражает дух всей страны." Назарбаев 2006, 354, Translated by the author.

¹⁸⁷ See for example Koch 2012a

¹⁸⁸ Koch 2010, 769-771

¹⁸⁹ Koch 2013b

Koch (2010, 2012a), much of the power of centrally located capital comes from the profits provided by miniaturization. The city, as a smaller spatial unit, allows a utopian closure otherwise impossible for the state.¹⁹⁰ As Koch (2012a) notes,

“Obviously, the city as miniature cannot stand in for the state’s territory – but as we see in Nazarbayev’s comments about Astana as a symbol of the country’s many transformations, it is often used as a rhetorical device to do so”¹⁹¹.

Nazarbayev’s representational practices and Kazakhstan’s official state rhetoric indeed advertise [‘the boulevard’ of] Astana as Kazakhstan¹⁹².

“Harmonious eclecticism on both banks of the Yesil river, absolutely unique architectural projects, new social programmes, the expansion of the city’s entertainment infrastructure and the development of the tourism and leisure industry – Astana, as a mirror, reflects all of the processes underway in the country”.¹⁹³

Capitals have an important role in nation building projects –they are built to invoke feelings of national pride and identity, and so was Astana. Astana, as a “mirror” of Kazakhstan, stands for the progress in the country; it represents the entire country and the progress it is taking.

The Astana project has been fundamental to Nazarbayev and Kazakhstan’s nationalistic propaganda that seeks to combat the challenges of ethnically and religiously diverse country whilst developing and improving its international image and prestige¹⁹⁴, especially after the Borat scandal¹⁹⁵. However, already before the scandal and mainly through the Astana project, president Nazarbayev was trying to increase the international awareness and prestige of Kazakhstan wanting to put Kazakhstan ‘on the map’. After the Borat scandal the mission intensified, and the Nazarbayev administration increased spending on

¹⁹⁰ Koch 2010; Koch 2012a, 123-124

¹⁹¹ Koch 2012a, 124

¹⁹² Ibid

¹⁹³ Akorda 2007, 41

¹⁹⁴ Koch 2010

¹⁹⁵ British comedian Sasha Baron Cohen chose Kazakhstan as his fictional character’s Borat homeland picturing Kazakhstan as a backward and intolerant country, opposite to the image that Kazakhstan’s government is trying to build. (Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan, 2006)

Astana, Kazakhstan's image building project¹⁹⁶.

Astana has been such a central part of Kazakhstan's project inasmuch that president Nazarbayev "views Astana as a miniature of [the optimum] Kazakhstan"¹⁹⁷, which highlights the importance of representing Astana as a modern city. The president has performed this representation by way of new, modern, and grandiose architecture, particularly on the Left Bank of the Ishim River, which represents the rupture with the Soviet architecture that is still present in most parts of Astana and Kazakhstan, and emphasizes the modern and progressive forward looking capital and country that Astana stands for.¹⁹⁸ Through Astana's architecture, Kazakhstan's president and elite realize their nation-building project; they represent Kazakhstan's identity as future oriented and modern, and with modern urban landscape, they legitimate the authoritarian rule of the president and the authoritarian state of affairs of Kazakhstan¹⁹⁹. Nazarbayev and his elite see Astana as an optimal miniature of Kazakhstan and the Astana project as a mean to reassert their authority as a logical agent having a vision of the future of the Kazakh nation and the state.²⁰⁰

Astana acts thus as a synecdoche for Kazakhstan. According to Burke, a synecdoche is

"the basic process of representation, as approached from the standpoint of 'equations' or 'clusters of what goes with what.' To say that one can substitute part for whole, whole for part, container for the thing contained, thing contained for the container, cause for effect, or effect for cause, is simply to say that both members of these pairs belong in the same associated cluster."²⁰¹

Therefore, as Astana represents [the ultimate] Kazakhstan, as Astana substitutes for Kazakhstan, Astana's modern look is extremely important to president Nazarbayev and his elite particularly as its opposite, non-modern, usually translates into being backward and uncivilized. And if Astana stands for Kazakhstan, it can certainly not be perceived as

¹⁹⁶ At the same time most of Astana and Kazakhstan's population cannot afford sports facilities, traveling, buying goods and services in Khan Shatyr or any other prestigious mall and so on.

¹⁹⁷ Koch 2012a, 123 (See also Назарбаев 2006 and Назарбаев 2010)

¹⁹⁸ Koch 2010, 769-771

¹⁹⁹ Koch 2010

²⁰⁰ Koch 2012a, 125-131

²⁰¹ Burke Kenneth 1957, *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, New York: Vintage, p. 65 in Overington 1977, 146

uncivilized and backward as well as it cannot be perceived, at least not desirably, as Soviet. The implication and the importance of Burke's Negative is precisely this:

“A variant of the argument from “paradox of substance”, in support of belief in the power of language to “present” the world to men and women in imaginative ways, is the one taken directly from “negative ambience” itself. What is a thing, an object, an entity, a being? Anything that it is “not”. A dialectical opposition obtains between “thing” and “not thing”.²⁰²

Therefore, if Astana is “anything that it is not”²⁰³, it is crucial for Nazarbayev and Kazakhstan that it is not backward, uncivilized, and Soviet –and the list could go on endlessly, just like Burke emphasizes: “You can go on forever saying what a thing is not”²⁰⁴. For Nazarbayev and Kazakhstan, it is extremely important that Astana is a success story, not a failure, because Astana is “the hallmark” of Kazakhstan²⁰⁵, “the pride of the whole nation, the triumph of independent Kazakhstan”²⁰⁶, the synecdoche for Kazakhstan. Hence, if Astana stands for Kazakhstan, it must be a success story, and it cannot be associated with anything that is considered negative or non successful in the contemporary world, only with positive and praised.

And the popular belief in Kazakhstan is that Astana has truly improved Kazakhstan's international image²⁰⁷ and provided economic opportunities for Kazakhstanis. Strategic

²⁰² Burke Kenneth 1970, *The rhetoric of religion: Studies in logology*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press (Original work published in 1961) pp. 23-24 in Appel Edward C. 1993, “Implications and Importance of the Negative in Burke's Dramatistic Philosophy of Language”, *Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 1, p. 56

²⁰³ Ibid

²⁰⁴ Burke 1970, 19 in Appel 1993, 51

²⁰⁵ Karibzhanova Rose, “The steppe pearl”, <http://e-history.kz/en/contents/view/1571> [10.10.2014]

²⁰⁶ Ibid

²⁰⁷ Koch 2012a, 164-165. According to Koch's research on elite- and popular narratives and -speculation around the capital relocation and the Astana project, there is a remarkable similarity between the official narratives provided by the presidential administration, and the popular ones; the popular speculation around the capital relocation reflects the official narratives (Koch 2012a, 125-131). In Koch's survey (2012a), the most popular beliefs to capital relocation were 1) Almaty's location in an earthquake-prone zone; 2) Astana's central location; 3) a need for a new capital for a newly independent state; and 4) a need to accelerate the economic development of the region, which are very similar to the official justifications (See Nazarbayev's justifications on the capital relocation, pp. 27-28) (Koch 2012a, 131-136; Koch 2013b; Koch 2010, 772). It is important to note here that the two most popular beliefs and justifications, the earthquake –argument and the central location –argument, are completely depoliticized; the relocation is shown as a mission the government had to carry out to take care of the security of its citizens and to better exploit the location of the capital geographically. These justifications for the capital relocation seem to be very objective (Koch 2012a, 133) –something that just had to be done despite of the prevailing economic situation. Another important aspect here in the popular capital relocation -discourse is the lack of the popular participation in the decision-

state documents and the president constantly repeat the role of Astana as a provider of economic opportunities and as a corrector of regional disparities within Kazakhstan. Kazakhstanis tend to truly accept this narrative even though the distribution of economic benefits has been and is very uneven both in Astana and Kazakhstan.²⁰⁸

Moreover, even though Kazakhstan is in many ways intending to be not Soviet, Kazakhstan's rhetorics and practises are still very similar to the Soviet ones; the promises of a better future, economic growth, and prosperity to all²⁰⁹ still justify the political sacrifices necessary to get there (for instance multiple restrictions on political freedoms currently in effect in Kazakhstan).²¹⁰ Considering the separation that Kazakhstan is eagerly trying to take from its Soviet past, it is interesting to see, how much the Soviet way of ruling still affects Kazakhstan's rhetorical practises and the way of acting. In these aspects Kazakhstan is still very Soviet even though it is trying its best to show that it is not.

Furthermore, Astanas new, modern and non-Soviet look applies only to a very small part of the city, to its new administrative and commercial centre on the Left Bank of the Ishim River. The rest of the capital maintains its 'village like' Soviet look. Therefore, it feels more like there are two distinct cities from different times and spaces, two Astanas, instead of one coherent, modern, and developed capital the image of which the Nazarbayev administration is very eagerly trying to disseminate.²¹¹

Two Astanas

The Astana project has been essential in enacting Nazarbayev's vision on Kazakhstan's post-Soviet modernity. Nazarbayev's government has spent a considerable amount of

making processes, characteristic to politically disempowered population and an authoritarian regime (Koch 2012a, 135-136). Empowerment in Astana, just like architecture, is very divided.

²⁰⁸ Koch 2012a, 131-136, 164-165; Koch 2013b; Koch 2010, 772

²⁰⁹ See the Kazakhstan 2030 – and the Kazakhstan 2050 –development plans: Official site of the president of the Republic of Kazakhstan, "The Strategy for development of the Republic of Kazakhstan", http://www.akorda.kz/en/category/gos_programmi_razvitiya [7.5.2015]; Official site of the president of the Republic of Kazakhstan, "Address of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan N. Nazarbayev to the nation. January 17, 2014", http://www.akorda.kz/en/page/page_215839_address-of-the-president-of-the-republic-of-kazakhstan-n-nazarbayev-to-the-nation-january-17-2014 [7.5.2015]; and Kazakhstan Strategy 2050, <http://kazakhstan2050.com/> [7.5.2015]

²¹⁰ Koch 2010 772-774

²¹¹ Observations made by the author 2014; See also Koch 2013c

money in order to turn Astana into a beautiful and attractive capital that unites all Kazakhstanis; the Astana project has thus been an important part of Kazakhstan's nation- and state building efforts. Moreover, the Astana project has been essential in creating the identity of a modern city; through the project the Nazarbayev administration has been able to create a new identity to Astana by excluding outside the city its unwanted opposites, and even though there are many opposites, many 'others' Astana wants to exclude itself from, most importantly it is not Soviet, it is not backward, and it is not a village, or at least it would like not to be.²¹²

However, still today most of the city does not match the hypermodern image of the Left Bank of the Ishim that has become the synecdoche for Astana and the modernity in and of Kazakhstan. This official modern image of Astana is propagated through the Internet and television, broadcasted domestically and internationally representing Astana as the vanguard of modernity in Kazakhstan giving the impression that the entire Astana looks like its Left Bank. Because of this, the city has been often referred to as a village –too many Soviet structures and village like settlements still remain there for Astana to be a 'proper' city– and if it is a village, it is not a truly modern city even though Kazakhstanis really want it to be.²¹³

Moreover, the Soviet understanding of city's function and symbolism still influence elite's perceptions of the 'city'; elite articulate Astana's modernity in contrast to the Soviet past strengthening thus the Soviet imaginaries by Soviet conceptions and binaries (modern and civilized versus soviet, uncivilized and backward).²¹⁴ Therefore, even though the elite wants to distance itself and Kazakhstan from their Soviet past and from being Soviet, the elite does so in contrast to the Soviet and thus keeps being Soviet.

Through the Astana project, Kazakhstan has thus been trying to create an impression of bringing progress to the entire Kazakhstan, accessible to all Kazakhstanis, and to distance itself from its Soviet past. The Astana project and particularly the large scale image building projects on the left Bank of the Ishim River have been framed as boosters of

²¹² Koch 2014; Назарбаев 2010

²¹³ Ibid; Observations made by the author during the spring and summer of 2014 and conversations had by the author with the residents in their 30s during the same time period; Koch 2013c

²¹⁴ Ibid

domestic economy and fosterers of international image and prestige.²¹⁵ As Koch notes,

“The official narrative of achieved “progress” in Kazakhstan consistently points to these large-scale, image-building projects, as though their benefits are accessible to all in the country, and as though progress in Astana reflects progress in the entire country”²¹⁶.

Government’s political justifications on the Astana project and its flagship architectural projects give indeed an impression that these projects benefit the entire country and population²¹⁷. However, these benefits are felt only by a small number of people mostly residing in Astana, the elite of Kazakhstan²¹⁸.

To Astana to achieve this image of a modern capital, many Soviet era structures and original Tselinograd settlements had to be razed and hid behind new facades. Moreover, even though there are many Soviet era structures and Tselinograd settlements that still remain today, many are waiting to be destroyed or demolished. Officially, president Nazarbayev and his government have deemed the old structures to be unworthy for preservation for their poor and unsafe living conditions, sanitation problems, and lack of amenities, but the old and decrepit appearance of the Soviet era buildings played an important role too, since it did not fit the new look of the new capital.²¹⁹ More importantly, the standardized Soviet building style was spoiling the new look of the new capital; it was out-dated and it had to be demolished²²⁰; according to the official Kazakh rhetoric, modern Astana’s urban form and architecture has to be unique.²²¹

Indeed, the Left Bank of the city and particularly ‘the Boulevard’ is full of colourful and unique buildings with various shapes and styles including the biggest tent in the world (Khan Shatyr), ‘the cigarette lighter’ (the Ministry of Transport and Communication), ‘the giant lollipop’ (Baiterek), and the pyramid shaped congress hall, built for the Congress of

²¹⁵ Koch 2012a, 153-154, 158

²¹⁶ Koch 2012a, 167

²¹⁷ Koch 2012a, 171

²¹⁸ Koch 2014

²¹⁹ Koch 2014

²²⁰ Nazarbayev 2010, 53 in Koch 2014, 8

²²¹ Ibid; Koch 2014

World and Traditional religions (the Palace of Peace and Reconciliation).²²² However, when one leaves the Left Bank, Astana looks just like another Soviet era city, the same as any other Soviet city in Central Asia²²³. Despite the efforts, Astana remains thus more like two very different cities than one modern and unique capital.

3.2 The Agent of Change



The President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev ²²⁴

The Astana project and all the architectural projects, at least on the Left Bank of Astana,

²²² Observations made by the author 2014

²²³ Excluding Turkmenistan. During my stay in Central Asia, I visited four Central Asian countries. Especially Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and Uzbek cities (excluding the old Silk Road cities like Bukhara and Samarkand) all looked the same. Tajikistan's Dushanbe looked a bit more 'Mediterranean' to me than other Central Asian capitals, but still definitely more Central Asian and standardized than 'European'. As we noted later with my European friend who I was travelling with in Central Asian countries, if one has seen one Central Asian capital, one has seen them all.

²²⁴ "The President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev: Abylay's dream came true", History of Kazakhstan, 3 October 2013, translated by Taukebayeva D. June 7, 2014 <http://e-history.kz/en/publications/view/203> [10.10.2014]

go through president Nazarbayev, who has had a huge impact on the new appearance on the Left Bank of the city. He is the agent of the Astana project and everything that has been taking place in the independent Kazakhstan. According to Akorda, the official site of the president of the Republic of Kazakhstan,

“The idea of creation of the new, modern capital of Kazakhstan belongs to the Head of State Nursultan Nazarbayev”²²⁵.

The president of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev, the “Leader of the Nation” and the “Father of the Nation”²²⁶, as the official status that gives him immunity from prosecution says, is the centre of a thriving personality cult, common to the former Soviet Union and post Soviet countries. In 1989 Nazarbayev, a metallurgic engineer, became the first secretary of the Kazakh Communist Party. By then, he was also the Chairman of the Kazakh Supreme Soviet, a fellow of the Soviet Politburo, and the president of the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic (KSSR). In 1991, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, he became the first president of the independent Kazakhstan with an impressive 91,5% of the vote²²⁷.²²⁸ Since then Nazarbayev has been the president of Kazakhstan extending his tenure through constitutional revisions and allegedly free elections²²⁹. In the two last elections, in 2011 and 2015, he won the re-election with an even more impressive 95.5% and 97,7% of the vote²³⁰. It was informed that even his main opponents “hoped he would win”²³¹. However, according to the independent western monitoring groups, Kazakhstan

²²⁵ Official site of the Republic of Kazakhstan “Astana - the capital of the Republic of Kazakhstan” <http://www.akorda.kz/en/category/astana> [14.11.2014]

²²⁶ In 2010 the parliament gave Nazarbayev the “father of the nation” –status that gives him immunity from prosecution (“Post-Soviet world: what you need to know about Kazakhstan”, *the Guardian/New East network*, 2014).

²²⁷ “Kazakhstan, Heart of Eurasia” 2013, 46

²²⁸ Yacher 2011, 1002; “Profile: Nursultan Nazarbayev”, *BBC NEWS*, 17 August 2007, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/asia-pacific/4489174.stm> [23.9.2014]; “Post-Soviet world: what you need to know about Kazakhstan”, *the Guardian/New East network*, 2014; Lillis Joanna 2013, “Tony Blair's Kazakhstan role has failed to improve human rights, activists say”, *the Guardian*, 8 November, <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/nov/08/tony-blair-kazakhstan-human-rights-role> [25.9.2014]; Watt Nicholas 2013, “Kazakhstan's autocratic president tells David Cameron: I would vote for you”, *the Guardian*, 1 July, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jul/01/kazakhstan-president-david-cameron-vote> [25.9.2014]

²²⁹ “Post-Soviet world: what you need to know about Kazakhstan”, *the Guardian/New East network*, 2014

²³⁰ Lillis 2013; Watt 2013; “Post-Soviet world: what you need to know about Kazakhstan”, *the Guardian/New East network*, 2014; Hannula and Niemeläinen 2015

²³¹ Watt 2013

has not had any free and fair president and parliamentary elections in the course of its independence²³².

Scene and Agent, and Agent and Act

Shortly after becoming the first president of Kazakhstan, Nazarbayev presented his idea of moving the capital from Almaty to Astana. He designed and executed Astana's makeover and Astana's "unique and mythical architecture"²³³. The capital relocation and the Astana project are arguably the most important political nation- and state building projects of his career²³⁴.

The Supreme Court of Kazakhstan adopted the decision to relocate the capital from Almaty to Astana on the 6th of July 1994, and the capital was officially relocated on the 10th of December 1997. On the 20th of October 1997, president Nazarbayev proclaimed Akmola as the new capital of Kazakhstan. All the state agencies and president's office were relocated to the new capital. The State Symbols were handed over to Akmola on the 8th of November 1997. Officially, Akmola became the capital of Kazakhstan on the 10th of December 1997, and on the 6th of May 1998 the president renamed Akmola as Astana.²³⁵ By the year 2000, the process of the capital relocation was mostly completed, and Kisho Kurokawa, a well-known Japanese architect, who planned Astana's master plan, the layout of the Left Bank of the Ishim River, had finished his design on the new Astana²³⁶.

In 2008, the government proclaimed the Astana Day, the day to celebrate the 'birthday' of the capital. The government chose the 6th of July for the Astana Day as it was on the 6th of July in 1994 when the Supreme Soviet of Kazakhstan gave its support to Nazarbayev to

²³² "Post-Soviet world: what you need to know about Kazakhstan", *the Guardian/New East network*, 2014

²³³ Williamson 2012

²³⁴ Koch 2013b; Koch 2014

²³⁵ Vykhodchenko 2014; "The initiator of developing the new capital city", History of Kazakhstan, <http://e-history.kz/en/contents/view/1554> [10.10.2014]; Official site of the Republic of Kazakhstan "Astana - the capital of the Republic of Kazakhstan", <http://www.akorda.kz/en/category/astana> [10.10.2014]; "Astana - the capital of the Republic of Kazakhstan", History of Kazakhstan, <http://e-history.kz/en/contents/view/378> [10.10.2014]; Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the Hellenic Republic, "Astana: 10 Years of Prosperity", http://www.kazembassy.gr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3&Itemid=24&lang=en [7.10.2014]

²³⁶ "The initiator of developing the new capital city", History of Kazakhstan, Ibid

relocate the capital. The 10th anniversary of Astana was celebrated as a proof to president's right decision to relocate the capital.²³⁷



Left Bank and the Akorda Presidential Palace²³⁸

However, there were also critique towards Nazarbayev's unilateral decision to relocate the capital, at least when it was taken. According to Kazakhstan's e-history pages, many took Nazarbayev's initiative to move the capital from Almaty to Astana too ambitious; there were "sceptics" that doubted the decision and that had distrust in it. However, all questionings of Nazarbayev's decision to relocate the capital are invariably followed by the glorification of him and his decision; he is described as a wise and far-sighted politician and the leader of the nation, and his decision to relocate the capital is expressed as a necessary step to combat the challenges of the newly independent post Soviet Central Asian state that only he saw at the time;²³⁹ he is always praised for his decisions and efforts in creating the new capital.²⁴⁰

²³⁷ "The initiator of developing the new capital city", History of Kazakhstan, Ibid

²³⁸ "Astana – capital of Kazakhstan" 2013, History of Kazakhstan, 29 July, <http://e-history.kz/en/publications/view/15> [10.10.2014], translated by Taukebayeva D., 3 June, 2014

²³⁹ Karibzhanova Rose, "The steppe pearl", <http://e-history.kz/en/contents/view/1571> [10.10.2014]

²⁴⁰ "The initiator of developing the new capital city", History of Kazakhstan, Ibid

Still, praised or not, as Schatz (2004) notes, when considering the capital relocation in an authoritarian context, the preferences of an authoritarian ruler play the decisive role. For an authoritarian ruler, the ‘personal prestige’ might be more important than any rational reasoning in a poor economical or political situation, like the one that the post-Soviet Kazakhstan had right after the independence. Glittering buildings and grandiose projects of Astana’s new administrative and commercial centre on the Left Bank of the city were built because the president decided so, and not because the impoverished and unemployed post-Soviet Kazakhstani population needed them or wanted them. But in an authoritarian context, capital relocation and -rebuilding is easier to pursue than in a democratic context: elite is more eager to accept the financial costs in anticipation of future political, economic and symbolic gains, and if the context is truly authoritarian, any opposition is easy to overcome through patronage and coercion.²⁴¹

As Nazarbayev’s “pet project”²⁴², Astana has had an essential role in establishing Nazarbayev’s vision of Kazakhstan as a modern and tolerant nation. Kazakhstan’s government has spent any amount of money in making its new capital one of the most attractive, beautiful and popular capitals in the world, which has been the aim of the Astana project all over. Moreover, Nazarbayev’s Astana needs to be a competitive and innovative capital, an example to all other cities in Kazakhstan and Central Asia, and it needs to unite all Kazakhstanis, regardless of their different ethnicities and religions.²⁴³

The Astana project, according to Nazarbayev, is the biggest achievement of the independent Kazakhstan. According to him, the project’s modern architecture symbolizes Kazakhstan’s progress, success, and originality in the world.²⁴⁴ For him, Kazakhstan’s place in the world and the world rankings is very important, and he often sites Kazakhstan’s place in them. He is developing a “hyper-modern” image for Astana, and he is using the prestige of the internationally famous architectural firms²⁴⁵ to do so and to increase Astana and Kazakhstan’s international recognition and prestige in the world²⁴⁶.

²⁴¹ Schatz 2004, 117-118

²⁴² Koch 2014

²⁴³ Koch 2013a; Koch 2014

²⁴⁴ Koch 2013a; Koch 2014

²⁴⁵ Foster + Partners, Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill (Koch 2013a, 110)

²⁴⁶ Koch 2013a, 110

Still, despite employing these kinds of popular strategies to develop Astana, Nazarbayev emphasizes that Astana and Kazakhstan are being developed in a “Kazakh way” in distinction to any other ways. The developmental rhetoric is part of the nationalistic narrative that developed in Kazakhstan during the early years of the independence. As Koch (2013a) argues, ‘the Kazakh way’ -narrative, as the other ‘third way’ -narratives developing in the post-communist world, rejects western political and economic (neo) liberalization narratives and favours state-controlled capitalism that legitimizes better domestic political and economic arrangements²⁴⁷ in an autocratic state like Kazakhstan.

Nazarbayev has attracted a lot of criticism in foreign press, particularly for the amount of power and wealth held by him and his family.²⁴⁸ Nevertheless, he has been trying to improve Kazakhstan’s international image by chairing international organizations and improving Kazakhstan’s level of development. Kazakhstan’s huge oil reserves facilitate Kazakhstan’s urban development as they do “conceal” Kazakhstan’s human rights’ situation from the minds of national and international corporations that want to profit from Kazakhstan’s oil.²⁴⁹ Naturally, Nazarbayev claims that Kazakhstan secures the key human rights like free elections, political parties and opposition²⁵⁰. He goes on to point out that the democracy in Europe was not born in one night either; it was an outcome, not the beginning of the governmental system. Kazakhstan is still a young country finding its way, and “nobody has a right to instruct us [Kazakhstan] how to live”²⁵¹.²⁵²

Nevertheless, the president Nazarbayev seems to be genuinely popular in Kazakhstan. As Koch (2012) notes, “the “state” is popular in Kazakhstan today because it provides economic opportunity – which is generally scripted as the result of Nazarbayev’s benevolence and foresight”²⁵³. The Astana project is used to promote this image of benevolence; the city and its many ultramodern and extravagant new structures are said to be for the people. The Astana project has been an important element in creating the image of Nazarbayev’s benevolence, and the project has become synonymous with his cult of

²⁴⁷ Koch 2013a, 110

²⁴⁸ See for instance “Post-Soviet world: what you need to know about Kazakhstan”, *the Guardian/New East network*, 2014

²⁴⁹ Williamson 2012; “Post-Soviet world: what you need to know about Kazakhstan”, *the Guardian/New East network*, 2014

²⁵⁰ Watt 2013

²⁵¹ Nazarbayev 2013 in Watt 2013

²⁵² Ibid

²⁵³ Koch 2012a, 187

personality. Still, as Koch (2012) further notes, "many people in Kazakhstan, however, experience and perform their political subjectivity as one real love, appreciation, and respect for the homeland and its benevolent leader, President Nazarbayev"²⁵⁴.²⁵⁵

The Soviet Union did instil a deep emotional attachment to the "state", and this is still largely the case in today's Kazakhstan, where Nazarbayev's administration employs paternalistic way of ruling providing economic opportunities and stability to Kazakhstanis. Moreover, through the Astana project, the administration stimulates Kazakhstanis' emotions of pride (for instance through sports, city beautification projects, and spectacles). For Kazakhstanis, Kazakhstan is their homeland, and they support the idea of national progress and greatness.²⁵⁶ For them, the president is the "main author and architect"²⁵⁷ of the Astana project, its "father"²⁵⁸ ²⁵⁹.

For Nazarbayev, Astana as the centre of Kazakhstan's modernization project and the showcase for Kazakhstan's modernization achievements, is such a "pride and heart of Kazakhstan"²⁶⁰ that he has associated the city with himself; even the Astana Day, the birthday of the capital, is celebrated on his birthday, on the 6th of July [even though this was of course not the official reason for choosing this date for Astana's celebrations].²⁶¹ According to Koch (2012a), "Certain regimes have shown an exceptional affinity for nationalist spectacle and performances, often working together an autocratic leader's personality cult"²⁶², and this has been the case for Kazakhstan, where spectacles have had a depoliticizing and aestheticizing purpose²⁶³. Flagship architectural projects, nationalistic holidays and sporting events in particular have been used to create nationalism and patriotism. Still, the biggest spectacle in Astana (and the entire Kazakhstan) is the Astana Day: every year millions of dollars are spent to the multi-day festivities and concerts; no other Kazakh celebration matches the extent of the funding, not even the Independence

²⁵⁴ Koch 2012a, 206

²⁵⁵ Koch 2012a, 200-206

²⁵⁶ Koch 2012a, 203-205

²⁵⁷ Koch 2012a, 130

²⁵⁸ Koch 2012a, 1

²⁵⁹ Koch 2012a, 1, 123-124, 125-131

²⁶⁰ Nazarbayev 2006a, 350 in Koch 2012a, 129

²⁶¹ Koch 2012a, 7-8, 168

²⁶² Koch 2012a, 155

²⁶³ Koch 2012a, 155-167

Day or the New Year celebration.²⁶⁴ And, in general, all the spectacles and economic developments in Kazakhstan are accredited to Nazarbayev's benevolence and productive policies: "The country's results are the effect of the productive policy pursued by its President Nursultan Nazarbayev"²⁶⁵.

Astana's monumental architecture can be read thus as a monument to Nazarbayev's utopian vision on Kazakhstan's modernity and idealized future and a tool to create nationalism and patriotism in Kazakhstan.²⁶⁶ Nazarbayev, as the agent of the Kazakhstani capital relocation and the Astana project, has managed to picture himself as a benevolent leader improving Kazakhstan's economic and political situation home and abroad. For many Kazakhstanis, he has done miracles in Kazakhstan's economic situation, brought progress and modernity to Kazakhstan, and made Kazakhstan and Kazakhstanis proud of their achievements.²⁶⁷

3.3 Conclusion: The Great Era of Astana?²⁶⁸

The president Nazarbayev often emphasizes Astana's geographical centrality and refers to Astana as the heart of Kazakhstan and Eurasia²⁶⁹. One of his books (2010) is even titled *В сердце Евразии* [In the Heart of Eurasia]. Nazarbayev's idea of 'Eurasianism' has had a huge impact on Kazakhstan's new identity and Astana's built environment; even Astana's master plan and Astana's architecture resonate with it. Astana master plan architect Kisho Kurokawa's ideas on symbiosis made him close to Nazarbayev's Eurasianism and hence a great choice for designing Astana's master plan. Astana's architecture, in respect for Astana's location in the heart of Eurasia, embraces Eastern and Western culture and architecture and combines them. In Astana, as Nazarbayev often emphasizes, different

²⁶⁴Koch 2012a, 168-177

²⁶⁵ Akorda 2007, 29

²⁶⁶ Koch 2012a, 7-8, 168

²⁶⁷ For his economic miracle, see for instance Akorda 2007, 30-33

²⁶⁸ The president of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev in his "Astana – Strategy of Success" –speech <http://e-history.kz/en/contents/view/1018> [10.10.2014] stated that 'the Great Era of Astana' has begun.

²⁶⁹ Назарбаев Нурсултан Абишевич 2001, *Эпицентр мира* [Epicentre of Peace, but the Russian word мир also translates to World]. Almaty; and Назарбаев 2006; See also Koch 2013b

cultures, customs, traditions, and ethnic and religious groups live together in peace and harmony, which is a great asset for Kazakhstan.²⁷⁰

The capital relocation and the Astana project started a new era for Kazakhstan, and Astana's importance for the New Kazakhstan is truly wondrous. Astana is the centre of Eurasia, the national idea of Kazakhstan, and the symbol of Kazakhstan's independence and unity. For Kazakhstanis, Astana has become a strong and prospering capital that unites all Kazakhstanis²⁷¹, and, like Nazarbayev said, Kazakhstanis should be proud of the achievements of Astana and the modern Kazakhstan.²⁷² For Nazarbayev and many Kazakhstanis, Astana is “the epicentre of the most important global political events”²⁷³, and the epicentre of the world.

For Nazarbayev and many Kazakhstanis, the Great Era of Astana and Kazakhstan have thus begun, at least rhetorically. Through the capital relocation and the Astana project, Kazakhstan has entered the new scene of the New Kazakhstan. With the benevolent guidance of president Nazarbayev, Kazakhstan has become economically more prosperous and politically more unite and harmonious than ever. With the capital relocation and the Astana project, president Nazarbayev addressed particularly acute post Soviet state and nation-building challenges, increased the control of the state territory, and affirmed his political legitimacy and integrity to rule the entire nation. For Kazakhstanis, Kazakhstan's success in the world is mainly due to Astana's development and Kazakhstan's benevolent leader Nazarbayev.

Astana and its new architecture, as the centre of Kazakhstan and president Nazarbayev's nation- and image-building project, is the symbol of Kazakhstan's many transformations

²⁷⁰ Назарбаев 2006; Назарбаев 2010; Koch 2012a, 159-161; Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the Hellenic Republic, “Astana: 10 Years of Prosperity”, Ibid; Official site of the Republic of Kazakhstan, “Astana - the capital of the Republic of Kazakhstan”, Ibid; “Astana - the capital of the Republic of Kazakhstan”, History of Kazakhstan, Ibid

²⁷¹ Nazarbayev's speech on the 10th anniversary of Astana in the Official site of the Republic of Kazakhstan “Astana - the capital of the Republic of Kazakhstan” <http://www.akorda.kz/en/category/astana> [14.11.2014]

²⁷² From Nazarbayev's speech “Abylay's dream came true” in “The President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev: Abylay's dream came true”, History of Kazakhstan, Ibid; “The historical role of the President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev to move the capital of an independent state”, History of Kazakhstan, <http://e-history.kz/en/contents/view/709> [10.10.2014]; Official site of the Republic of Kazakhstan “Astana - the capital of the Republic of Kazakhstan”, Ibid; “Message of President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev”, History of Kazakhstan, 17 January 2014, <http://e-history.kz/en/publications/view/445> [10.10.2014]

²⁷³ “Astana - the capital of the Republic of Kazakhstan”, History of Kazakhstan, Ibid

and progress, a synecdoche for Kazakhstan, and a miniature of the optimum Kazakhstan. Therefore, representing Astana as a modern city and Kazakhstan's identity as future oriented and modern is extremely important, particularly as their opposite (non-modern) is usually understood as backward and uncivilized.

Astana's new architecture helps thus to legitimize state's functions and ideology; through Astana's architecture, Nazarbayev's administration reflects the image of economic prosperity and modernity both home and abroad. Astana's architecture acts thus as an *agency*, a tool to create a new scene and a new mental image for a New Kazakhstan. It is a tool for Astana and Kazakhstan to leave behind the associations with their Soviet past, the associations with the Soviet Union and the 'Stans' of the post Soviet Central Asia (to the extent that president Nazarbayev was ready to initiate the process of changing the name of the country from Kazakhstan to Kazakh Eli, which means 'Land of Kazakhs' (note: 'Land of Kazakhs' and not 'Land of Kazakhstanis' or 'Kazakhstan's Land'²⁷⁴)).

With the two acts of the capital relocation and the Astana project, the president got thus everything he needed for his new scene, his New Kazakhstan. During the Soviet times, Kazakhstan was not at the centre of anything; now Kazakhstan, with the lead of president Nazarbayev, is reimagining itself as the centre and the heart of Eurasia; it is reimagining itself from the periphery of the Soviet Union to the heart of Eurasia.

Next I will focus on the Astana project and the new architecture of Astana by way of analysing three prominent examples of Astana's new architecture as the agencies of change, as the agencies to leave the scene of the old Kazakhstan and to enter the scene of the New Kazakhstan: the Tree of Life, the Palace of Peace and Reconciliation and the Khan Shatyr entertainment and shopping centre. These buildings represent the most

²⁷⁴ The idea of the president caused discussion both in Kazakhstan and the world press. See for instance Solovyov Dmitry, Elizabeth Piper (ed.) 2012, "Kazakh leader may drop the 'stan' in Kazakhstan", Reuters, 14 December, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/02/07/us-kazakhstan-name-idUSBREA160HA20140207> [7.5.2015]; Tomlinson Simon 2014, "President to drop the 'stan' from Kazakhstan because he is fed up with people confusing his country with poorer nations with similar names", *Daily Mail*, 7 February, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2554014/President-drop-stan-Kazakhstan-fed-people-confusing-country-poorer-nations-similar-names.html> [7.5.2015]; "Kazakhstan: President suggests renaming the country" 7 February, *BBC NEWS*, <http://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-news-from-elsewhere-26082740> [7.5.2015]; Tadeo Maria 2014, "Drop the 'stan': Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev mulls renaming the country to Kazak Yeli", *The Independent*, 7 February, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/drop-the-stan-kazakhstan-president-nursultan-nazarbayev-mulls-renaming-the-country-to-kazak-yeli-9115194.html> [7.5.2015]

prominent agency for changing the mental image of Kazakhstan, for leaving the era of the old Soviet Kazakhstan and for entering the era of the new independent and modern Kazakhstan.

Even though Astana and its new architecture can be read through the five terms of the Pentad²⁷⁵, I will concentrate on Astana and its new architecture as an agency, as a mean to impress and to raise global awareness and prestige of Kazakhstan. However, since the role of the architecture and the new capital in symbolizing the entire country is such a significant, I will analyse Astana as a purpose and as a symbol of the new scene, the New Kazakhstan, too. In the next chapters, through Astana's architecture, I will thus focus on the symbolic making of the 'New Kazakhstan' and on the representation of the New Kazakhstan the Nazarbayev administration is so eagerly trying to promote.

²⁷⁵ Here the scene would be today's Astana that is experiencing changes through construction- and beautification projects, a city that is not ready. The acts would be the architectural- and beautification projects whose ambition (purpose) would be making the city as one of the most beautiful capitals in the world, the capital that would be talked about worldwide. And the new scene would be a beautiful capital where there would be no signs left of the Soviet architecture and the Soviet past, a capital that would be respected and admired worldwide.

4. FROM ASHES TO GLORY: THE TOWER OF REBIRTH

In many cases, capital city building and rebuilding involves special projects²⁷⁶ that intent to differentiate the city from any other city in the world and to become its symbols, peculiar to the city and its perceivability. In Astana, such has been the case with the new buildings on the Left Bank of the city, particularly regarding the Baiterek Tower, the Palace of Peace and Reconciliation, and the Khan Shatyr entertainment- and shopping complex.

In this chapter I will scrutinize Baiterek and its symbolical meaning for Kazakhs and the New Kazakhstan, the new scene. I will read Baiterek politically using the analytical notions of Burke's scene, act, agent, agency, and purpose in the *Scene*→*Act* and the *Scene*→*Agent* –ratios. I aim to identify the motives behind Baiterek that I see both as an act and an agency, planned and built by president Nazarbayev, the agent behind the Baiterek Tower. The purpose of Baiterek, as I see it, is to symbolically lead Kazakhs from the ashes of their past to the glory of their future, which is the purpose of Baiterek and Astana's new architecture, the agency to lead to the new scene, to the New Kazakhstan, as a whole.

The role of president Nazarbayev is very exceptional in Astana's new architecture and particularly in Baiterek. Baiterek is a part of his image-building project, the agency to impress both home and abroad and to raise Kazakhstan's prestige in the world. For Nazarbayev, Astana is the heart of Kazakhstan and Kazakhstan the heart of Eurasia²⁷⁷, and since Baiterek is the official symbol of Astana and the New Kazakhstan, I find it as one of the most important pieces of architecture to concentrate on. Therefore, I will conduct a Burkean analysis of Baiterek concentrating on its symbolism, messages and significance to Nazarbayev's nation building process, and to Astana and Kazakhstan in general. However, since I see Astana's new architecture as an agency, as a mental tool to leave the scene of the Soviet past and to enter the scene of the independent and prosperous Kazakh future, the New Kazakhstan, I will concentrate on Baiterek particularly as an agency in president Nazarbayev's wider nation building drama.

²⁷⁶ “Many capital city restructuring, styling, or building efforts involve ‘special projects’” (Van der Wusten 2000, 133 in Koch 2010, 776).

²⁷⁷ Назарбаев 2010; See also Koch 2012a, 118; and “Kazakhstan, Heart of Eurasia” – and “The World Revolves around Kazakhstan” –leaflets (2013)

4.1 Baiterek, the Tree of Life

Baiterek, in Kazakh “a giant poplar tree”²⁷⁸ –and in Kazakh and Persian mythology, “the Tree of Life”²⁷⁹, is the official symbol of Astana, the symbol of the New Kazakhstan.



Baiterek, Astana ^{280 281}

Baiterek was built to represent this mythical Tree of Life that for Kazakhs symbolizes the rebirth of the Kazakh nation and thus the rebirth of Kazakhstan. With its form, Baiterek

²⁷⁸ <http://translate.enacademic.com/бәйтерек/en/>; <http://translate.meta.ua/en/translator/english/kazakh/>; EXPO2017 <http://www.expo2017astana.com/en/page/astana/> [7.10.2014]

²⁷⁹ бәйтерек: 1) раст. тополь [poplar] 2) ствол [trunk] 3) миф. Древо жизни [myth: tree of life] <http://www.translatos.com/en/kz-ru/бәйтерек> [7.10.2014]

²⁸⁰ Photo taken by the author, June 2014

²⁸¹ To get more looks on Baiterek, visit the following pages: Google Maps <https://www.google.com/maps/views/view/106331840693614528650/gphoto/5960453504311176434?gl=us&heading=297&pitch=90&fovy=75> [22.1.2015] and 360globe.net <http://www.360globe.net/kazakhstan/astana/bayterek-tower-exterior.html> [22.1.2015]

symbolizes an ancient Kazakh folktale and a national myth where the mythical and sacred bird Samruk (Simurgh) lays its golden egg of happiness atop the sacred Tree of Life.²⁸²

Baiterek's entire substance represents this Kazakh national myth: the white tower with pointing spires symbolizes the trunk of the Tree, and the golden glass sphere atop of it the golden egg that the mythical Samruk lays atop the Tree every year²⁸³.²⁸⁴ According to the Kazakh folktale, the golden egg symbolizes the sun, in other words life and hope, and happiness and new beginnings.²⁸⁵

The Tree of Life and its different forms and name variations are present and considered sacred in many old cultures and traditions worldwide (Tree of Life, World Tree, Tree of Seeds²⁸⁶). There are also several different versions and name variations regarding mythology and folktale revolving around Samruk and its young in Persian, Iranian, and Central Asian literature. These old folktales have been transmitted only orally (until very recently), which explains partly their variations.²⁸⁷

In Kazakh mythology and fairy tale, the mythological bird like creature is called Samruk. Its equivalent creature in Persian mythology is Simurgh, a fabulous mythical flying creature of happiness, half bird and half mammal, whose substance symbolizes the union between the heaven and earth²⁸⁸. Simurgh is also a frequent character in the Greater Iranian art and literature, iconography of medieval Armenia, the Byzantine Empire, and other

²⁸² Atlas Obscura Astana, Kazakhstan, Bayterek Tower

<http://www.atlasobscura.com/places/bayterek-tower> [5.9.2014]

²⁸³ Koch 2013a, 112; Embassy in Kazakhstan in Malaysia, "Astana – Capital City", Left Bank http://www.kazembassy.org.my/astana_leftbank.htm [22.1.2015]

²⁸⁴ Atlas Obscura Astana, Kazakhstan, Bayterek Tower, Ibid; Embassy of Kazakhstan in Malaysia, "Astana – Capital City", Left Bank, Ibid; Lancaster 2012; "A Summary of cultural objects of Astana", *The Astana Times, Bringing Kazakhstan to the World* 2014, Astana Nation, 3 July, <http://www.astanatimes.com/2014/07/summary-cultural-objects-astana/> [6.9.2014]

²⁸⁵ Atlas Obscura Astana, Kazakhstan, Bayterek Tower, Ibid; Embassy of Kazakhstan in Malaysia, "Astana – Capital City", Left Bank, Ibid; Lancaster 2012

²⁸⁶ The Tree of Life is considered sacred in many old cultures (Persian, Russian and Caucasian traditions, Scandinavian world tree and others) (Nabarz Payam 2005, *The Mysteries of Mithras: The Pagan Belief That Shaped the Christian World*, Chapter 5, "Simorgh – a Mithraic Fairy Tale", pp. 75, 82. Canada, Webcom; Ghahremani Homa A. 1984, "Simorgh – An Old Persian Fairy Tale", *Sunrise magazine*, June/July 1984. Theosophical University Press; Schmidt Hanns-Peter, 2002, "Simorgh", *Encyclopedia Iranica*. <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/simorg> [8.9.2014]).

²⁸⁷ Nabarz 2005, 71; Ghahremani 1984

²⁸⁸ Nabarz 2005, 71, 82; Ghahremani 1984

regions that were influenced by Persian culture²⁸⁹. In Sufi mysticism and classical and modern Persian literature, Simurgh is an allegory for God; it is a deity of victory, fortune, wealth and rain. It is a saviour and a guardian, and it grants protection, boons and powers.²⁹⁰

Simurgh is very closely connected to the Tree of Life that in many old cultures has all-healing abilities and all the different seeds of the vegetable world. By nesting on the Tree, Simurgh scatters the seeds of the Tree to the world.^{291 292} “Whenever Simurgh flies up from the tree one thousand branches grow, and whenever she sits on it, one thousand branches break and the seeds fall into the water.”²⁹³ The enemy of Simurgh, the serpent that represents the underworld, eats its young every year. Still, every year Simurgh returns to lay its eggs on the Tree.^{294 295} Baiterek represents thus the ever-lasting fight between good and evil, and through Samruk’s golden egg, the rebirth of the Kazakh nation. For Kazakhs, Baiterek symbolizes thus their new beginning, their New Kazakhstan.

For now, Kazakhstan seems to have won the fight between good and evil. Baiterek represents this victory, the independence of Kazakhstan and the seeds Kazakhstan has for the happiness and prosperousness in the future. Baiterek represents this promise of the better future in the present and gives a glimpse of Kazakhstan’s modern future that, if Kazakhstanis are willing to wait for, will come to them soon enough. Baiterek, as the agency and the symbol of rebirth and new beginning, is the promise of the better scene that leads to a new, prosperous and admired independent Kazakhstan.

²⁸⁹ Japanese Mythology & Folklore 2014, “From Golden Egg to Saena-Simurgh-Phoenix to Ashes and Worm (?): Will the real firebird please step forward?” 8 February, <http://japanesemythology.wordpress.com/2014/02/08/from-golden-egg-to-saena-to-simurgh-to-phoenix-to-ashes-and-worm-will-the-real-firebird-please-stand-up/> [10.9.2014]

²⁹⁰ Schmidt 2002

²⁹¹ Nabarz 2005, 75, 82; Ghahremani 1984; Schmidt 2002

²⁹² For a full definition for Simorgh/Simurgh/Samruk, see Encyclopaedia Iranica, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/simorg> [8.9.2014]

²⁹³ Nabarz 2005, 75

²⁹⁴ Nabarz 2005, 75, 83; Ghahremani 1984

²⁹⁵ There are several representations and manifestations of Simurgh in Persian literature, for instance divine wisdom and perfect human being. According to some legends, Simurgh immolates itself every seventeen hundred years and rises like a Phoenix, which is better known to the western world. (Nabarz 2005, 75, 82)



Baiterek and the Left Bank of Astana ²⁹⁶

However, the symbolism of Baiterek does not end here; Baiterek is an entirely symbolical entity, built to impress and to be talked about. “Dominating the new capital, it is an architectural symbol of renewal, the symbol of Astana, the symbol of Kazakhstan”²⁹⁷. Baiterek is the heart and in the heart of Astana’s modern administrative centre, the Left Bank, and the symbol of the capital, the country and its ambitions²⁹⁸.

Baiterek was completed in 2002²⁹⁹, and as seen above from the photograph, it stands in the middle of the main axis of the new administrative centre, between Akorda presidential

²⁹⁶ Photo taken by the author, March 2014

²⁹⁷ EXPO2017 web pages, <http://www.expo2017astana.com/en/page/astana/> [7.10.2014]

²⁹⁸ Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the Hellenic Republic, “Astana: 10 Years of Prosperity”, Ibid; EXPO2017 web pages, Ibid. Baiterek is the symbol of the city. Brochures, events, gatherings, forums, and conferences located in Astana have all a picture or a symbol of Baiterek in them. For instance in Pyramid 2012, 112-113, 115-119, on the pages focused on the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, Baiterek was the very symbol used to represent the congress and the capital Astana. Also in Astana Economic Forum, held in April 2014, Baiterek was the symbol of the event and the city. Furthermore, Astana EXPO2017 web pages directly express that Bayterek is the symbol of the capital and its business card (EXPO2017 web pages, Ibid.).

²⁹⁹ Koch 2013a, 113

palace (the blue domed white building in the middle of the two golden ministry buildings up in the photograph), Palace of Peace and Reconciliation (behind the Akorda presidential palace) and Khan Shatyr entertainment and shopping complex (outside the photograph).

During the summer, the axis is lined with flowerbeds, sculptures and fountains³⁰⁰ (see the first photograph of Baiterek on page 54). During the winter the axis and the city as a whole look deserted and forgotten. Covered by snow, the city looks white, clean and peaceful – and very unreal. The photograph above reminds more a miniature model of the axis inside Baiterek than a photograph taken of it in the middle of the day. The city centre and the city as a whole look and feel abandoned; during the winter, there is hardly any people outdoors, and the city feels post apocalyptic –nothing alive moves there³⁰¹; the city looks more as an architectural model of itself than a real city.

Architectural models tend to show the city or a part of it as depopulated and clean spaces, and the best miniature models show only the best sides of the city or the object “creating a fantasy world ‘imbued with a happy precision’ that makes them ‘more dead than alive’”³⁰². The models privilege the visuals that look modern (tidy, clean, uniform, orderly, mechanized) and not primitive (disordered, complicated, unmechanized, untidy); they transform their “subject into a fetishized symbol of the desired ideal of modernity”³⁰³.³⁰⁴ The clean and orderly photograph of the axis above looks more like a miniature model than a true photograph taken of a true city in the middle of the day.

Another issue visible from the photograph is the love to space that the Kazakhs have. All Astana’s most prominent new buildings (Akorda, Kazakh Eli –monument, National museum, Palace of Independence, and particularly Palace of Peace and Reconciliation and Khan Shatyr) are surrounded by lots of space. The space around the buildings gives them importance and dignity, and allows them to stand out.

³⁰⁰ Kazakhstanlive.com, International Information Centre of the Republic of Kazakhstan, <http://www.kazakhstanlive.com/2.aspx?sr=4> [9.9.2014]

³⁰¹ This is a description of my personal experience when walking in the city during the wintertime. The city felt very unreal, and not only in the administrative centre but also in the other parts of the city like for instance in the ‘more alive’ Riverside. It felt that only in late March/April did the people start to appear in the city scene.

³⁰² Koch 2010, 780

³⁰³ Koch 2010, 781

³⁰⁴ Koch 2010, 780-781

The love to space that the Kazakhs have can be at least partially explained by their nomadic past; for thousands of years Kazakhs moved according to the seasons in search for food, water and grazing land. They lived pastoral life with no fixed homes or residences;³⁰⁵ and they always had lots of space around them in the vast Central Asian steppe.

Baiterek is thus full of symbolism that can be read as an agency that disseminates the image of Astana and therefore Kazakhstan as an independent nation-state reaching for modernity and better future while remembering and respecting its past and traditions, the very image of Astana and Kazakhstan that the Nazarbayev administration is pursuing to disseminate. It symbolizes the independent Kazakhstan and the decision Kazakhstan took to relocate and rebuild the new capital for itself.

Indeed, the height of Baiterek (97 metres) symbolizes the year Astana became the new capital of Kazakhstan, 1997³⁰⁶. It symbolizes the most important year for the new capital and hence for the new and independent Kazakhstan; it creates a new self-view and triumphs the hostility of the pre-existing setting, the repression of the past and the memory of it; it represents Kazakhstan's capital relocation as breaking the connection with the colonial past and starting a new era of independence, free of old colonial connections and mental restrictions of the former Soviet capital Almaty.

4.2 Symbolic Path, Future in the Present, and the Agent and His Cult

Baiterek, as Astana's landmark³⁰⁷, "is the most important tourist destination in Astana and the whole scene is one of fanfare, revelry, and awe"³⁰⁸. Tourists and locals have an access to the golden sphere against a relatively small admission fee³⁰⁹. From the golden glass

³⁰⁵ For a definition, see the Free Dictionary, <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/Nomadic+tribes> [6.4.2015]

³⁰⁶ Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the Hellenic Republic, "Astana: 10 Years of Prosperity", Ibid; EXPO2017 web pages, Ibid.

³⁰⁷ Koch 2013a, 112

³⁰⁸ Koch 2013a, 113

³⁰⁹ When I visited Baiterek in February 2014, the entrance fee was 250 KZT, which was then, shortly after the almost 20% devaluation, approximately one euro.

sphere, the visitors can observe the city and admire the impressive view that it provides them. The sphere is made of golden coloured ‘chameleon’ glass that changes colour with the sunlight³¹⁰; this makes the view from the sphere very warm and welcoming even in the midst of a frozen winter night³¹¹.

From the sphere, the visitors get a bird’s eye view of the newly constructed city centre, which, when looked from the Baiterek Tower or from any building tall enough, as the Kazakh Embassy pages point out, “appears to have been dropped in the middle of the steppe”³¹². From Baiterek’s observation sphere, the visitors are able see the explicit contrast between the city and the steppe.³¹³

Furthermore, apart from being a tourist attraction, the visit to Baiterek is also a symbolic path since the visitors of the Tower travel inside the sacred Tree of Life and the golden egg of happiness and new beginning. Baiterek invites the visitors into the Kazakh history and folktale, to look at the new, modern and future oriented Astana from the sphere, from the Kazakh past and traditions.³¹⁴ Baiterek, through its symbolism, through its symbolic path and its futuristic design, combines the past with the future and promises the future in the present; like miniature models, it represents the idealized image of Kazakhstan’s post Soviet modernist national identity; Baiterek, like Khan Shatyr, the Pyramid, and other buildings on the Left Bank of the Ishim River, and the miniature models of them, “‘buy time’ for the government’s economic development program by offering an image of the future in the present”³¹⁵.

The image of the Left Bank is the image that president Nazarbayev is pursuing for his new country; he is the agent of the Astana project, as established before, and he is the agent of the Baiterek Tower. According to the National Geographic (2/2012), the common belief among the citizens of Astana and Kazakhstan is that the president himself sketched the

³¹⁰ EXPO2017 web pages, Ibid.

³¹¹ In Kazakhstan, during the wintertime, the temperature can fall as low as -40.

³¹² Embassy of Kazakhstan in Malaysia, “Astana – Capital City”, Culture, http://www.kazembassy.org.my/astana_culture.htm#1 [22.1.2015]

³¹³ Observations made by the author, February 2014; See also the description on Embassy of Kazakhstan in Malaysia, “Astana – Capital City”, Left Bank, http://www.kazembassy.org.my/astana_leftbank.htm [6.9.2014]

³¹⁴ Atlas Obscura Astana, Kazakhstan, Bayterek Tower, Ibid.; Embassy of Kazakhstan in Malaysia, “Astana – Capital City”, Left Bank, Ibid.; Lancaster 2012

³¹⁵ Koch 2010, 779

original idea of Baiterek on a paper napkin; the president had an idea about the building, but no paper with him, so he sketched his idea on his napkin³¹⁶. Also according to the Kazakhstan History Portal³¹⁷ and CNN News³¹⁸, the Baiterek Tower was built according to a sketch made by president Nazarbayev³¹⁹; it was thus the president who planned and designed the Tower and its unique and mythical appearance. Baiterek was his idea, and he wanted it to be executed accordingly.

Baiterek has become the iconic symbol of Astana and the New Kazakhstan, and as the Kazakhstan History Portal proudly appraises, in 2002 Baiterek won the competition of the best architectural monument, the Grand Prix and the golden medal at the 10th international competition on the best architectural monument in CIS³²⁰.

However, Baiterek does not ‘just’ win international competitions. As the symbol of the capital, it is portrayed everywhere, from brochures, vouchers, and leaflets to advertisements and posters of economic forums, religious conferences, and books and publications. It is on the cover of “Kazakhstan, Heart of Eurasia”³²¹, “Diplomatic Herald”³²², and advertisements and posters of the Astana Economic Forum 2014³²³. Moreover, it is illustrated on the cover of one of president Nazarbayev’s (2003) books, *Стратегия независимости* [Strategy of Independence]³²⁴.

President Nazarbayev is thus strongly involved with Baiterek. In addition to being behind the appearance of the building, he promotes the building in official contexts and his own works. Moreover, he is even more connected to Baiterek through the Ayala-Alakan monument –the golden monument with an imprint of his right hand. Inside the golden

³¹⁶ Lancaster 2012; Embassy of Kazakhstan in Malaysia, “Astana – Capital City”, Left Bank, Ibid.

³¹⁷ “The initiator of developing the new capital city”, History of Kazakhstan, Ibid.

³¹⁸ Carrington Daisy 2012b, “Astana: The world’s weirdest capital city” CNN 13 July, http://edition.cnn.com/2012/07/13/world/asia/eye-on-kazakhstan-astana/index.html?iid=article_sidebar [3.10.2014]

³¹⁹ “The initiator of developing the new capital city”, History of Kazakhstan, Ibid.; Carrington 2012b

³²⁰ “The initiator of developing the new capital city”, History of Kazakhstan, Ibid.

³²¹ “Kazakhstan, Heart of Eurasia” –leaflet 2013

³²² Diplomatic Herald 2013, Vol. 3, No. 42, Issued by the Ministry for foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, ISSN 1814-7089

³²³ All the advertisements and posters of the Astana Economic Forum 2014 had the Baiterek Tower in them; it was the symbol of the event. Author’s observations, April 2014

³²⁴ Назарбаев Нурсултан Абишевич 2003, *Стратегия независимости*. Алматы Атамұра ISBN 9965-05-872-5 (Collected speeches of the president Nazarbayev such as the Kazakhstan 2030 strategy, Formation of the Eurasian Union, The Independence of Kazakhstan: lessons from history and today, and others.).

sphere, the visitors find the solid gold imprint of president Nazarbayev's right hand. The monument, besides being the imprint of the president's right hand, is located on the top floor of the sphere at the height of 97 metres representing the year 1997, the year Astana became officially the new capital of Kazakhstan³²⁵. The monument links the capital relocation and the president and combines them in one.

Moreover, on special occasions, like on state visits and national holidays³²⁶, the Ayala-Alakan, when touched by the visitors, triggers the recording of the Kazakh national anthem³²⁷, the lyrics of which are said to be revised by president Nazarbayev himself making him the co-author of the anthem³²⁸. The touching of the Ayala-Alakan and the monument itself symbolize "the bond between the state and citizens, and peace, friendship and harmony"³²⁹ of the country and in the country³³⁰. Furthermore, it is believed, according to the Republican Newspaper Kazpravda [the Kazakhstani truth] that a wish of a person, who puts his or her hand on the monument and makes a wish, will come true³³¹. In addition to associating the president and the capital relocation, and the president and the national anthem, Kazpravda propagandizes president Nazarbayev as a benevolent and magical leader that fulfils his subjects' dreams. This is very similar to Disney movies with their fairy godmothers that fulfil heroes or heroines' dreams.

In the photograph below the visitors of Baiterek and Ayala-Alakan make a wish as they place their hand on the imprint of the right hand of their president³³². The cult of the president is very evident here in the Ayala-Alakan and in the act of placing one's hand on the golden handprint of the president; president Nazarbayev is truly worshipped here. The national anthem adds solemnity to the touching experience and increases patriotism, the bond and the connection between the president and his citizens.

³²⁵ "A Summary of cultural objects of Astana", *The Astana Times, Bringing Kazakhstan to the World* 2014

³²⁶ During the official visit of the Speaker of the Parliament Eero Heinäluoma to Astana in the beginning of March 2014, the handprint of the president indeed triggered the recording of the national anthem creating a magnificent ceremonial atmosphere in the sphere. Observations made by the author, March 2014

³²⁷ Observations made by the author during the visit to Baiterek in March 2014.

³²⁸ See for example Lancaster 2012 and nationalanthems.info <http://www.nationalanthems.info/kz.htm> [26.1.2015]

³²⁹ "A Summary of cultural objects of Astana", *The Astana Times, Bringing Kazakhstan to the World* 2014

³³⁰ Ibid

³³¹ Kazpravda [The Kazakh Truth], <http://newsite.kazpravda.kz/print/1311242803> [11.9.2014]

³³² Lancaster 2012



The Ayala-Alakan, Gerd Ludwig, National Geographic ³³³

Alongside the Ayala-Alakan is the Bata monument, the sculpture of a globe that marks the first Congress of World and Traditional Religions held in Astana in 2003, when 17 leaders of world and traditional religions gathered for the first time in Astana to promote peace and harmony between different traditional and world religions.³³⁴ The Congress was meant to settle interreligious disputes without violence and terror, and contribute to interethnic and interreligious peace and harmony. Since then, the Congress has been held every three years in Astana, in the Palace of Peace and Reconciliation that was specifically built for it.³³⁵

The initiative for a dialogue between leaders of world and traditional religions came from president Nazarbayev³³⁶, and the monument is there to remind that. Furthermore, it is meant to increase the mental image and prestige of Kazakhstan in the eyes of national and international visitors and the world, the two important issues for president Nazarbayev, and

³³³ Gerd Ludwig 2012

³³⁴ Ibid. Observations made by the author during the visits to Baiterek in February and March 2014.

³³⁵ Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, I Congress, http://www.religions-congress.org/content/blogcategory/18/32/lang_english/ [12.9.2014]

³³⁶ Ibid; Akorda 2007, 34-35

to remind that Kazakhstan and president Nazarbayev as the initiator of the project in particular, promote world peace and participate in its creation.

4.3 Conclusion: the Lollipop and the Tree

Baiterek has become the official symbol of Astana and the New Kazakhstan. Representing the age-old Kazakh folktale, it symbolizes the rebirth of the Kazakh nation and Kazakhstan uniting the people that as individuals and society have lost so much so many times in the course of their history. Despite the losses, they have not given up; they have risen like Samruk-Phoenix from the ashes of their repressive Soviet past. For Kazakhs, Baiterek symbolizes the unified Kazakh nation that rises from the ashes of its past to the glory of its future, which is the act and the new scene of Baiterek.

Baiterek is full of symbolism that as an agency disseminates the image of Astana and Kazakhstan as a strong nation that rises from its dark past towards its happiness and new beginning. Since Baiterek is the official symbol of Astana³³⁷ and thus the New Kazakhstan, it produces the image and the new scene of Kazakhstan pursued by president Nazarbayev and his administration: new, independent, future-oriented, and prosperous Kazakhstan. Furthermore, as an architectural act, Baiterek impresses and adds Kazakhstan's prestige in the world, which has been the overall purpose of the Astana project.

Baiterek, as an architectural symbol of Kazakhstan's renewal and independence, combines in its symbolism, design and mythology the past, the present and the future; it celebrates the progress while being a part of the Kazakh past, traditions, and beliefs³³⁸. It represents the future in the present by showing the New Kazakhstan, the look that the capital and the entire country will have after the numerous development projects will be finally completed. Baiterek, as the symbol of rebirth and new beginning, represents the new, prosperous, admired, and independent Kazakhstani scene and leads to it; it produces the

³³⁷ See for example, "A Summary of cultural objects of Astana", *The Astana Times, Bringing Kazakhstan to the World* 2014; Koch 2013a, 112

³³⁸ Atlas Obscura Astana, Kazakhstan, Bayterek Tower, Ibid.; Embassy of Kazakhstan in Malaysia, "Astana – Capital City", Left Bank, Ibid.; Lancaster 2012

new scene, the new mental image of Kazakhstan pursued by the state. However, Baiterek does not look only to the Kazakh future but also to the Kazakh past combining the old folktales and the Tree metaphor with the modernity; it respects the Kazakh past and traditions and combines them with the modernity and the future; it ties the Kazakh mythology with the modern world creating a modern version of it.

Moreover, Baiterek's name and its meaning connect Baiterek to the old world and its traditions while Baiterek's nickname, a giant lollipop, connects it to the modern world. It is peculiar for Kazakhs to nickname buildings, and they have nicknamed all the new buildings on the Left Bank of Astana. Since from the distance, Baiterek has a close resemblance to a giant lollipop, Kazakhs have nicknamed Baiterek a Big Chupa Chups. The Big Chupa Chups evokes thus the local legend of the Tree of Life and combines the traditional and the modern in its name and nickname, too.³³⁹

Situated at the heart of Astana's modern Left Bank, Baiterek is thus the symbol of the city and the new Kazakhstan. The unusual and unique Baiterek [that has peculiarly significant similarities with Ankara's corresponding Tower³⁴⁰] combines the old and the new, represents the happiness and new beginning, and symbolizes the rebirth of the Kazakh nation and the rebirth of Kazakhstan. Baiterek's unique design has raised Astana and Kazakhstan's global awareness, as it was meant to. Due to its peculiar form and futuristic and even utopian design, it has appeared in various Newspaper articles³⁴¹ in the west raising the awareness of the new capital, even if not only in a positive and desired way.

The new scene in which Kazakhstan is known and admired worldwide is thus underway, even though it has not been reached yet, at least not the way the president wanted, for he and his architectural projects have been criticized by western press for being authoritarian and megalomaniacal. Baiterek, as part of Nazarbayev's Astana project, has improved Astana and Kazakhstan's mental image and prestige in the world but also brought criticism to president Nazarbayev and his authoritarian rule, as have the Palace of Peace and Reconciliation and Khan Shatyr covered in the next two chapters.

³³⁹ Observation made by the author 2014; Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the Hellenic Republic, "Astana: 10 Years of Prosperity", Ibid; Carrington 2012b

³⁴⁰ On similarities and differences between Ankara's and Astana's towers see Koch 2013a

³⁴¹ See *the Guardian*, *the National Geographer*, and others (See the References).

5. FROM INTROVERSION TO COOPERATION, PEACE, AND HARMONY

Since the decision to relocate the capital from Almaty to Akmola was taken, and particularly since Astana became the new capital of Kazakhstan in 1997, Astana's urban development has taken place very rapidly. After Baiterek was completed in 2002, president Nazarbayev urged the city planners to accelerate their efforts to complete the Astana project in order to fulfil its international task of raising Kazakhstan's global awareness and prestige. And the efforts accelerated:³⁴² in less than 10 years, Astana's other two pieces of architecture that are the objects of the study, the Palace of Peace and Reconciliation and the Khan Shatyr entertainment and shopping centre, as well as many other new pieces of architecture on the Left Bank of the Ishim River, were completed.

The Palace of Peace and Reconciliation, the Pyramid, is one of Astana's special projects that differentiate the city from any other city in the world; it is the symbol of peace and accord in Astana and Kazakhstan, and it symbolizes the work Kazakhstan has done for interethnic and interreligious peace and harmony both in Kazakhstan and in the world. In this chapter I scrutinize the Palace of Peace and Reconciliation, its symbolical meaning for Kazakhs and the New Kazakhstan, and its significance to Astana, Kazakhstan, and Kazakhstan's nation- and image building process. I read the Pyramid politically using the analytical notions of Burke's scene, act, agent, agency, and purpose in the Scene→Act– and the Scene→Agent –ratios. I analyse the motives behind the construction of the Pyramid (the act and the agency), the construction of which was ordered by president Nazarbayev, the agent, to show Kazakhstan as a peaceful state (purpose) that supports its multi-ethnic and -religious nation and contributes to world peace.

In this chapter I conduct a Burkean analysis of the Pyramid concentrating on its symbolism, messages and significance to Nazarbayev's nation building process, and to Astana and Kazakhstan in general. I see the Pyramid as the agency to leave the scene of the homogenized Soviet past and to enter the scene of the independent, internationally oriented, culturally minded, interreligious, peaceful, and multicultural New Kazakhstan that is appreciated worldwide.

³⁴² Koch 2013a, 109

5.1 The Pyramid of Peace and Harmony

The Palace of Peace and Reconciliation, the Pyramid, was built for the *Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions*, organized every three years in Astana, the new capital of Kazakhstan. The Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions gathers the spiritual leaders of the world to discuss pressing issues, to strengthen interethnic peace and harmony and to resist aggression and hatred between religious and ethnic groups.³⁴³ The Pyramid is thus dedicated to religious understanding and tolerance, condemnation of violence, commitment to peace, and promotion of equality³⁴⁴.

The official opening of the Pyramid was on the 1st of September 2006. For its particular importance for Astana and Kazakhstan, the four Central Asian presidents³⁴⁵ participated in its official opening, accompanied with an international festival *World Stars in Astana*, dedicated to the opening of the Pyramid. Therefore, multiple world-famous artists participated at the official opening of the Pyramid, too³⁴⁶.³⁴⁷ The participation of the presidents and the dedication of the festival to the official opening of the Pyramid shows the importance of the building for Astana and the New Kazakhstan, and to president Nazarbayev, the agent of the Astana project and its architecture, and the agent of the Pyramid, the Palace of Peace and Reconciliation.

The initiative to organize a forum for world and traditional religions came from president Nazarbayev who wanted to strengthen the interreligious dialogue between different confessions, countries and peoples, and to start to safeguard peace, stability and progress in the world³⁴⁸. The I Congress seemed advantageous and successful, and the leaders of world and traditional religions that participated at the I Congress decided to convene every three

³⁴³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan 2012, *Pyramid, Palace of Peace and Reconciliation*, Astana, pp. 7, 11 (from here on Pyramid 2012)

³⁴⁴ Lord Foster 2010 in Pyramid 2012, 21

³⁴⁵ Nursultan Nazarbayev from Kazakhstan, Kurmanbek Bakiyev from Kyrgyzstan, Emomali Rakhmanov from Tajikistan and Islam Karimov from Uzbekistan (Pyramid 2012, 107)

³⁴⁶ For example, Spanish opera singer Montserrat Caballé, ballet star Anastasiya Volochkova, Mark Peretokin, and Evgeniy Ivanchenko, leading soloists from Italian opera houses and many others (Pyramid 2012, 107).

³⁴⁷ Pyramid 2012, 107

³⁴⁸ For the list of participants, see Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, "Participants of the 1st Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions" http://www.religions-congress.org/content/view/128/32/lang_english/ [14.4.2015]

years to discuss and to contribute to interreligious peace and harmony³⁴⁹. Kazakhstan was granted the honour to serve as the host country for the Congresses, and the Palace of Peace and Reconciliation was created to serve as their venue.³⁵⁰

The initiative to construct the centre for the interreligious dialogue came from president Nazarbayev, too³⁵¹. In 2002, due to his initiative, a design competition was organized to attract ideas for the design of the new centre. The idea of the pyramid shaped building came from the first competition, from a Kazakh architect. The decision makers liked the idea of a pyramid-shaped Congress venue, but they wanted an internationally recognized architect and practise to carry out the project in order to get international prestige and attention to it. Hence, they kept the pyramid –idea and organized more competitions to attract a world famous architect until Lord Norman Foster entered the competition with his pyramid-shaped redesign for the Congress venue and won it.³⁵²

However, the official narrative and the media narratives show president Nazarbayev and Lord Foster as the co-agents of the project³⁵³. The official governmental narrative pictures president Nazarbayev as the visionary of the project who had the idea of the pyramid shaped Congress venue; it pictures him as the author and the architect of the project. The location chosen for the Pyramid was next to the Akorda Presidential Palace –just behind the Akorda Presidential Palace on the main axis of the new administrative and commercial centre of Astana. Hence, the president had an opportunity to follow the construction project very closely and make sure it was carried out properly and according to his wishes³⁵⁴.³⁵⁵

³⁴⁹ For the participants of the II Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, see <http://www.religions-congress.org/content/view/129/33/lang.english/>, for the participants of the III Congress, see <http://www.religions-congress.org/content/view/214/34/lang.english/>, and for the participants of the IV Congress, see <http://www.religions-congress.org/content/view/352/60/lang.english/> [14.4.2015]

³⁵⁰ Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, I Congress, <http://www.religions-congress.org/content/blogcategory/18/32/lang.english/> [10.4.2015]

³⁵¹ Pyramid 2012, 7, 11

³⁵² Koch Natalie 2012b, “Urban ‘utopias’: The Disney stigma and discourses of ‘false modernity’” *Environment and Planning A* Vol. 44, No. 10, pp. 2445 – 2462, particularly the pages 2452-2456 that concentrate on Astana’s Pyramid.

³⁵³ Koch 2012b, 2453; For media analysis on Kazakhstan in the western press, see Koch 2012b

³⁵⁴ There is a straight view from the Akorda Presidential Palace to the Pyramid, which makes it easy to imagine that it was relatively effortless to follow the construction process of the Pyramid from the Akorda, as the Pyramid was constructed basically on Akorda’s backyard. (Observations made by the author 2014)

³⁵⁵ Pyramid 2012, 17, 21, 47

Media narratives follow the official ones, and for instance Moore (2010), when he writes about Kazakhstan’s futuristic capital and the Palace of Peace and Reconciliation, contributes that when president Nazarbayev commissioned a pyramid-shaped palace, it “may be the first and only time a client has told the mighty Foster what a building should look like, and been obeyed”³⁵⁶. As Koch (2012b) notes about the Pyramid, and president Nazarbayev’s involvement in it as in general in the Astana project, “the Pyramid, and indeed the entire Astana project, is a one-man show”³⁵⁷.



The Pyramid ³⁵⁸

In case of the Pyramid, president Nazarbayev is thus made the agent of the project. He is narrated as the designer of the Pyramid’s shape and form and the supervisor of its

³⁵⁶ Moore Rowan 2010

³⁵⁷ Koch 2012b, 2454

³⁵⁸ Photograph taken by the author, June 2014. For a closer look at the Pyramid, visit the Google Map, <https://www.google.com/maps/views/view/110355114130354333103/gphoto/5908995920529185266?gl=us&heading=314&pitch=87&fovy=75> [28.1.2015]. And for a closer look at the interior of the Pyramid, visit Atlas Obscura <http://www.atlasobscura.com/places/palace-of-peace-and-reconciliation>, and Foster + Partners, <http://www.fosterandpartners.com/projects/palace-of-peace-and-reconciliation/> [28.1.2015]

construction work. However, here in the official narrative, the president is not described as the designer of the building itself; in the narrative it is Lord Foster, the famous British architect together with his company Foster + Partners, who actually designed, planned and constructed the Pyramid³⁵⁹, even though, as pointed out above, it was neither the president or Lord Foster who had the original idea of the pyramid-shaped Congress venue.

The Pyramid is one of the newest peculiar pieces of architecture on the Left Bank of Astana. The Pyramid, built to serve as a place for a dialogue between different civilizations, as its nickname suggests, was built in a pure form of a pyramid. The height of the Pyramid is 62 metres, and its base is 62 x 62 –metres. The entire complex is 40,000 m², and the usable space of it 25,500 m²³⁶⁰. The conference hall for the *Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions*, which is located at the top of the building, is supported with four pillars that symbolize “the hands of peace”³⁶¹. However, ‘the hands of peace’ are not the only symbols and symbolisms in the building. According to Lord Foster, the building itself represents “a new symbol for the unity of the religions of the world”³⁶².

The Palace of Peace and Reconciliation has four different name variations. In official context the building is usually referred to as the Palace of Peace and Reconciliation, the Palace of Peace and Accord or the Palace of Peace and Harmony. In unofficial context and colloquial language the building is usually referred to as the Pyramid for the shape and form it has.³⁶³ In the chapter, I will refer to the Palace of Peace and Reconciliation as the Pyramid for it being short and sweet.

³⁵⁹ Pyramid 2012, 7, 11

³⁶⁰ Pyramid 2012, 47

³⁶¹ Pyramid 2012, 17, 21, 47

³⁶² Lord Foster 2010 in Pyramid 2012, 21

³⁶³ In all the conversations I had with the locals, the Palace of Peace and Reconciliation was referred to as the Pyramid. There is even a notion about locals using the term Pyramid for describing the Palace of Peace and Reconciliation in the Pyramid 2012, 17 as well as in “A Summary of cultural objects of Astana”, *The Astana Times, Bringing Kazakhstan to the World* 2014. Also when taking a taxi, the easiest way to be understood, if trying to get to the Palace of Peace and Reconciliation, is to say that you are going to the Pyramid (Various taxi drives taken by the author to the Pyramid during the spring and summer of 2014).

The Symbolism as the Agency

The Pyramid has many symbolic aspects, and like Baiterek, it combines the past with the present and the future; the form of the Pyramid reflects to the ancient past but the materials used to its construction –glass, steel, and cement– reflect to the modern civilization³⁶⁴. Astana’s Pyramid’s associations with the ancient Egyptian pyramids were very important to president Nazarbayev, who, as officially narrated, had an explicit idea regarding the appearance and form of the Pyramid. Still, the construction of the Pyramid is unusual and unique even with its close resemblance with the Egyptian pyramids. However, the Pyramid is not ‘just’ a peculiar piece of art; it is a symbolical entity, built to impress and to be talked about, and it has become the symbol of Kazakhstan’s religious dialogue and harmony; its symbolism, as one of Astana’s new architecture’s agencies, leads to the new scene, the New Kazakhstan.

According to the Pyramid, the Palace of Peace and Reconciliation (2012), produced by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Pyramid combines European trends, architecture, and standard with eastern cultures, colours and style.³⁶⁵ By combining the western with the eastern, the Pyramid represents ‘Eurasian architectural image’ and hence embodies president Nazarbayev’s favourite metaphor of Kazakhstan being the bridge between Europe and Asia, the metaphor practised both in Astana’s architecture and Kazakhstan’s politics to impress both Europe and Asia.

Also according to Kairat Mami, Chairman of the Senate of the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan and Head of the Secretariat of the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, the Pyramid combines well the western with the eastern fitting in with the appearance of the New Astana. The Pyramid

[F]its harmonically into a beautiful image of the capital of Kazakhstan – Astana. The Palace embodies the spirit and aesthetics of the city combining western and eastern cultures and style³⁶⁶.

³⁶⁴ Pyramid 2012, 17

³⁶⁵ Pyramid 2012, 51

³⁶⁶ Pyramid 2012, 11

Mami's statement on the Pyramid follows president Nazarbayev's, who sees the Pyramid, as well as the other new and futuristic architecture of Astana, to combine western and eastern culture and style, as he regularly cites Astana, as already mentioned before, to be "in the Heart of Eurasia"³⁶⁷ and "the Epicentre of the World"³⁶⁸.

The Pyramid has a unique architectural structure and a perfect form of a pyramid (62x62x62)³⁶⁹. Associations with the mathematical perfection and the wonders of the ancient Egypt are very clear since the most famous pieces of architecture with the similar form are the world famous pyramids of the ancient Egypt –the Great Pyramid of Giza considered being one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world³⁷⁰.

Advantour, an international travel agency concentrating on Central Asian tourism, promotes the Palace of Peace and Reconciliation as the "Eighth Wonder of the World"³⁷¹, epithet, according to its page, assigned by the people, and it adds that "the building's cupola phosphoresces brightly at night and like a lighthouse, indicates the way to unity of peoples and religions"³⁷². It is obvious that a travel agency propagates for its travel destinations but still, this is a very propagandistic promotion of the Pyramid. I agree the Pyramid being an interesting and in a way a unique piece of architecture, but here the Pyramid is validated as the eight wonder of the world, as a lighthouse and an agency that guides and unites peoples and religions. Of course this is, without a doubt, the very way the Nazarbayev administration would like the Pyramid and Astana to be talked and associated about – the wonder that unites and impresses the world, but still, this feels a way too much particularly as most of Astana and Kazakhstan do not look modern and futuristic at all.

Lord Foster's imaginative and individual trend of architecture reflects the modernist thinking in architecture that states that buildings should be "original, simple, brilliant, and

³⁶⁷ Назарбаев 2010

³⁶⁸ Назарбаев 2001

³⁶⁹ Pyramid 2012, 21, 47

³⁷⁰ Ancient History Encyclopedia, "The Great Pyramid of Giza: The Last Remaining Wonder of the Ancient", <http://www.ancient.eu.com/article/124/> [20.6.2014]; Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Pyramids of Giza", <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/234470/Pyramids-of-Giza> [20.6.2014]

³⁷¹ Advantour, "Palace of Peace and Reconciliation - "Eighth Wonder of the World" of Astana", <http://www.advantour.com/kazakhstan/astana/palace-peace-reconciliation.htm> [17.10.2014]

³⁷² Ibid

orderly” in addition to being “functional and technologically impeccable”³⁷³. Foster’s trend fits thus well in with the sought after appearance of the New Astana. His Pyramid combines the ancient architectural forms with modern techniques and building skills, and because of its construction materials and techniques, the Pyramid is indeed unique. Astana’s Pyramid represents Kazakhstan as a unique country that combines the ancient traditions with innovations and technologies of modern civilization. Moreover, as repetitively stated, it fills the western standards, which are considered important throughout the publication and also elsewhere^{374, 375}.

5.2 Rhetorics of Geometrics, Forms, Shapes, and ‘Wonders’

Due to their perfect mathematical form, pyramids have been perceived sacred for millenniums. Their perfectly equal forms carry many symbolical meanings: the four equal points of the pyramid point to all the points of the compass covering all the directions in the world. For Kazakhstan this symbolizes Kazakhstan’s equality towards all the nations in the world and Kazakhstan’s friendly position towards them all.³⁷⁶ According to Lord Foster, the

“essence of the pyramid should be perceived as being a chamber of good and light and the idea of rebirth. There are several interpretations of the pyramid as a symbol. It is the most powerful shape, which divides the surrounding area. This pyramid is embodiment of peace and harmony.”³⁷⁷

According to Lord Foster, the Pyramid symbolizes the idea of rebirth, the very same idea

³⁷³ Pyramid 2012, 49

³⁷⁴ Filling the western standards is pointed out several times in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ 2012 publication the Pyramid, Palace of Peace and Reconciliation. For instance, in the publication, there was a special notion regarding the Pyramid’s opera hall with 1500 seats that is comparable to American standards. It seems that it is something worth mentioning whenever possible, and not just in the case of the Pyramid but also for example the announcements of the available rooms or flats tend to have a mention of a European style made renovation, “euroremont”, if there is one made. See for example Krisha, [http://krisha.kz/arenda/komnaty/astana/?das_price.srch\]\[to\]=300&das_price.currency\]=3&das_sys.hasphoto\]=1](http://krisha.kz/arenda/komnaty/astana/?das_price.srch][to]=300&das_price.currency]=3&das_sys.hasphoto]=1) [15.10.2014] or just Krisha, <http://krisha.kz/arenda/komnaty/astana/> [15.10.2014]

³⁷⁵ Pyramid 2012, 47

³⁷⁶ Pyramid 2012, 7, 17, 47

³⁷⁷ Pyramid 2012, 17

that Baiterek symbolizes –the rebirth and new beginning. The rebirth and new beginning seem to be a very integral part of the Kazakh nation- and state building project and the idea of the New Kazakhstan. By using the form of the pyramid, Kazakhstan exploits the associations associated with the pyramid to frame itself as an equal, open and friendly nation towards all the nations in the world, as the four points of the pyramid that cover the whole world suggest.

Moreover, in addition to advertising itself as “the Eighth wonder of the World”, an association meant to raise Kazakhstan’s mental image and prestige in the world, the garden the Pyramid comprises, “the Hanging gardens of Astana”³⁷⁸, connects the Pyramid to the Hanging gardens of Babylon and thus clearly to another wonder of the ancient world. The Pyramid (2012) sings the praises of the garden; it creates a picture of modern day hanging gardens, created by steel, glass and bright illumination.³⁷⁹ Here too, the Pyramid combines the history and modernity, the image of the ancient legendary gardens with an industrial modern day garden rhetorically converting ‘the garden’ of the Pyramid into a modern day hanging garden of Babylon.

With the pyramid and the garden the Pyramid (2012) combines the associations with the two wonders of the ancient world [at least rhetorically, since the garden the Pyramid comprises cannot really be described as a garden not to mention as “the hanging garden of Astana”]. The image of the garden provided by the Pyramid (2012) is far better than the reality, in which most of the flowers of the ‘garden’ are artificial, and the space itself far less impressive or bright as given in the publication. It is not really even a garden but a mix of artificial and real flowers and plants that decorate the wall and stairs that lead to the uppermost floor of the Pyramid. Pyramid’s (2012) clever use of photographic techniques, dynamism, cleanliness and illumination create a feeling of order and discipline, inherent in the modernity, and indeed an image of an impressive modern day garden.³⁸⁰ However, these expectations created by the publication are not realized when visiting the garden and the Pyramid at all.³⁸¹

³⁷⁸ Pyramid 2012, 83

³⁷⁹ Ibid

³⁸⁰ Pyramid 2012

³⁸¹ This is a description of my personal feeling after my first visit to the Pyramid in February 2014. I was really disappointed when I first visited the Pyramid because of the high expectations I had of it after reading the Pyramid 2012 in January 2014.

The way the publication overprizes the ‘garden’ gives an impression that in the context of the Pyramid, it is more important for Astana and Kazakhstan to impress than to provide something authentic, real. During my seven months stay in Astana, I had countless of walks in the city and in its new administrative axis. Even there, in the new city centre on the Left Bank of the Ishim River, and even in front of the Akorda presidential palace, I saw countless cracks and fragments, even on the newest buildings and public roads and steps, even though from the distance everything looked shiny and sound.³⁸² This made me wonder if it were really more important to impress, even for a short time, than to have something well planned and built that would withstand the time because most of the buildings, bridges and roads, when observed in close up, looked like they were about to fall apart very soon.

In addition to having ‘the hanging gardens’, and in general, associating itself rhetorically with the two wonders of the ancient world, the Pyramid is full of other indoor and outdoor symbols and symbolisms, too. The base of the pyramid (the square), for instance, represents the four classical elements: Earth, Air, Water, and Fire³⁸³ as well as the four points of the compass that for Kazakhstan symbolizes Kazakhstan’s friendliness and openness towards all the nations in the world, as already stated.³⁸⁴

The most important indoor symbols of the Pyramid are the hands of peace, the doves of peace, the colours of the roof of the conference hall that are the same as the colours of Kazakhstan’s flag, and the conference hall itself. The upper roof of the Pyramid, the roof of the Conference Hall, is covered with a colourful dome made of glass mosaic, where the doves of peace flit about. The 130 doves on the glass mosaic symbolize the peace and the peaceful life of the 130 different peoples and ethnic groups living together in the territory of today’s Kazakhstan.³⁸⁵

³⁸² Observations made by the author during the spring and summer of 2014

³⁸³ Pyramid 2012, 17, 26-27, 96-97

³⁸⁴ Pyramid 2012, 17, 26-27, 96-97

³⁸⁵ Pyramid 2012, 17, 26-27, 96-97



Upper Roof of the Pyramid, Foster + Partners³⁸⁶

The colours of the glass mosaic represent the colours of Kazakhstan's flag. The flag is one of the most important national symbols in today's world, and Kazakhstan uses the colours and the images of Kazakhstan's flag in various official celebrations and decorations, even in decorations on different kinds of official and nonofficial buildings, like the Pyramid. The images and the colours of Kazakhstan's flag have deep symbolism, well known to the citizens of Kazakhstan, particularly to the ethnic Kazakhs³⁸⁷.

The sun, as one of the most important features on Kazakhstan's flag and many Kazakh celebration decorations³⁸⁸, covers the point of the Pyramid, too, and gives an impression of the sun the rays of which penetrate the whole building. Because of the clever mirror

³⁸⁶ Foster + Partners, "Projects/Palace of Peace and Reconciliation Astana, Kazakhstan 2004-2006", <http://www.fosterandpartners.com/projects/palace-of-peace-and-reconciliation/> [2.2.2015]

³⁸⁷ Kazakhstan's blue flag features a golden sun, sunbeams, a soaring steppe eagle in the middle of it, and a golden national ornament in a vertical direction on the left side of it. They symbolize Kazakhstan's freedom, independence and sovereignty, and the plain blue background the cultural and ethnic unity of Kazakhstan. The blue symbolizes the infinity of the sky over the earth, wellbeing, peace, and unity; the sun the life, wealth and abundance; the eagle the freedom, independence, future and power; and the national ornament the traditions and culture of Kazakhstan. ("Values of the Independence", History of Kazakhstan, 3 June 2014, <http://e-history.kz/en/publications/view/622> [13.4.2015], translated by Kuzmenko I., 4 June 2014; Auanasova A. 2014, "Symbols of the new country", History of Kazakhstan, 4 June, <http://e-history.kz/en/publications/view/624> [13.4.2015], translated by Taukebayeva D., 4 June 2014)

³⁸⁸ Pyramid 2012, 109-111

techniques of the Foster + Partners Company, the rays of sunlight actually penetrate the whole building fostering the image of the all-powerful sun on the point of the Pyramid.³⁸⁹

The hands of peace, the four inclined pillars, support the most important space in the Pyramid, the Conference Hall for the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions. The hands of peace hold the ‘Cradle of Hope’, the conference hall under the apex, an open platform above the central auditorium, in the air.³⁹⁰



Conference Hall, Foster + Partners³⁹¹

The Conference Hall, the most important space in the Pyramid, was designed and built in the image of the UN’s Security Council’s conference room in New York³⁹². It is the Palace for Peace and Reconciliation, Accord, and Harmony after all. Building the main conference room in the image of the UN’s Security Council’s conference room gives a clear message of the role that the Pyramid wants to take for itself. The main task of the UN’s Security Council is to maintain and to restore peace in the world, and the main task

³⁸⁹ Pyramid 2012

³⁹⁰ Ibid

³⁹¹ Foster + Partners, “Projects/Palace of Peace and Reconciliation Astana, Kazakhstan 2004-2006”, Ibid.

³⁹² Pyramid 2012, 17

of the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions is to maintain peace and accord between world religions and promote the interethnic peace and harmony among ethnic groups. The most important meetings and discussions around peace and reconciliation take place in this space.

The base of the pyramid, the Atrium Hall, has a fine round geometric picture³⁹³, which brings clarity and order to the interior space and makes it feel very clean and modern. The elegant and clear round picture creates mathematical correctness, and due to the building materials and Foster + Partners' mirror technique, the Hall is very bright, which further adds the feeling of clarity, order, and elegance.

The mathematical correctness and perfectness is thus used here, too, creating a perfect circle around which people can be seated equally. The round table has been symbolizing equality among the people that sit around it at least since the times of King Arthur, the most famous round table being his legendary round table, which furthers the symbolism of the Hall.

On the next page, there is a photograph of the Atrium Hall taken from the Foster + Partners' webpages³⁹⁴. In addition to the Hall itself, the photograph features a huge poster of the event taking place, the symbol of Astana, Baiterek, in the middle of it.

³⁹³ Pyramid 2012, 78-79

³⁹⁴ Foster & Partners, "Projects/Palace of Peace and Reconciliation Astana, Kazakhstan 2004-2006", Ibid.



Inside the Pyramid, in one of the galleries, there is a display of ancient cultures and historical objects³⁹⁵. The symbolism of the pyramid used in the building has been taken even to the inner decoration of the Pyramid by putting the objects in display inside smaller pyramids. Pyramids inside the Pyramid, sacred inside the Sacred or ‘just’ a clever decoration technique that fits the overall appearance of the Pyramid?



Display of the ancient cultures and historical objects ³⁹⁶



Majorities of Kazakhstan’s minorities ³⁹⁷

The symbolism in the Pyramid and of the Pyramid is too well thought out for it to be ‘just’ the latter case, since also the library of the Pyramid is “built as a pyramid within a

³⁹⁵ Visit to the Pyramid, February 2014

³⁹⁶ Photograph taken by the author, February 2014

³⁹⁷ Photograph taken by the author, February 2014

pyramid”³⁹⁸. Furthermore, the Pyramid houses an exhibition that represents the majorities of Kazakhstan’s minorities (ethnic groups) in their national dresses standing next to each other in peace and harmony³⁹⁹, and an another exhibition that represents the world religions⁴⁰⁰.

The symbolism of the pyramids inside the Pyramid, the majorities of Kazakhstan’s minorities, and the exhibition of world religions all represent Kazakhstan as a peaceful country, home to all the different ethnicities and religions in the world. The Pyramid embodies thus the official policies of the Nazarbayev administration, the very way president Nazarbayev wants Kazakhstan to be represented in Kazakhstan and in the world –as the promoter of global and local ethnic and religious peace, understanding, and harmony. Here too, in the context of Pyramid, the architecture embodies the official state policies and the image building ambitions of president Nazarbayev.

The Pyramid can be argued to be also the symbol of the green Kazakhstan. Together with Khan Shatyr, the Pyramid is one of the most green and energy efficient buildings in Astana and Kazakhstan. Energy efficiency had a special role in these buildings, both planned and built by the Foster + Partners Company. Lord Foster, who supports ecologically friendly ideas and innovations in energy efficiency, maximized the use of natural light and air in the Pyramid (as in Khan Shatyr). Therefore, the Pyramid self-regulates air and light and actively saves energy. Large panels of glass and metal helped to maximize the access of the natural light into the Pyramid, and a clever optical system of mirrors and reflecting techniques made its circulation effective in the whole building.⁴⁰¹ Sustainable energy and energy efficiency are an essential part of the green image that Kazakhstan is creating for itself, particularly after the destructiveness of the Soviet rule towards the nature and the people of today’s Kazakhstan’s territory⁴⁰², and the greenness of these buildings symbolize this image.

³⁹⁸ Pyramid 2012, 81

³⁹⁹ Visit to the Pyramid, February 2014

⁴⁰⁰ Pyramid 2012, 47

⁴⁰¹ Pyramid 2012, 50, 77; See for example also Pyramid 2012, 54, 55, 57, 58, and 64-73

⁴⁰² See for example Berlyne Colin 2012, “The Atom Project. A Global Initiative for a Nuclear-Weapons-Free World” *Edge Kazakhstan* December, No. 08, pp. 26-30

5.3 Conclusion: from Periphery to the ‘New Jerusalem’

The Pyramid represents Kazakhstan’s interethnic and interreligious diversity in a symbolical and material form. Mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence of more than 130 nationalities and 50 religions is one of the main priorities of the independent Kazakhstan⁴⁰³ – and it must be if Kazakhstan is to maintain the peace within its borders. For Kazakhstan, the Pyramid is “the symbol of peace and unity”, and “aspiration towards perfection and harmony”⁴⁰⁴. It symbolizes Kazakhstan’s equality, peacefulness and friendliness towards all the religions and nations in the world.

The initiative to construct the Pyramid came from president Nazarbayev, the agent of the Pyramid, the Astana project and its futuristic architecture in general. According to the official narrative, which actively promotes Nazarbayev’s personality cult, the president had a vision of the Pyramid, and the Pyramid was constructed according to his vision. By choosing Lord Foster –the internationally recognized architect– and his practice to realize the project, the Nazarbayev administration ensured the international recognition for the project improving Pyramid’s and thus Astana and Kazakhstan’s image and prestige in the world. Moreover, as emphasized everywhere, it was president Nazarbayev who initiated the meetings of the Congresses of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions.

For Kazakhstanis, the Pyramid symbolizes the “inter-ethnic and inter-religious harmony, unity and friendship between nations”⁴⁰⁵. However, even though the Nazarbayev administration actively promotes this image of Kazakhstan, the economic and political powers in the country are consolidating more and more in very few hands threatening the inter-ethnic balance. In 1991, when Kazakhstan became independent, only about 40% of Kazakhstan’s population were ethnic Kazakhs. President Nazarbayev endeavoured to use Kazakhstan’s demography and its geographical location as a national asset referring to Kazakhstan “as a bridge between Europe and Asia”⁴⁰⁶. Kazakhstan’s geography makes the country both European and Asian, and its history and population link it to both

⁴⁰³ Akorda 2007, 33

⁴⁰⁴ Pyramid 2012, 11

⁴⁰⁵ Pyramid 2012, 107

⁴⁰⁶ Brill Olcott Martha 2010, *Kazakhstan, Unfulfilled Promise?* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, United Book Press, pp. 11-12

continents.⁴⁰⁷

However, this skilful phrasing of president Nazarbayev has been little more than public relations effort. Over the past decade, Kazakhstan has empowered politically only ethnic Kazakhs at the expense of all the other nationalities living in today's Kazakhstan. Moreover, the Nazarbayev administration has been actively trying to make Kazakhs the majority population of Kazakhstan, and to secure the control of the country by ethnic Kazakhs.⁴⁰⁸ Hence, even though Kazakhstan is constantly emphasizing its interreligious and interethnic peace and accord, the favouring of ethnic Kazakhs both politically and economically stands the test of time.⁴⁰⁹

Still, this skilful phrasing is definitely needed for keeping the peace and harmony in such a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country as Kazakhstan. The Pyramid, as the material symbol and agency for the Kazakhstani peace and harmony, symbolizes the values and ideas Kazakhstan wants to be associated with. By constructing its post Soviet reality (its new scene) through nationally and internationally respected ideas and values, Kazakhstan not only manages to keep the peace within its borders but also, with this skilful phrasing, manages to improve its mental image and prestige in the world. The speech of president Nazarbayev in the inauguration of the Pyramid on the 1st of September 2006, neatly summarizes the idea the Pyramid stands for:

“The shape of the pyramid itself has deep meaning -- a sacred significance for many ethnic groups -- associated with the pursuit of perfection and harmony of the human soul. The shape of a pyramid reflects the unity of religions, ethnicities, and cultures. In this sense, our pyramid personifies the lofty and noble idea of dialogue among civilizations. Just as the four walls of the pyramid look to the four corners of the earth, Kazakhstan is open and friendly to everyone. It symbolizes sublime goodness and mutual understanding, beauty in the world, and the purity of humankind's

⁴⁰⁷ Brill Olcott 2010, 11-12

⁴⁰⁸ Brill Olcott 2010, 11-13; The constitution of Kazakhstan, adopted in 1993, even referred to Kazakhstan as “the home of the Kazakh people” (Brill Olcott 2010, 14) and not the Kazakhstani people. In 1995, through a national referendum, the earlier constitution was replaced. In 1998, and again in 2007, the Constitution was amended, and the reference of Kazakhstan as “the home of the Kazakh people” was replaced with “We, the people of Kazakhstan”, and “A citizen of the Republic of Kazakhstan” (Official site of the president of the Republic of Kazakhstan, “The Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan”, <http://www.akorda.kz/en/category/konstituciya> [27.7.2014]).

⁴⁰⁹ Observations made by the author and conversations had by the author with ethnic Kazakhs and Russians in their 30's; See also Brill Olcott 2010, 10-17

aspirations.”⁴¹⁰

Kazakhstan does not ‘just’ build to reimagine itself; it talks itself into modernity and future. Representing the Pyramid as the embodiment of peace, accord and harmony, high officials of Kazakhstan talk and write Kazakhstan into the better future. The emphasis on the peaceful Kazakhstani future runs through the Pyramid (2012), and even though there are no explicit expressions of it in the official contexts, the emphasis is in contrast to Kazakhstan’s past that is connected to repression, deportation and terror. In other words, if the emphasis is on peace and harmony, there must be some fear of disturbance of them or they must still be lacking, at least partially. The emphasis in the context of the Pyramid, as well as in general, is on the future in contrast to the past, and the peace in contrast to the terror. Kazakhstan is thus actively creating itself a new scene in contrast to the old one.

Moreover, the new scene should be preferably one where Kazakhstan would be seen as the “bridge between the two subcontinents” and the “integrator standing for the unification of Eurasian peoples”⁴¹¹. As one of Nazarbayev’s pet projects, the Pyramid is an important part of Kazakhstan’s nation building and identity- project. The narrative revolving around the Pyramid establishes Kazakhstan at the intersection of world religions, which makes Kazakhstan a ‘natural’ agent to promote peace and accord, to strengthen the interreligious dialogue in the multi-ethnic and –religious Kazakhstan and in the world.⁴¹² As it is said in Akorda (2007), “the main priority of the independent Kazakhstan is to ensure stability in the society and to further strengthen interethnic and interreligious accord”⁴¹³.

Kazakhstan is thus reimagining itself from the periphery of the Soviet Union to a geographically central and acknowledged agent in the world, and the Pyramid has a special role in this:

“There are many architectural objects of cult devotion in the world, uniting various religious traditions under a single roof. But Kazakhstan’s temple differs from others in that it doesn’t only symbolize friendship and harmony among world and

⁴¹⁰ President Nazarbayev’s presentation at the opening of the Palace of Peace and Reconciliation, 1 September 2006 in Pyramid 2012, 7

⁴¹¹ Akorda 2007, 34

⁴¹² Koch 2010, 776-777

⁴¹³ Akorda 2007, 33

traditional religions, but is also a space for negotiations and forums. Over the last years, the Astana Pyramid has, without exaggeration, become the center of socio-political and cultural life not only in Kazakhstan, but for entire world community.”⁴¹⁴

The accuracy of the statement can be argued⁴¹⁵, but it shows the importance of the issue for Kazakhstan. President Nazarbayev constantly refers to Kazakhstan as the “bridge between Europe and Asia”⁴¹⁶, and the Pyramid has a special religious importance in this reference. Still, the Pyramid is not ‘just’ the “bridge between Europe and Asia”⁴¹⁷, a one of a kind piece of architecture that unites religions and traditions and symbolizes peace, friendship and harmony between religions, but it is also transforming Astana “into a kind of New Jerusalem”⁴¹⁸. The heart of Eurasia, the epicentre of the world, and the New Jerusalem transfer Astana and Kazakhstan metaphorically from the periphery of the Soviet Union to the centre of Eurasia promoting Nazarbayev’s administration’s nation- and image building project. The metaphors strive to increase Kazakhstan’s prestige in the world by bringing people symbolically together from different parts of the world and providing them with a place for a dialogue and interreligious understanding. Through the rhetorical acts around the Pyramid and the Pyramid’s symbolism, Kazakhstan proceeds towards its new scene.

⁴¹⁴ Pyramid 2012, 107

⁴¹⁵ Particularly considering for example the media coverage on Kazakhstan (see for example Koch’s 2012b media analysis on Kazakhstan (western press)) and how few people in the west are familiar with Kazakhstan and Central Asia in general.

⁴¹⁶ Brill Olcott 2010, 11-12

⁴¹⁷ Ibid

⁴¹⁸ Pyramid 2012, 48

6. FROM COMMUNISM TO CAPITALISM: KHAN SHATYR, THE KAZAKH SYMBOL OF WEALTH

Khan Shatyr is one of the newest pieces of architecture and entertainment and shopping centres in Astana. The name of the building, Khan Shatyr, translates to the “Royal Marquee”⁴¹⁹ or to “the Tent of the Khan”⁴²⁰ Khan meaning the ruler of the people or the King, when translated to western cultures⁴²¹. Khan Shatyr has thus a prestigious name that refers to the house and home of the ancient rulers of today’s Kazakhstan’s territory. Furthermore, Khan Shatyr’s structure has its resonance in Kazakh history, the form of the building, the tent, being the traditional nomadic building and living form. However, it is not ‘just’ a tent; it is the world’s tallest tensile structure⁴²² and the world’s largest tent.

Khan Shatyr, like Baiterek, symbolizes historic and traditional aspects of Kazakhstan’s culture in a modern rendition. It embodies the symbols of the Kazakh past combined with the prosperity of the present and the future. In this chapter I am going to concentrate on Khan Shatyr, its symbolism and meaning to Kazakhs, Kazakhstanis and Kazakhstan, and its significance to the new capital, to the new state, and to the nation building process that has been going on throughout Nazarbayev’s presidency.

In this chapter I will analyse Khan Shatyr and its symbolical meaning for Kazakhs and the New Kazakhstan, the new scene. I will read Khan Shatyr politically using the analytical notions of Burke’s scene, act, agent, agency, and purpose in the Scene→Act – and the Scene→Agent –ratios. I will analyse the motives behind Khan Shatyr that I see both as an act, requested by president Nazarbayev and realized by Lord Norman Foster, and as an agency to leave the scene of the Soviet past and to enter the scene of the independent and prosperous Kazakh future full of luxury goods and fine brands, the scene of the consumer society of the New Kazakhstan and the symbol of wealth. I will concentrate on Khan

⁴¹⁹ Kazakh World, “Khan Shatyr: Kazakhstan’s one of a kind shopping mall and entertainment complex” <http://kazakhworld.com/khan-shatyr-kazakhstans-one-of-a-kind-shopping-mall-and-entertainment-complex/> [23.10.2014]

⁴²⁰ Foster + Partners, “Projects/Khan Shatyr Entertainment Centre Astana, Kazakhstan 2006-2010”, <http://www.fosterandpartners.com/projects/khan-shatyr-entertainment-centre/> [6.10.2014]

⁴²¹ In English, khan has two main definitions, and the definition that better suits this context is a “title given to rulers and officials in central Asia, Afghanistan, and certain other Muslim countries” (Oxford Dictionaries, <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/khan#khan-2> [23.10.2014])

⁴²² Foster + Partners, “Projects/Khan Shatyr Entertainment Centre Astana, Kazakhstan 2006-2010”, Ibid.

Shatyr as an agency and a purpose, as here too, president Nazarbayev is an explicit agent, and Khan Shatyr an explicit act and part of a bigger act, the Astana project, as Baiterek and the Pyramid were.

6.1 The Giant Tent



Khan Shatyr, Foster + Partners ⁴²³

Khan Shatyr Entertainment Centre, completed in 2010, is the newest of the three buildings analysed here. It was officially opened on the 6th of July 2010. The time of the opening

⁴²³ Foster + Partners 2006, “News/Archive/Designs for a new entertainment centre in Astana”, 7 December, <http://www.fosterandpartners.com/news/archive/2006/12/designs-for-a-new-entertainment-centre-in-astana/> [6.10.2014]

coincided with the Astana Day⁴²⁴, the birthday of the capital, which coincides [conveniently] with the birthday of president Nazarbayev.⁴²⁵ President Nazarbayev, the agent of Baiterek, the Pyramid, the Astana project and Astana's new architecture in general, participated in Khan Shatyr's grand opening ceremony⁴²⁶, which coincided with his 70th birthday. Khan Shatyr was opened for Nazarbayev's 70th birthday even though it was not entirely finished; for Kazakhs, the 70th birthday is considered to be an important occasion. Khan Shatyr's opening ceremony was a "true spectacle"⁴²⁷, and the western press criticised it as a birthday present for the president⁴²⁸, who had ordered the creation of Khan Shatyr just as he had ordered the creation of Baiterek and the Pyramid.

President Nazarbayev has been criticized for ordering the construction of Khan Shatyr despite the existence of four other malls within a square kilometre from the new Khan Shatyr⁴²⁹, even in Kazakhstan. Alexander Tarasov, 70, told to New York Times (2008) "We didn't need all this", and "The only people who benefited from this are the people at the top who bought up all the land and became millionaires"⁴³⁰. According to New York Times (2008) Tarasov receives a pension that is less than \$100 a month, which, according to my own experiences from living in Astana, is not nearly enough to buy the food or to pay the rent and utility bills for a month.

For the realization of Khan Shatyr, the president invited again the famous Lord Foster and his practise Foster + Partners to design and to manage the construction of Khan Shatyr.⁴³¹ President Nazarbayev must have enjoyed working with Lord Foster, and he must have

⁴²⁴ In Kazakhstan, every city has its own birthday and birthday celebrations with different events and actions, even fireworks. The birthday of the capital happens to coincide with the birthday of the president so that the city celebrations are the president's celebrations and respectively the president's celebrations are the city's celebrations. (Observations made by the author during the Astana Day celebrations and discussions carried out regarding the day with the local co-workers at the Embassy of Finland in Astana, Kazakhstan)

⁴²⁵ Foster + Partners 2010, "News/Archive/Grand opening of Khan Shatyr Entertainment Center, Kazakhstan the world's tallest tensile structure", 6 July, <http://www.fosterandpartners.com/news/archive/2010/07/grand-opening-of-khan-shatyr-entertainment-center-kazakhstan-the-worlds-tallest-tensile-structure/> [6.10.2014]; "A Summary of cultural objects of Astana", *The Astana Times, Bringing Kazakhstan to the World* 2014, Ibid.

⁴²⁶ Foster + Partners 2010, "News/Archive/Grand opening of Khan Shatyr Entertainment Center, Kazakhstan the world's tallest tensile structure", Ibid.

⁴²⁷ Koch 2012b, 2458

⁴²⁸ Ibid; for the criticism in western press, see Koch 2012b

⁴²⁹ Moore 2010; "Astana, the futuristic frontier of architecture", *the Guardian*, 8 August 2010, <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/gallery/2010/aug/08/architecture-kazakhstan> [2.10.2014]

⁴³⁰ "Kazakhstan Celebrates its Capital's 10th Anniversary", *New York Times*, 6 July 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/06/world/asia/06iht-kazakh.4.14278399.html> [20.4.2015]

⁴³¹ Foster+ Partners, "Projects/Khan Shatyr Entertainment Centre Astana, Kazakhstan 2006-2010", Ibid.; Kazakh World, "Khan Shatyr: Kazakhstan's one of a kind shopping mall and entertainment complex", Ibid.; "A Summary of cultural objects of Astana", *The Astana Times, Bringing Kazakhstan to the World* 2014, Ibid.

approved the outcome of the Palace of Peace and Reconciliation, as he invited Lord Foster to design another building for him.

Foster's Khan Shatyr is full of symbolism that can be read as an agency that disseminates the image of Astana and Kazakhstan as a nation that remembers and respects its Kazakh (nomad) history and traditions. As stated before, the structure of the centre has its resonance in Kazakh history, the form of the building, the tent, being the traditional nomadic building and living form. Khan Shatyr is an agency, a tool to connect the people of Astana and Kazakhstan to their Kazakh past in combination with their consumerist and wealthy Kazakh future, the new scene of Kazakhstan. Moreover, it is also an act to impress and to add Kazakhstan's prestige in the world (purpose) by using unique and spectacular architecture to do so, the purpose of the Astana project all along.

Rhetorics of Forms and Shapes

Khan Shatyr, just like Baiterek and the Pyramid, combines the past with the future. Its form reflects to Kazakhstan's nomad past but its building materials and appearance to a prosperous and green new future. Khan Shatyr, just like Baiterek and the Pyramid, contains lots of symbolism; the associations with the nomadic lifestyle and the royal marquee had a huge impact on the design of the mall, and president Nazarbayev had a huge impact on the outcome of the complex for it was him who wanted the new mall to represent a giant yurt. Khan Shatyr is a unique building and a new symbolical entity, built to impress and to be talked about, and it is an important agency for the New Kazakhstan.

Khan Shatyr reaches 150 metres forming one of the highest peaks in Astana, and the area the complex encloses exceeds 100,000 square meters.⁴³² The tent of the Khan is located at the northern end of Astana's central axis that starts from the Pyramid and stretches through the Akorda Presidential Palace and Baiterek all the way to Khan Shatyr.⁴³³ (See the photograph of Baiterek on page 57)

⁴³² Ibid

⁴³³ Foster+ Partners, "Projects/Khan Shatyr Entertainment Centre Astana, Kazakhstan 2006-2010, Ibid.;" Foster+ Partners, "News/Archive/Grand opening of Khan Shatyr Entertainment Center, Kazakhstan the world's tallest tensile structure", Ibid.

The form and the structure of Khan Shatyr have great resonance for ethnic Kazakhs for the Kazakh history as for centuries the tent remained the traditional nomadic building and living form in Kazakhstan's territory and on the entire Central Asian Steppe.⁴³⁴ Khan Shatyr symbolizes the historic and traditional aspects of Kazakhstan's culture in a modern rendition; it combines the symbols of the Kazakh past with the aspirations for the Kazakh future.



Kazakh yurt ⁴³⁵

For Kazakh nomads the Kazakh yurt was the most popular housing custom; it was easy to take down and to put back together. Its structure was light and it was easy to transport and to carry with. It was very convenient for the nomadic life of the Steppe, and despite its light structure, it kept wind and cold outside. The Kazakh yurt was thus the best house and home for Kazakh nomads, and it still is for those who often have to travel or to change their places of working or living.⁴³⁶

The Kazakh yurt is one of Asia's oldest architectural constructions. President Nazarbayev, who had a great impact on the appearance of Khan Shatyr, wanted to combine the

⁴³⁴ Foster+ Partners, "Khan Shatyr Entertainment Centre", file:///Users/user1/Downloads/Khan_Shatyr_Entertainment_Centre_Foster_Partners.pdf.pdf [6.2.2015]; "Kazakh yurt – a house without corners", History of Kazakhstan, 22 September 2014 <http://e-history.kz/en/publications/view/743> [21.10.14]; Ker Than 2010, "Pictures: World's Biggest Tent Rises in Kazakhstan", *National Geographic, Photo Gallery*, 1 September, Photographs by Webster Will, Getty Images, <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2010/08/photogalleries/100831-worlds-biggest-tent-kazakhstan-world-pictures/> [23.10.2014]

⁴³⁵ "Kazakh yurt – a house without corners", History of Kazakhstan, 22 September 2014, <http://e-history.kz/en/publications/view/743> [21.10.14]

⁴³⁶ Ibid

traditional and the modern in it, as was the case with Baiterek. For him the emphasis on Kazakh history and Kazakh traditions is particularly important, and through Astana's architecture he strives to keep it present in the present-day Kazakhstan; through the architecture, the president strives to keep the best of the Kazakh [non Soviet] past and to associate it with the best of the Kazakh future. Through the architecture, the president shows the Kazakh future, the New Kazakhstan, and promises its eventual realization.

According to Nigel Dancey, the Design Director at Foster + Partners, "Khan Shatyr will be an important new destination for the people of Astana to enjoy at all times of the year, whatever the weather"⁴³⁷. Khan Shatyr indeed will be, and it already is, an important destination for the people of Astana and Kazakhstan to enjoy all year round, even in the middle of the harshest winter weather conditions peculiar to Kazakhstan⁴³⁸ due to its very modern and energy efficient construction materials. Khan Shatyr is planned and built in an economical and thermally efficient way. The translucent material, the polymeric fluorine ETFE covering the building, allows the daylight to penetrate the building while protecting the interior of the building from the extreme weather conditions of the capital, from the extreme heat and cold.⁴³⁹ Khan Shatyr provides Astana with multiple civic, cultural and social amenities in a sheltered location, protected from weather extremes – "a world within"⁴⁴⁰.

Khan Shatyr is an important destination even for those Kazakhstanis who do not have sufficient means to purchase the luxury items and services sold in the stores of the centre, in other words, the majority of Kazakhstanis. For them Khan Shatyr serves as a popular rendezvous⁴⁴¹, a place to meet, to socialize, and to be seen, even if they cannot actually afford to buy any of its items or services. Khan Shatyr is indeed one of the most popular destinations in Astana due to its peculiar appearance, uniqueness, size and impressiveness –and of course due to the numerous famous world, regional, and local brands and designer

⁴³⁷ Foster + Partners 2010, "News/Archive/Grand opening of Khan Shatyr Entertainment Center, Kazakhstan the world's tallest tensile structure", Ibid

⁴³⁸ Observations and experiences made by the author during the wintertime in Astana in 2014.

⁴³⁹ Foster+ Partners, "Projects/Khan Shatyr Entertainment Centre Astana, Kazakhstan 2006-2010, Ibid.; Foster + Partners, "News/Archive/Khan Shatyr Entertainment Centre's 150 metre mast successfully erected", Press Release 12 December 2008, <http://www.fosterandpartners.com/news/archive/2008/12/khan-shatyr-entertainment-centres-150-metre-mast-successfully-erected/> [6.10.2014]; EXPO 2017 web pages, <http://www.expo2017astana.com/en/page/astana/> [3.10.2014]

⁴⁴⁰ Foster + Partners, "Khan Shatyr Entertainment Centre", Ibid.

⁴⁴¹ Koch 2014

labels it houses⁴⁴², even if not affordable for the most of the visitors, who mostly just circle the centre and admire its luxury. It is also a popular tourist attraction for Kazakhstanis who come to Astana; they admire it, they take some pictures of it, and they circle around it but they rarely buy anything from its stores⁴⁴³.

Despite this, Khan Shatyr and the other malls in Astana and Kazakhstan are officially planned and designed the masses, the collective public in mind that in Kazakhstan is relatively poor and cannot afford their services⁴⁴⁴; therefore, the stores of the malls usually stay relatively empty.

6.2 Khan Shatyr, the Symbol of Wealth and Prosperity



Celebrations, Khan Shatyr, Foster + Partners⁴⁴⁵

⁴⁴² Observations and experiences made by the author during the wintertime in Astana, 2014.

⁴⁴³ Observations and experiences made by the author during the spring and summer in Astana, 2014. Most of the more prestigious shops had no customers, and many times I entered them to circle around, there were more sales persons than actual clients in there.

⁴⁴⁴ Koch 2014

⁴⁴⁵ Foster+ Partners, “Projects/Khan Shatyr Entertainment Centre Astana, Kazakhstan 2006-2010”, Ibid.

During the night, Khan Shatyr is very colourful, and sometimes it changes its colours like a rainbow⁴⁴⁶. During the day, Khan Shatyr stays white. White yurt has been the symbol of wealth and prosperity among Kazakhs for centuries. The size of the yurt and its interior decoration represented the economic status of its residents. The yurts of the rich were full of beautiful ornaments⁴⁴⁷ and wealth whereas the yurts of the poor were small and simple.

Khan Shatyr symbolizes the Kazakh wealth and prosperity. It is a popular destination for wealthy citizens of Astana and Kazakhstan, and it “represents a major new civic, cultural and social venue for the people of Astana, bringing together a wide range of activities within a sheltered climatic envelope that provides a comfortable environment all year round”⁴⁴⁸.



The inner part of Khan Shatyr ⁴⁴⁹

⁴⁴⁶ Observations made by the author during the spring and summer of 2014 in Astana.

⁴⁴⁷ “Kazakh yurt – a house without corners”, History of Kazakhstan, Ibid.

⁴⁴⁸ Foster + Partners 2010, “News/Archive/Grand opening of Khan Shatyr Entertainment Center, Kazakhstan the world’s tallest tensile structure”, Ibid

⁴⁴⁹ Photo taken by the author, February 2014

Khan Shatyr indeed brings together a wide range of activities. The mall has plenty of different entertainment and leisure facilities and flexible spaces that can be used for various programmes, events and exhibitions. The large flexible space at the core of the building is often used for various cultural events and exhibitions⁴⁵⁰, markets and celebrations⁴⁵¹.



The Beach, Khan Shatyr⁴⁵²

For children, the highlights of Khan Shatyr are the amusement park and the water park on its two uppermost floors. The tropical beach resort, the sand of which was imported from the Maldives⁴⁵³, is one of the most prestigious places to enter in Astana, affordable only to the top strata of Kazakhstan. The temperature of the resort stays at 35 degrees Celsius all

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid; Foster + Partners 2008, “News/Archive/Khan Shatyr Entertainment Centre’s 150 metre mas successfully erected”, Ibid

⁴⁵¹ For example during the Kazakh ‘New Year’ celebration in the beginning of March, the space was full of stands selling traditional and modern, Kazakh and foreign items and goods. Observations made by the author during the Nauryz celebrations, March 2014.

⁴⁵² Photo taken by the author, March 2014

⁴⁵³ Observations and experiences made by the author during the time in Astana in 2014; Kazakh World, “Khan Shatyr: Kazakhstan’s one of a kind shopping mall and entertainment complex”, Ibid.; “A Summary of cultural objects of Astana”, *The Astana Times, Bringing Kazakhstan to the World* 2014

year round despite of the extremely harsh winter weather conditions of the steppe that surrounds Astana.⁴⁵⁴ Temperatures in Astana vary from -35 degrees Celsius in wintertime to +35 degrees Celsius in summertime. The design of the building shelters the centre from the weather extremes allowing its visitors to enjoy agreeable temperature.⁴⁵⁵

Khan Shatyr is like a world within a world; it provides a comfortable shelter to practise all kinds of cultural and social amenities, whatever the weather is like outside the centre.⁴⁵⁶ The centre provides the citizens of Astana and Kazakhstan a city inside the city and gives the population, at least the wealthy one, a relief from the Kazakh steppe winter.

The huge amount of space surrounding the centre is utilized too, particularly during the traditional Kazakh celebrations. For example during the Nauryz, traditional yurts are put up to provide shelter to different market stands and activities. During the Kazakh festivities, traditional entertainment is provided too, and performers dressed up in traditional Kazakh costumes, entertain the people from Astana, Kazakhstan and elsewhere.



⁴⁵⁴ “A Summary of cultural objects of Astana”, *The Astana Times, Bringing Kazakhstan to the World*, 2014

⁴⁵⁵ Foster + Partners 2010, “News/Archive/Grand opening of Khan Shatyr Entertainment Center, Kazakhstan the world’s tallest tensile structure”, *Ibid*

⁴⁵⁶ Foster+ Partners, “Projects/Khan Shatyr Entertainment Centre Astana, Kazakhstan 2006-2010, *Ibid*.”

6.3 Conclusion: Another Symbol of Nazarbayev's Megalomania?

Khan Shatyr is not 'just' one of Astana's shopping and entertainment centres, it is one of Astana and Kazakhstan's greatest attractions that draws people from all over Kazakhstan⁴⁵⁸. Khan Shatyr, as the world's largest tent and the tallest tensile structure, designed by the famous Lord Foster, has managed to attract a considerable amount of attention to Kazakhstan. However, the attention has not been merely a positive and admiring one, as the Nazarbayev administration intended. For instance, at the time of the inauguration, Khan Shatyr was described by *the Guardian* as "the latest vanity project initiated by Nursultan Nazarbayev, Kazakhstan's increasingly autocratic president"⁴⁵⁹.

Considering the timing of the opening ceremony, the Astana Day, the holiday to celebrate Astana, the timing of which conveniently coincides with the birthday of president Nazarbayev, the spectacular and megalomaniac opening ceremony was interpreted by the western press, as the celebrations on the Astana day in general, as a birthday present and as a birthday celebration for president Nazarbayev. As Koch (2012b) notes, "The Western press has consistently read the grandiose spectacles held during the holiday not as celebrations of the capital city's 'birthday' (as in the official version), but as a birthday party for Nazarbayev himself"⁴⁶⁰. The opening was celebrated with high level representatives and performers⁴⁶¹, which is read as another "supporting evidence for the president's megalomania"⁴⁶².

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid

⁴⁵⁸ Observations and experiences made by the author during the time in Astana in 2014; Kazakh World, "Khan Shatyr: Kazakhstan's one of a kind shopping mall and entertainment complex", Ibid.

⁴⁵⁹ Elder Miriam 2010, "World's biggest tent offers escape from Kazakhstan's big chill" *the Guardian* 6 July, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/jul/06/largest-tent-kazakhstan-lord-foster> [23.10.2014]

⁴⁶⁰ Koch 2012b, 2457-2458

⁴⁶¹ The opening ceremony was launched by Andrea Bocelli, an Italian tenor, and closed with fireworks. The president of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev, the president of Russia Dmitry Medvedev, the president of Turkey Abdullah Gul and the president of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovich, among others, participated at the opening ceremony (Koch 2012b, 2458).

⁴⁶² Koch 2012b, 2457-2458

One of the explanations for Khan Shatyr has been the need to silence the last of the early critics that resisted the idea of the capital relocation from Almaty's nice and warm climate to Astana's harsh steppe winter weather conditions. By providing the critics a city within a city with all its services, the Nazarbayev administration hoped to silence last of them.⁴⁶³ If this were at least partly true, as Koch's interview (2011) with Astana master planner Chikanayev would suggest⁴⁶⁴, the creation of Khan Shatyr was necessary to silence the Kazakhstani critique towards Nazarbayev. In this explanation, president Nazarbayev, the agent, created Khan Shatyr, the act and the agency, to silence the critique and the discontent towards him and his decision to relocate the capital (scene→act-, agent→act-, scene→agent→purpose, and scene→act→purpose -ratios) – a move to strengthen his position in power.

Another explanation for Khan Shatyr could be the will to create a new symbol of wealth and prosperousness for Kazakhstan, a promise that soon too, the people who cannot yet afford the goods and the services of the centre will have the means to buy them if they preserve their trust towards Nazarbayev. If the centre is “for the people”⁴⁶⁵, as often stated, then the people should be able to afford it. Khan Shatyr gives thus a glimpse of the better future in the present, a piece of architecture Kazakhstanis are proud of. As Koch's interviews (2011) show, “the lower strata of Astana will often superficially remark on its beauty, but uniformly underscore how expensive it is”⁴⁶⁶. For now, high prices exclude the lower classes from actually buying anything from the centre, which explains both the critique towards it in Kazakhstan and the critique towards Nazarbayev's megalomaniac tendencies in the west; if the centre is “for the people”⁴⁶⁷, the people should be able to afford it.

Khan Shatyr acts thus both as a promise of a better future and as an agency to silence the criticism towards the decision that president Nazarbayev took. By representing a modern version of the traditional Kazakh yurt, Khan Shatyr, as part of Nazarbayev's architectural nation building process, underlines the Kazakh ethnicity and awakens the Kazakh national memory of the pre Russian and the pre Soviet Kazakhstan and Kazakh life. Despite the

⁴⁶³ See Koch 2012b, 2456 and Koch's (2012b) media analysis on Astana for further speculation.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid

⁴⁶⁵ Koch 2012a, 150; Observations made by the author, spring 2014

⁴⁶⁶ Koch 2012a, 148

⁴⁶⁷ Koch 2012a, 150

Eurasian policy of president Nazarbayev, the Kazakh ethnicity, past, and future is highlighted here, too, in the architectural form of Khan Shatyr. By providing an extra entertainment and leisure centre and an escape from the winter for the top strata of Astana and Kazakhstan, Nazarbayev managed to silence the critics and to get a new symbol, a new piece of architecture for Astana to impress and to be talked about in the world –an agency to increase Kazakhstan’s mental image and prestige in the world.

7. CONCLUSION: ASTANA'S ARCHITECTURE AS THE REPRESENTATION OF THE NEW KAZAKHSTAN

Kazakhstan's new capital Astana has changed a lot during its existence. It has become a peculiar combination of futuristic design and Soviet style standardized architecture and a combination of tradition and modernity, as Kazakhstan has managed to include new symbols of glory, traditions, myths, and representations of Kazakhstan and Kazakhstan's past in Astana's architecture. As the symbol of Kazakhstan's development and modernity, Astana has become the center of Kazakhstan's cultural creativity and architectural experimentation. As such, it has become the embodiment of Nazarbayev's ambitions for the country, a political mean to impress, to put Astana and Kazakhstan on the map, and to add Astana and Kazakhstan's prestige in the world.

In this chapter, I draw conclusions from my political reading of the Astana project and Astana's new architecture on the Left Bank of the Ishim River. In the beginning of my study I asked, what sort of political messages can be read from Astana's new architecture, and what can a political reading of Astana's new architecture reveal about Astana, Kazakhstan, and the aspirations and desires of Kazakhstan's authoritarian president Nazarbayev. To answer to my research questions, I read Astana's new architecture politically with the help of the conceptions created by Kenneth Burke. I discovered that Kazakhstan's capital relocation and the Astana project were legitimized as necessary political acts in Kazakhstan's post Soviet scene. The acts were legitimized and carried out by president Nazarbayev, the agent of both of them. Astana's new architecture, as I hypothesized, was used as an agency to impress as a new Kazakhstan. However, the change Astana has experienced was much more superficial than I was able to anticipate initially.

My reading of Astana's new architecture showed many ways in which architecture is used as means for political representations. Astana's new architecture is a part of Kazakhstan and president Nazarbayev's state- and nation-building process symbolizing Kazakhstan's independence, rebirth and new beginning; Astana's architecture symbolizes thus the new vision of the New Kazakhstan. This is in accordance with Burke's account on art as an

“act” or a “symbolic action”, as means of communication⁴⁶⁸ in a way that architecture, designed to evoke some sort of a ‘response’, helps to accept and to tolerate the intolerable⁴⁶⁹. As such, art and architecture have a large propaganda element in themselves; art is persuasion, a ‘strategic answer’ to a situation in which it took place.⁴⁷⁰ In accordance with Burke’s notions, Astana’s new architecture is propagandist, persuasive, and nationalistic (among many other things that it is). Next I will go through the main themes I discovered while reading Kazakhstan’s capital relocation, the Astana project, and Astana’s new architecture politically.

Kazakhstan’s Capital Relocation: the Political Act in the Post Soviet Scene

In accordance with Burke’s interpretation of art as an ‘act’, a ‘response’ to a situation in which it took place, Astana’s architecture, and the Kazakhstani capital relocation and the Astana project in general must be enlarged upon as acts needed in specific Kazakhstani post Soviet scene. In accordance with the principle of drama, in Kazakhstan’s post Soviet scene, the act to relocate the capital had to be adopted to develop the economically and politically shattered post Soviet Kazakhstani scene (scene-act-purpose –ratio)⁴⁷¹.

In Kazakhstan, the post Soviet Almaty-Astana capital relocation is justified as a necessary (and depoliticized) act needed to develop the scene of the independent post Soviet Kazakhstan. As Astana was imagined as a discursive ‘tabula rasa’, its radical changing to the capital of the independent Kazakhstan became legitimate; Astana became a perfect place to realize the vision of the New Kazakhstan. Through the Astana project (the act), the elite established the state as the agent of modernity and as the constructor of the Kazakh nation-state (scene-act-(new)scene). Almaty was a colonial and a Soviet capital ill suited for creating national loyalty and control in a post-colonial context. Kazakhstan’s capital relocation was thus needed to address Kazakhstan’s post-Soviet state and nation building

⁴⁶⁸ Burke 1941, *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, Louisiana pp. 89, 8 and 235, 236 in Hochmuth Marie 1952, “Kenneth Burke and the “New Rhetoric””, *The Quarterly Journal of Speech*, Vol. 38, No. 2, p. 134

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid

⁴⁷⁰ Burke 1941, 1 in Hochmuth 1952, 134

⁴⁷¹ Scene-act –ratio: “a certain policy *had* to be adopted in a certain situation” (Burke 1945, *A Grammar of Motives*, New York p. 13 in Hochmuth 1952, 142). See also Overington 1977

challenges; it was a response to the challenges caused by Kazakhstan's cultural, ethnical and religious geography, and a way to initiate the process of 'imagining' the Kazakh nation-state (scene-act-purpose).

Moreover, the Kazakhstani capital relocation was personally beneficial to president Nazarbayev. With the capital relocation, the president consolidated his position in power and marginalized his rivals; he remoulded Kazakhstan's patronage system to his favour and rewarded the elite that stayed the most loyal to him. Moreover, through Kazakhstan's capital relocation and the state building process, the president strengthened his position and political legitimacy and integrity to power and to rule the nation (agent-act-purpose –ratio). The relocation was thus equally about the symbolic order and persuasion as it was about a specific political act in a specific political scene. With the Kazakhstani capital relocation (the act), president Nazarbayev (the agent) addressed all his and Kazakhstan's post Soviet challenges and put Kazakhstan on its new path, on the 'Great Era of Astana' and the New Kazakhstan.

The President, the Agent of the New Kazakhstan

President Nazarbayev has had a great part in designing and executing Astana's makeover and Astana's new and unique architecture; his personal preferences have affected Astana's new appearance a lot.⁴⁷² For Nazarbayev, Astana's Left Bank acts as a synecdoche; it represents his vision of the new Kazakhstan and its post Soviet modernity. In many ways Astana acts thus as his vanity project. For Nazarbayev, Astana "reflects the spirit and soul"⁴⁷³ of the optimum Kazakhstan, which makes it a part of Kazakhstan's image building project and highlights the importance of representing Astana as a modern and developed city. This representational practise has been done by way of new, modern, and grandiose architecture on the Left Bank of Astana. Accordingly, according to Nazarbayev, the history of the independent Kazakhstan "reflects in [Astana's] new quarters, parks and masterpieces of architecture. Therefore, the love for Astana is a filial feeling for the

⁴⁷² "All the new projects bear the mark of the country's president, Nursultan Nazarbayev." (Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the Hellenic Republic Ibid)

⁴⁷³ "Наша столица отражает дух всей страны." Назарбаев 2006, 354, Translated by the author.

motherland”⁴⁷⁴.

Nazarbayev ties Astana with Kazakhstan’s independence and Kazakhs and Kazakhstani’s love with their motherland promoting thus patriotism and nationalism within his peoples. By unifying ‘the love for Astana’ and the independence of Kazakhstan, Nazarbayev rhetorically obligates the loving the capital –for who in Kazakhstan would not love the independence? For Nazarbayev, the Astana project is the most important and visible political nation- and state building project of his career. In Kazakhstan, his decisions to relocate the capital and initiate the Astana project are glorified as necessary steps to combat the challenges of the newly independent post Soviet Kazakhstan, to attract investment and capital to Astana and Kazakhstan. The Astana project is Nazarbayev’s biggest achievement and an important element in creating the image of his benevolence. Nazarbayev utilizes thus the emotional attachment that the Soviet Union instilled to the ‘state’ employing the paternalistic ways of ruling and providing economic opportunities and stability to Kazakhstani. For Kazakhs, the president is the ‘father’ of the Astana project and the New Kazakhstan, and Astana’s monumental architecture is a monument to Nazarbayev’s vision on Kazakhstan’s modernity and idealized future, an agency to create nationalism and patriotism in Kazakhstan.

President Nazarbayev is the centre of a thriving personality cult, common in the former Soviet Union and post Soviet countries. Nazarbayev has ruled Kazakhstan for its entire independency, extending his tenure through constitutional revisions and allegedly free elections. However, this does not seem to bother Kazakhstani as they see Nazarbayev as a wise and far-sighted politician and the father of the nation who provides them economic opportunities. As I noted during my stay in Kazakhstan, most Kazakhs seem to really love, appreciate and respect their homeland and their president⁴⁷⁵. Through Astana, Nazarbayev stimulates Kazakhs’ emotions of pride. For Kazakhs, Kazakhstan is their homeland, and they support the idea of the national progress and greatness made possible by their president. Nazarbayev, and many Kazakhs and Kazakhstani, have even come to associate Astana with Nazarbayev. For Nazarbayev, Astana is the centre of Kazakhstan’s modernization project and the showcase for Kazakhstan’s achievements. Astana’s new

⁴⁷⁴ “A solemn meeting devoted to the Independence Day of the Republic of Kazakhstan was held on December 14, 2013 with the participation of the President Nursultan Nazarbayev”, 15 December 2013, History of Kazakhstan, <http://e-history.kz/en/publications/view/401> [10.10.2014]

⁴⁷⁵ See also Koch 2012a for similar thoughts and conclusions.

architecture symbolizes Kazakhstan's progress, success, and originality, and through symbols and propaganda like the Ayala-Alakan, increases patriotism in Kazakhstan. Nevertheless, in the western media, Nazarbayev has attracted a lot of criticism for the amount of power and wealth held by him and his family.

Astana's Architecture as the Act and the Agency to 'Imagine' the Nation

For Kazakhstanis, the Almaty-Astana capital relocation and the following Astana project have been among the most visible policies taken by Nazarbayev's post-communist administration, and the "centrepiece of the official nation-building project in Kazakhstan"⁴⁷⁶. For Kazakhs, the capital relocation and the Astana project have been the most important success stories of the independent Kazakhstan; for them, the capital Astana embodies the official Kazakh post independent nationalism inherent in Astana's new and modern architecture.⁴⁷⁷

Astana, and particularly the Left Bank of Astana's Ishim River, has a unique role in the Kazakh nationalist imagination⁴⁷⁸; it is the capital of the independent Kazakhstan. The picturesque Almaty had been the capital of the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic. It was (and still is) the largest city in Kazakhstan and its cultural centre. However, it was not the face that the independent post Soviet Kazakhstan wanted for itself. Almaty was a Soviet capital, and a Russian city; it was a colonial capital with Russian street names and monuments honouring Russian heroes, writers, and poets. It was a Russian capital full of ethnic Russians occupying most of the prestigious administrative level positions of the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic. Almaty, as Shonin Anacker put it, was a Soviet capital, "a Russian city in the midst of Kazakh territory"⁴⁷⁹ and therefore not appropriate for the new independent face of Kazakhstan.

⁴⁷⁶ Anacker Shonin 2004, "Geographies of Power in Nazarbayev's Astana", *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, Vol. 45, No. 7, pp. 515

⁴⁷⁷ See Anacker 2004, 515-516

⁴⁷⁸ See also Anacker 2004, 515

⁴⁷⁹ Anacker 2004, 517

After the Kazakhstani independence, Russian street names and monuments were renamed and replaced with the Kazakh ones in Almaty and elsewhere. Apparently this was not enough, since the president Nazarbayev decided that the independent Kazakhstan needed a capital of its own. Since his decision to relocate the capital of Kazakhstan from Almaty to Astana, Astana's physical appearance has changed very rapidly, and it still does with endless new construction projects and new peculiar pieces of architecture rising in the steppe town.

President Nazarbayev made Astana a Kazakh capital with Kazakh architecture and ambiance. Astana's new architecture became embedded in Kazakh mythology, traditions, and history disseminating emotions and pride in ethnic Kazakhs. It became the embodiment of the Kazakh national identity and nationalism. By creating Astana, Nazarbayev created Kazakhstan and articulated new Kazakh national identity. He embedded Astana in Kazakh national and traditional symbols and the symbols of his state power constituting himself and Kazakhstan as agents of modernity controlling the development of Astana (agent-act-purpose). As Alev Cinar (2012) put it when writing about the making of Ankara, "By constructing a city, the state becomes the agent of the nation, the author who inscribes the nation into space, hence creating the nation-state."⁴⁸⁰

By choosing architectural styles, erecting statues and monuments, naming and renaming street names and buildings, the Nazarbayev administration controls the daily life of Astana's city dwellers actively creating modern Kazakhstani citizens and constructing Astana as a modern Kazakh capital of the independent Kazakhstan. For ordinary Kazakhstani citizens, Astana's new architecture is one of the most visible symbols of the new Kazakhstan, and as such, it is an important part of Nazarbayev's nation building project. Through Astana's architecture, the Nazarbayev administration is 'imagining' the new Kazakhstani identity and the new Kazakhstani nation. Moreover, by representing a rupture with the Soviet architecture, Astana symbolizes Kazakhstan's new beginning. Astana creates its modernity in contrast to and in opposite to its Soviet past; it determines itself as a place of modernity, future, order, civilization and reason and represents outside of itself the colonial, barbarian, uncivilized, backward, irrational and disordered Soviet.⁴⁸¹

⁴⁸⁰ Cinar Alev 2012, "Cities" in *The Routledge Handbook of Modern Turkey*, Edited by Metin Heper and Sabri Sayari, Routledge, Taylor & Francis Books, p. 304

⁴⁸¹ See Timothy Mitchell 1998 about the creation of the identity of a modern city (Mitchell Timothy 1998,

In order to represent itself as a modern, the city needs the other, the 'non modern' to maintain its representation as 'modern'. This is in accordance with Burke's Negative; Astana needs the negative to highlight all the things that it is not.⁴⁸² Furthermore, as Burke points out, we need opposites, 'polar terms', to define 'us' and the terms we are using⁴⁸³, the negative. Through Astana's new architecture, Kazakhstan is portraying itself as a modern, futuristic, nationalistic, multicultural and secular nation-state in contrast to backward, traditional, Islamic and Soviet. Astana, taking a 'definitive break' from the Soviet Union, embodies the official vision of the Kazakh nation; it constitutes itself by overcoming Kazakhstan's colonial legacy and developing national consciousness and identity. Astana, through its new architecture, establishes collective (Kazakh) memories and traditions actively 'imagining' Kazakh identity and community in the Benedict Anderson's sense⁴⁸⁴.

The chosen pieces of architecture, Baiterek, the Pyramid, and Khan Shatyr, embody the new beginning of Kazakhstan; they actively distance Astana and Kazakhstan from the Soviet past and emphasize the Kazakh traditions, folklore, and history in addition to nationally and internationally respected shapes and forms. Through them, and Astana's new architecture in general, Astana reinvents Kazakh history, traditions and myths in a modern rendition. Astana's new architecture emancipates Kazakhstan from the Soviet past and creates new urban citizens and new national and civic pan-Kazakh identity.

The examination of the chosen architecture has demonstrated the importance of representing Kazakh ethnicity and national memory in Astana's new architecture. Both Baiterek and Khan Shatyr embody the two most important Kazakh national symbols, the yurt and the tree with the egg. Kazakh nomad life revolved around the yurt for centuries, and its importance is still well visible in all the major Kazakh fairs and national events. As for the Tree of Life and the sacred bird, they are the most important Kazakh national myths embodying Kazakhstan's rebirth and new beginning. The Pyramid, on the other hand, has

Colonising Egypt: With a new preface. Cambridge University Press, p. 165).

⁴⁸² As Appel (1993) argues, "Persons discriminate one thing only in a relationship to, in contrast to, or as standing out from something else. – Humans describe beings by putting them in a larger "class" and then pointing out how they differ from other members of that class. The more they try to get at the intrinsic nature of something, the more they end up talking about things that it is not." (Appel 1993, 56)

⁴⁸³ Hochmuth 1952, 140; Appel 1993, 60

⁴⁸⁴ Anderson Benedict 1991, *Imagined Communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, London: Verso

an internationally recognized form. It represents Kazakhstan as a multi-ethnic and multi-religious state and symbolizes Kazakhstan's peaceful and harmonious approach towards all the peoples and religions in the world. It provides a meeting place for the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions and encourages religious and ethnic tolerance, stability, peace and accord. It actively symbolizes the peaceful role that Kazakhstan has taken for itself as a contributor of national and international peace.

Architecture, as part of urban symbolism and everyday rituals, inflects Astana's identity formation and social attachment. It fosters citizens' mental bonding to the city and makes them feel at home there. Through collective festivities and rituals, such as Nauryz and the Astana Day, Astana's citizens gradually identify with their city and their social cohesion towards their city grows stronger.⁴⁸⁵ Baiterek, the Pyramid and Khan Shatyr, among Astana's rest new architecture⁴⁸⁶, influence the consciousness of Astana's citizen actively creating new urban citizens embedded in national and international symbols and values but part of modern culture and consumption society.

Superficiality of Change: Astana as Potemkin Village

The Nazarbayev administration has effectively been erasing colonial traces from Astana, Almaty, and other cities in Kazakhstan causing at times confusion to the ordinary citizens who find it still sometimes difficult to navigate through the new street and square names. However, the traces of the colonial past remain in Astana and elsewhere; the Soviet era apartment blocks and construction styles still dominate the city view even though on the Left Bank and particularly on the 'Boulevard', the futuristic architecture embedded in symbols of national pride and international importance is starting to dominate the view. Still, this nationally and internationally broadcasted image is a very small part of the real Astana.

⁴⁸⁵ See Nas and De Giosa 2011, pp. 283-286

⁴⁸⁶ In addition to the chosen buildings, all the Left Bank architecture is built to remind Kazakh traditional instruments, events, and symbols or contain national or international symbols, shapes and forms. Kazakhstan's Central Concert Hall, for instance, is shaped to remind 'Dombra', the traditional Kazakh instrument. (Observations made by the author, 2014)

The synecdochic representation of the Left Bank as Astana and Kazakhstan has stigmatized Astana as a mix of Disney World⁴⁸⁷ and a modern day Potemkin village⁴⁸⁸. Much of the change in Astana has been indeed superficial. Astana's new and modern image is mostly an illusion accomplished with colourful facades; behind the facades, the old Soviet structures remain mostly untouched.⁴⁸⁹ Still, these old Soviet structures appear to be better constructed than the new 'modern' buildings of the Left Bank and the new city as a whole. As Schatz noted already in 2004, the city was "rapidly constructed to appeal to international investors and foreign audiences. Rumors circulated about the shoddy workmanship and even dangerous conditions of the new buildings", and "One can find distinct [sil'nye] cracks in all new buildings"⁴⁹⁰.

Schatz's notion applies to the new architecture on the Left Bank of the Ishim River built afterwards, too, even if it mostly photographs well from the distance. There are cracks everywhere, even pieces missing from the stairs and roads, even in front of the Akorda presidential palace. A short walk in the city is enough to reveal the shabby state of the construction, even in the centre of Astana's Left Bank.⁴⁹¹ Still, the Potemkin stigma does not apply 'just' to the architecture and construction in general in Astana and Kazakhstan; it is also used to describe the state of 'democracy' in Kazakhstan: "the Kazakhstani state, which externally is seen as democratic, is instead a Potemkin village raised to fool those who do not have the possibility to see the true situation with regards to human rights in Kazakhstan"⁴⁹².

Despite the stigma of being a modern day Potemkin village, Astana's new architecture acts as a synecdoche for Astana and Kazakhstan's modernity and progress made possible by Nazarbayev's benevolent and enlightened presidency. Though being described by the

⁴⁸⁷ Koch 2012b and Talamini 2011 both talk about Astana's Disney stigma or Astana as a Disneyesque city.

⁴⁸⁸ Potemkin village refers to "a false or deceptive appearance, especially one presented for the purpose of propaganda" (Oxford Dictionaries: <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/potemkin> [2.2.2015]). It refers to Grigori Aleksandrovich Potemkin, who ordered the building of sham villages for the Crimea tour of the Empress Catherine II of Russia in 1787 (Ibid) to deceive the Empress about his accomplishments. Potemkin village is "Something that appears elaborate and impressive but in actual fact lacks substance" (Your Dictionary <http://www.yourdictionary.com/potemkin-village> [2.2.2015]).

⁴⁸⁹ Observations made by the author, 2014; See also Koch 2010 for similar descriptions.

⁴⁹⁰ Schatz 2004, 127

⁴⁹¹ Observations made by the author, 2014

⁴⁹² 4□2013 Report: Kazakhstan: Cunning Democracy. The Norwegian Helsinki Committee, Freedom House <https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/Kazakhstan%20Report%20-%2010-16-13.pdf> [31.1.2015]

western press as a symptom of Nazarbayev's megalomania⁴⁹³, Astana's new architecture and the facades around the city realize Nazarbayev's vision of progress and modernity in Kazakhstan. For Nazarbayev, Astana represents the optimum Kazakhstan, the symbol and the evidence of the future progress of Kazakhstan, and the symbol of Kazakhstan's "freedom and independence"⁴⁹⁴. For him, Astana was a dream that has now come true.⁴⁹⁵

President Nazarbayev uses Astana's new architecture to impress. With new and 'modern' architecture and multiple facades around the city, Astana tries to create far more developed image of itself and of Kazakhstan than the reality really is. In the shadow of the new administrative centre lies another city, another Astana and another Kazakhstan. This is another reason why Astana has been compared to a Potemkin village, "a showpiece of the new Kazakhstan that bears little resemblance to the rest of the country"⁴⁹⁶. Furthermore, most of the 'showpiece' apartment complexes of the new Astana remain unoccupied since they are too expensive for the average Kazakhstanis. Even so, the Nazarbayev administration uses Astana's new architecture as an agency to legitimize state functions and ideologies; it expands Astana's new architecture to impress the national and international audiences. It represents Kazakhstan as reformed country, perfect for investment (act-purpose)⁴⁹⁷.

Astana's function remains thus symbolic. The Almaty Astana capital relocation and the Astana project alienate Kazakhstan from the Soviet past and symbolically lead it to the future (scene-act-scene). Still, both Astana and Kazakhstan remain very Soviet. The Nazarbayev administration, its authoritarian tendencies and prevalent corruption, intent to create new Kazakhstani citizens through Astana's new architecture (compare to 'homo sovieticus'), and the promises of the better future that justify the political sacrifices today are all very 'Soviet', authoritarian and definitely not modern. Considering the separation that Kazakhstan is eagerly trying to take from its Soviet past, it is intriguing, how much the

⁴⁹³ See Koch 2012b, particularly 2450

⁴⁹⁴ "Астана – это город-знак, знак мечты, воплощенной в реальность -- идея свободы и независимости" [Astana is a city-symbol, symbol of hope that was realized -- symbol of freedom and independence] (Назарбаев 2006, 349)

⁴⁹⁵ "Это была мечта. Теперь – это чудесный город, гордость и сердце Казахстана" ["It was a dream. Now it is a wondrous city, the pride and heart of Kazakhstan"] (Назарбаев 2006, 350).

⁴⁹⁶ Kucera Joshua 2011, "Kazakhstan Rising. A tale of two Kazakhstans", 4 August, http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/dispatches/features/2011/kazakhstan_rising/a_tale_of_two_kazakhstans.html [31.1.2015]

⁴⁹⁷ Koch 2012b, 2449

Soviet way of ruling still affects Kazakhstan's rhetorical practises and the way of acting. Nevertheless, for Nazarbayev Astana's architecture is an agency to create a new image of the modern Kazakhstan. It is an agency to leave behind the 'Soviet', even if only superficially.

Final Reflections and Suggestions for Further Research

In accordance with Burke's statement on symbolic action and Pentad, in the course of Kazakhstan's independence there have been two major acts, the Kazakhstani capital relocation and the sequential Astana project. These two major acts occurred in the first years of the Kazakhstani post Soviet independence, where the independent Kazakhstan faced particularly acute state and nation building challenges. The purpose of the acts was to address these challenges and to distance the independent Kazakhstan from its colonial Soviet past, to raise the global awareness of Astana and Kazakhstan, and to improve Astana and Kazakhstan's overall image around the world.

Astana's architecture, particularly on the Left Bank of the Ishim River, is the most important and visible agency of president Nazarbayev; it is the very agency to show Kazakhstan's state of development, to reimagine Kazakhstan. For Nazarbayev, Astana's architecture acts as a nationalistic statement that rhetorically promotes Kazakhstan as a modern, developed and beautiful country in the heart of Eurasia. Moreover, it legitimizes his presidency and Kazakhstan's state's functions and ideology; through Astana's architecture, the Nazarbayev administration reflects the image of economic prosperity and modernity accessible to all in the future. Furthermore, through Astana's monumental architecture and internationally recognized architects, Nazarbayev improves the mental image and increases the global awareness and prestige of Astana and Kazakhstan; through Astana's architecture and Nazarbayev's Eurasian policies, Kazakhstan reimagines itself from the periphery of the Soviet Union to the Heart of Eurasia⁴⁹⁸. For Nazarbayev, and for most Kazakhs, the new Astana represents the New Kazakhstan, even if the rest of the world does not always interpret Astana and Nazarbayev's acts in general the way he would

⁴⁹⁸ See president Nazarbayev in his "Astana – Strategy of Success" –speech for his rhetorics involving Kazakhstan's development and success <http://e-history.kz/en/contents/view/1018> [10.10.2014]

like to.

As I hope I have managed to demonstrate, architecture is truly political when used for political purposes, particularly in an authoritarian context. In the beginning of the study I saw Astana's architecture as a political mean to impress, to put Astana and Kazakhstan on the map, and to add Astana and Kazakhstan's prestige in the world. I saw Astana's architecture as an agency to impact the image that people have about the independent Kazakhstan and its new capital, a way to impress. As I have demonstrated with Burke's methodologies, one can reveal many diverse political messages in urban symbolism and architecture about national and international aspirations and desires of a state and its political leader.

However, I do recognize that the pieces of architecture I chose for my research affected its outcome a lot. I chose the most prominent pieces of Astana's architecture knowing that they would not represent the general view of the city or the state. Therefore, next it would be interesting to research Astana's architecture and the city itself more comprehensively, to concentrate on articles of Astana in western, Central Asian or Asian press, and maybe even make a rhetorical analysis of president Nazarbayev's works, publications and speeches. For a further research, it would be interesting to study Astana's architecture in comparison with other Central Asian architecture, too. For instance Tajikistan has been planning to build a new city on the wastes of northern Tajikistan⁴⁹⁹. It would be interesting to research Tajikistan's city building project and compare it to Kazakhstan's. Tajikistan's president Emomali Rahmon has governed the country since 1992, and according to Helsingin Sanomat, he ordered the construction of the new city unilaterally, the same as president Nazarbayev. Additionally, he ordered the construction of flats, schools and sports fields right away.⁵⁰⁰ For further research, it would be interesting to compare these projects and the presidents and their personality cults in general, and to continue the research on Central Asia, particularly on urban symbolism and architecture there.

⁴⁹⁹ Pietiläinen Tuomo 2015, "Tadžikistan rakentaa autiomaahan uuden kaupungin tyhjistä", 29 March, *Helsingin Sanomat*, <http://www.hs.fi/ulkomaat/a1427595930834> [15.5.2015]

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid.

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Observations made by the author and experiences had by the author during the wintertime, the springtime and the summertime in Astana in 2014.

Observations made by the author during the Astana Day celebrations and discussions carried out regarding the day with the local co-workers of the Embassy of Finland in Astana, Kazakhstan, July 2014

Observations made by the author during the Nauryz celebrations, March 2014

Observations made by the author and conversations had by the author with educated ethnic Kazakhs and Russians in their 30’s (mainly employees from different Embassies in Astana)

Visits to Baiterek, February and March 2014

Visits to the Palace of Peace and Reconciliation, February 2014

Various visits to the Khan Shatyr entertainment and shopping centre during the spring and summer of 2014

Various taxi-drives taken during the spring and summer of 2014 and various conversations had with the taxi drivers regarding the street names and new places in Astana

Conversations with locals, especially with ‘taxi’ drivers, carried out by the author during the spring and summer of 2014 in Astana and Almaty

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