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WHY NOT A WORLD CITY? ASTANA, ANKARA, AND GEOPOLITICAL SCRIPTS IN URBAN NETWORKS

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Abstract: The world cities literature typically examines how and why certain cities achieve world city status, but this article examines why some actors eschew the world city competition and choose *not* to engage the discourse, despite deploying the very same urban development tactics. Through a case study of Astana, Kazakhstan's new capital city, I argue that state- and nation-building concerns in the era of independence have prevailed over interests in engaging the free market and liberalist narratives that accompany the world cities discourse. Demonstrating how the Nazarbayev regime has largely modeled its Astana project on Atatürk's development of Ankara, I jointly examine geopolitical discourses that shape how the relationship between the two cities is narrated and interpreted by elite and ordinary citizens alike. Drawing on data from interviews, focus groups, and participant observation conducted in Kazakhstan from 2009–2011, I demonstrate how these identities support the Nazarbayev regime's state-dominated economic arrangements much more effectively than could a neoliberal world cities script. [Keywords: Kazakhstan, Turkey, capital city, world cities, comparative urbanism, geopolitics.]

INTRODUCTION

"The goal is to have people talk about Astana like Dubai," explained Astana's Master Plan chief, Amanzhol Chikanayev (author's interview, 2011). Astana became the capital of Kazakhstan in 1997, and its accompanying urban development project has factored prominently in the post-Soviet regime's state-building project. In 2002, Chikanayev related, Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev expressed a need for the city planners to intensify their efforts to accomplish the international *zadacha* ("task") he had assigned to Astana—i.e., to raise global awareness and prestige of this young Soviet successor state. "So is the goal also to achieve what Dubai has achieved?" I asked. His response was forceful: "*No*, we want to do things our own way, in our unique fashion, not to copy. And anyways, Kazakhstan does not have the same resources as Dubai." Unlike elites in Dubai (Acuto, 2010; Bassens et al., 2010a, 2010b), the Nazarbayev regime, which has

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been in power since 1991, has never explicitly drawn on the "world cities" discourse. This is significant because Nazarbayev often cites Kazakhstan's place in a variety of world rankings—for him, Kazakhstan's place in "the world" is an important topic.

Nonetheless, elites in Astana have adopted many of the same urban development strategies deployed by their counterparts in Dubai, such as attracting foreign firms through special economic zones and technology parks; hosting mega-events such as international conferences, festivals, and sporting events; and developing a "hyper-modern" image for the built landscape, aided by the prestige of famous architectural firms such as Foster + Partners and Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill. However, as Chikanayev observed, in many respects Kazakhstan cannot afford to enter the world cities competition at the level of Dubai, Beijing, or Kuala Lumpur—places that have dramatic advantages in terms of real economic and social capital. Kazakhstan may have substantial natural resources (it is a global leader in oil, gas, and uranium reserves), but underdeveloped transport infrastructure, among other obstacles, have meant that the regime has only just begun to tap into this vast potential for wealth. Given Nazarbayev's fixation with Kazakhstan's international image (Saunders, 2007, 2008; Schatz, 2006, 2008) and this relative lack of resources, elites are not interested in engaging in a competition they would lose. The Saudis, for example, are planning a new "Mile High" tower projected to cost US $12 billion. Kazakhstan simply does not have that much cash to play the game.

Yet, beyond (or perhaps because of) these material limitations, Chikanayev's comments point to another crucial piece to the puzzle. His insistence that "Kazakhstan" wants to do things "its own way" is not an isolated rhetorical moment, but part of a broader nationalist narrative about "distinctiveness" that has evolved in Kazakhstan's 20 years of independence. In this article, I interrogate this script of "not copying" through a case study of the Astana development project. I argue that state- and nation-building interests are more fundamental to how the Astana project has been rhetorically legitimated domestically and internationally. In opposition to the market-oriented narratives like that of the world cities discourse, "third way" narratives are evolving throughout the post-communist world as a way to reject "standard models" from the West regarding political and economic (neo) liberalization. These narratives imply a "strong state" and state-controlled capitalism, and are much better suited to legitimating domestic political economic arrangements in independent Kazakhstan. This, as I demonstrate in this article, explains the regime's refusal to frame its spectacular urban development scheme in Astana as an "aspiring" world city.

The regime has instead primarily legitimated the Astana project with reference to historical precedence of capital changes. Among these, Atatürk's project in Ankara holds a special place. While the striking similarities between the two projects may appear to be in tension with the notion of national "uniqueness," elites in Kazakhstan have actually drawn from their situated readings of Turkish history to articulate this narrative. However, the foremost similarity between Atatürk's project and Nazarbayev's development of Astana is that both have been variably used and constituted as a geographic imaginary and rhetorical object in a highly specific spatio-temporal context. Drawing on data from interviews, focus groups, and participant observation conducted in Kazakhstan from 2009 to 2011,[2]

[2]The broader project included participant observation, focus groups (n = 36 participants), formal and informal interviews ($n \approx 150$), a country-wide survey (n = 1233), and textual analysis. Except for public officials, all interviewees cited here remain strictly anonymous and any names used are changed.

I explore how this context and its various materialities are experienced and produced by ordinary citizens and elites alike. I will first present a brief discussion of how this study fits into the world cities literature, before turning to a comparison of Astana and Ankara, and an analysis of how this has been enacted and interpreted by actors occupying various positions in Kazakhstan's field of power relations. Although there are more differences than similarities between Kemalist Turkey and post-Soviet Kazakhstan and their new capital cities, I argue that exploring contemporary rhetorical and material links between them is a valuable path to comparative insights on transnational urbanist networks among "ordinary" cities (Parnell and Robinson, 2012).

MOVING BEYOND METROCENTRICITY

Scholars in the field of urban studies have recently issued extensive calls to expand and improve the analytical potential of comparative urbanism (Simone, 2004; Davis and Tajbakhsh, 2005; Kantor and Savitch, 2005; Pierre, 2005; Sellers, 2005; Denters and Mossberger, 2006; Nijman 2007a, 2007b; Ward, 2008; McCann and Ward, 2011; Robinson, 2011a, 2011b). Much early comparative research was undertaken in the framework of "world" or "global" cities, but until some notable interventions (especially, Amin and Graham, 1997; Bunnell, 2002; Robinson, 2002), this work had the unfortunate habit of implying that cities in the global "south" simply "mimic" successful cities (overwhelmingly found in the global "north"), which effectively inscribed a moral geographic imaginary in which the "winners" of neoliberal globalization were to be admired and imitated. Yet as many scholars have since illustrated, a view "from the periphery" suggests that the "center's" political economies are not universally admired or imitated. Instead, a vast array of post-colonial networks and "south-south" connections are an increasingly important object of study in the mushrooming urban studies literature on policy mobility, city learning, and inter-referencing (Ward, 2006, 2007, 2010; Massey, 2007; McCann, 2008, 2010; Parnreiter, 2009, 2012; Bassens et al., 2010a; McFarlane, 2010; McCann and Ward, 2011, 2012; Robinson, 2011a, 2011b; Roy and Ong, 2011; Cochrane and Ward, 2012; Freeman, 2012; Marsden et al., 2012; Parnell and Robinson, 2012; Peck and Theodore, 2012; Roy, 2012).

Despite these advances, there remains in Anglophone urban studies a "metrocentric" tendency to privilege the experiences of large financial centers (Bunnell and Maringanti, 2010), as well as a residual fixation with discourses of neoliberalism (Parnell and Robinson, 2012). Bunnell and Maringanti (2010) argue that one of the root causes for "metrocentricity" is the failure of scholars to undertake the intensive empirical research in less comfortable and non-English-speaking field sites (due no doubt to constraints on resources). The findings presented here are part of a broader study in "disaggregated and localized" geopolitics (Ó Tuathail, 2010), which has answered similar calls for intensified empirical research in political geography (see also Megoran, 2006). Based on extensive field work conducted primarily in Russian, this article illustrates how such grounded research might look in urban geography.

Further, by considering Kazakhstan, where elites have taken a hesitant approach to neoliberalism, this study moves beyond an explicit focus on neoliberal discourses and policies, without negating neoliberalism's inescapably global reach. Contributing to a subset of the world cities literature on (more or less authoritarian) "developmental states"

(Hill and Kim, 2000; Saito, 2003; Olds and Yeung, 2004; Parnell and Robinson, 2006; Parnell and Pieterse, 2010), I find it productive to ask why some actors (acting in the name of "states" and "cities"), but not others, engage with such neoliberal concepts as the "world city" ideal. What subject position do government and financial elites occupy that compels and enables them to pursue these policies? And why do others eschew them? Accordingly, I ask why Kazakhstan's elites have *not* engaged with the world cities discourse in developing Astana, and why elites have instead taken more from the rhetorical toolkit of state sovereignty. One timeless tool in this statist approach is the strategy of moving the capital from one city to another, and to an ostensibly more "central" location in the geometrically conceived territory. Kazakhstan's President Nazarbayev often justifies his decision to move the capital through references to historical precedence. For example, in his book, *In The Heart of Eurasia* (Nazarbayev, 2005), he cites the following capital cities: Alexandria, St. Petersburg, Brasilia, Canberra, Beijing, Madrid, Oslo, Karachi, New Delhi, Yamoussoukro, Lagos, and Ankara. This list is common to many of his writings, with some or all being mentioned.

How and why, as I have suggested above, does Ankara stand out? I argue that through a critical reading of geopolitical texts and the field observations, it is clear that Ankara and Kemalist Turkey are an exceptional case. In this joint analysis of Astana and Ankara, it is imperative that we not detach readings of Ankara's history from today's geopolitical context. This is because the two cities' special relationship is part of a *contemporary* performance of geopolitical relations between Kazakhstan and Turkey, primarily articulated through identity narratives of "Turkish brotherhood." Elite and popular performances of these identity narratives have produced tangible (and less tangible) relations and networks. They are both drawn upon *and* articulated through contemporary readings of history. We should also bear in mind that what inspiration Kazakhstan's elites find in Atatürk's project in Ankara can never translate perfectly into Astana's cityscape and field of power relations, even if they wanted it to (which they arguably do not). While a model offers inspiration, this does not imply an intent to perfectly replicate it. An example from this case study illustrates this argument more clearly.

Baiterek, a tall white tower with a golden orb atop (Fig. 1), is a landmark in the middle of Astana's newly developed center, the "Left Bank" (i.e., of the Ishim).[3] It has been deployed as *the* iconic image of the new capital, and increasingly of Kazakhstan's independence. Curiously, this icon bears striking resemblance to the Atakule tower in Ankara, completed in 1989 (Figs. 1–2). Ankara's tower once served as the graphic symbol of the Ankara municipality, with the Ottoman symbolism of the orb designed to replace the common Hittite symbolism of the solar disc (Ergut, 2006, p. 163). In focus groups in Almaty in October 2010, when I juxtaposed certain images of Atakule in the middle of Ankara's cityscape with images of Baiterek in Astana's cityscape, participants did not immediately realize that they were different places, nor did they know that Ankara also had such a tower. Kazakhstanis would also likely be surprised upon visiting Atakule, as I was, because the experience of the two observation towers is starkly different. Atakule was built in the midst of Turkey's economic reforms in the 1980s, at the height of the "celebration

[3]*Baiterek* is the name of a mythical tree in a Kazakh folktale, and the white base of the tower is said to represent this tree, while the golden orb is supposed to represent the golden egg that a sacred bird ("Samruk") would lay in the tree.

Fig. 1. Atakule tower in Ankara, December 2010. *Source*: Author.

Fig. 2. Baiterek tower in Astana, June 2009. *Source*: Author.

of consumerism" (Çınar, 2007, p. 176), and a new and substantial shopping center accordingly served as its base. This was once the main draw to Atakule, but today, the complex is mostly abandoned and the run-down facilities of the observation center suggest few visitors. Baiterek, in contrast, is the most important tourist destination in Astana, and the whole scene is one of fanfare, revelry, and awe (Laszczkowski, 2010; Koch, 2010). Although much newer (completed in 2002), Atakule's Kazakh counterpart has a flashier exterior and better adorned interior.

The Atakule-Baiterek connection is instructive of how we should understand the overarching comparison of Ankara and Astana explored in this article: there are many structural similarities and analogous ideas at play, but the discursive and material environment in both places can differ dramatically, not to mention their temporal disjunctures. These differences were once underscored for me during a conversation with a Turkish colleague, who was unconvinced that a legitimate connection could be drawn between Turkey and

Kazakhstan, and Ankara and Astana. I pointed out similarities between early republican Turkey and newly independent Kazakhstan; she pointed out the differences. I explained the contemporary financial and diplomatic ties between the two countries; she explained their irrelevance in the grand scheme of Turkey's foreign relations. I never managed to convince her that it was a credible comparison, but I did manage to convince myself of one thing that day (and over the course my two-week field visit to Ankara): the "reality" of Turkey—the historical "facts" of the Ankara project, as well as what is "actually" happening "on the ground" today—is in many ways irrelevant to how these histories and realities are perceived in Kazakhstan.

Of course, my colleague was correct in pointing out so many dissimilarities, but it is precisely these differences that are systematically overlooked in the geopolitical imaginary that serves as the context in which foreign policy and state-/nation-building narratives are articulated in Turkey and in Kazakhstan. Of course, material conditions in both countries shape, enable, and challenge these imaginaries and narratives. So when I say that the "reality" in Turkey is partly irrelevant, I am stressing that the *use* of historical facts is subjective (as with the "facts" themselves); sometimes they are held up on a pedestal, and other times they are completely ignored. Moreover, "reality," like space, is part of a relational representational practice (Mitchell, 1988; Gregory, 1994; Massey, 2005). It consists of contingent interactions between people, things, and ideas, which constitute and are constituted by materializations of power relationships, and their persistence, subsidence, or destruction in time and space. It is inevitably experienced and remembered differently by everyone, and much of this is underpinned by various geographic imaginaries, i.e. "an implicit geography that organises our social understandings" (Massey, 2007, p. 87). A dense web of power relations stretches through actors and things in Kazakhstan and Turkey, and are materialized in countless embodied practices. The remainder of this article will explore some of these materialities and representational practices through a closer look at (co-constitutive) popular and elite narratives about Astana and Ankara.

NATIONALISM, MIMICRY, AND MODERNITY

Given space limitations, it is impossible to fully detail the similarities between Atatürk's project in Ankara and Nazarbayev's in Astana, but a cursory list can give a hint: both have been established by a national "father" whose personality cult is fused with the city (Atatürk and Nazarbayev), both capitals were moved to a "more central" location in a newly defined territory (post-Ottoman Turkey and post-Soviet Kazakhstan), both locations in the steppe have been framed as *tabulae rasae* and held up as the new nation's ability to conquer environmental difficulties, both have sought *spatial* distance from the political *past* as well as "backward" hinterlands, both depend on the notion of spatial diffusion of power in order to effect territorial control, both have been referred to as the "heart" of the nation, both have been endowed a function of "modernizing" the population especially through monumental and modernist architecture, both have been constructed primarily with cheap, foreign labor, both have used the prestige of famous foreign architects in the

development of the city plan, both have been designed as spiritual and education capitals of the state, etc.[4]

Although President Nazarbayev has long praised Atatürk's modernization project and his development of Ankara, his "official" reading (i.e., the regime-sanctioned version) must be contextualized with reference to a crucial element of nationalist scripts that have evolved in independent Kazakhstan: the rejection of outright "copying" of "standard models." Speaking at the Third International Qurultay of Turkic-Speaking Countries on Architecture and Town Planning and the Kazakhstan Town Planning, Astana Mayor Imangali Tasmagambetov underscored this for presidents Nazarbayev and Gül: "Borrowing standard models we would have bred ordinariness and mediocrity, whereas architecture is a visible reflection of each nation's originality and uniqueness, through which Turkic identity is boosted" (Kazpravda, 2010b). This narrative is part of a broader metanarrative, found in discursive fields throughout post-communist Eurasia, sometimes called the "third way" discourse. The script suggests that state control of information, capital, and foreign investment is a desirable avenue for entering the global capitalist market, without reliving the perceived social disorder accompanying extreme deregulation in the post-Soviet space in the 1990s (or in the case of China, preventing this).

The path to market liberalization in Kazakhstan was initially characterized by "shock therapy" methods (e.g., the hugely disruptive currency change in 1993), also deployed in other post-communist settings. Although there was some liberalization under the Nazarbayev regime, the government has retained ownership and firm control over foreign investment in most major domestic economic enterprises, such as uranium, telecom, metals, and the oil and gas sector (Dosmukhamedov, 2002; Charman, 2007; Kalyuzhnova, 2008). In the early years of independence, a strong anti-capitalist discourse developed, in which market reforms were seen as creating the pernicious and harmful phenomenon of *dikii kapitalism* ("wild capitalism").[5] The idea of an untamed capitalism wreaking havoc on social order has conditioned the discursive environment in post-Soviet Kazakhstan in such a way that "free market" neoliberal discourses are generally not favored. In those places with particularly authoritarian regimes, whose elites have strategically manipulated the image of political and economic disorder to validate their centralized control, "shock therapy" programs are often interpreted as originating in the "West." There were, of course, many U.S. and European citizens involved in setting the schemes in motion, but this narrative also clearly obscures the complicity of local elites and resultant oligarchs (Volkov, 2002). In any case, they caused such social trauma for Kazakhstan's citizens that the narrative of rejecting Western models has broad currency in many of these places.

As it is used by elites, the narrative of refusing standard models and "copying" is largely a way to reject free market economics, but it is also part of a broader rejection of Western influence and narratives about political liberalization. Since the "world cities" discourse draws extensively on these tropes of globalization and neoliberalism, it does not fit within the moral and political geographies that have evolved in independent Kazakhstan. The "third way" narrative of national uniqueness is much more salient, and in this respect, Kazakhstan's elites find rhetorical tools in their readings of Atatürk's historical precedence. For example, Kaletayev (2009), the chairman of ruling party Nur

[4]On Ankara, see especially Batuman (2009), Bozdoğan (2001), Çınar (2007), Ergut (2006), and Kacar (2010).
[5]For an exceptionally grounded account of this time in Kazakhstan, see Nazpary (2002).

Otan,[6] wrote an article on Atatürk, in which he praised the leader for his national ideology, which "did not mean blind copying of Western democracies, but the wish to find its own way, i.e. reorganization of the Ottoman society's values and ideals into those of the new Turkish republic and was not reduced to the hackneyed copying of external ideas." He goes on to say that, like Turkey, "Kazakhstan's society favors the ideas of a strong modern state seeking cooperation with developed countries," but "preserving its peculiar nature based on internal stability and social prosperity at the same time" (ibid.). The nationalist rhetoric of rejecting "hackneyed copying" here fuses with support for the Nazarbayev regime's "strong state" (i.e., nondemocratic) approach to politics in independent Kazakhstan.

Returning to the list of similarities between Astana and Ankara provided above, I have long noted that Kazakhstani academics working on Astana have systematically overlooked these obvious connections. When I have asked about it, I am faced with quizzical looks and brushed off.[7] In fact, with the exception of one young informant, Dinara, whenever I have shared these observations with Kazakh colleagues, informants, and friends, they uniformly appear insulted. And when Dinara eagerly shared what she had learned with her aunt, the aunt took great offense. "What do you mean, that Kazakhstan was not the first?! That we just copied Turkey?!" she exclaimed. Though I never told my interlocutors that Kazakhstan "copied" Turkey, this is nonetheless how it was invariably understood. Another example illustrates this more clearly. That same day, Dinara and I had a lunch interview with one of her colleagues from work, somewhere in the depths of the government bureaucracy. He was a successful, critical-thinking man in his mid-40s, who was also involved in cross-cultural exchange programs with Turkey. Completely fascinated by the Astana-Ankara connections, Dinara asked if he knew anything about the many "similarities" between Astana and Ankara. He claimed to have never thought about it and I was called upon to recount some of their commonalities. As I spoke, his demeanor changed rapidly, and with a tone of personal offense, he said, "That is the first time I have heard that Astana just copied Ankara."

In this discussion, as with all others, I never used the word "copy," nor did I invoke any actors who might do such copying; I pointed out the similarities of two capital cities. But I suddenly found myself in need of apologetics. Having spent enough time in Kazakhstan (and often treading a fine line with politically acceptable discussions), I knew that providing an opportunity to praise President Nazarbayev was the best way to ease the anxieties of someone who suddenly realized they were in a politically sticky discussion. And knowing about the welcome comparison of Nazarbayev with Atatürk, I said: "No, no, I did not say Astana copied Ankara. I just mean that Atatürk's vision and Nazarbayev's vision were very similar." He eased: "Well, yes. But I would say that for Atatürk, his role was more

[6]Nur Otan ("light of the fatherland") is President Nazarabayev's party and the only party with power in the political landscape.

[7]In addition to the issues I outline below, I think the failure to make this link is partly connected to the simple issue that academics are more familiar with Russian history and Peter I's capital city project in St. Petersburg. Because of this popular awareness and the continuation of historic ties between the Russian academy and academics in Kazakhstan (and the comparative lack of ties with other places, including Turkey), this comparison has predominated in the academic work, despite its limited relevance. An additional reason for the lack of academic attention to this comparison is that it allows scholars to remain in a discursive "safety zone" that characterizes Kazakhstan's authoritarian political environment. People know the boundaries and norms of dialogue about Russian history—what can and should be said, and what cannot and should not—but with Turkey this is not yet clear.

about cultural development, and Nazarbayev's is about political and economic leadership." These conversations raise a number of questions. Why did these individuals take such offense? Why did they automatically translate similarity as copying? And why did they consistently refer to *places* as the *actors* presumed to do the copying?

Much of this has to do with the way that Astana operates as a proxy for Nazarbayev's cult of personality, and we can see it function in the way that people in Kazakhstan instantly equate Astana with Nazarbayev—as in the last example, in which we seamlessly transitioned from "Astana" as the actor doing the copying to "Nazarbayev's vision." An important dimension of Nazarbayev's personality cult involves glorifying him as "original," something of a creative genius. The theme is littered throughout official publications, but a particularly vivid illustration is found in Dzhaksybekov's (2008) book on the early development of Astana. There he writes: "In the first years of Astana's construction, and now, we have had the important criteria: every symbolic, important object of the new capital should be original, not look like others, and bring something new" (ibid., p. 245). He then goes on to allude to President Nazarbayev, father of the project, as a visionary: "A person with an idea, of course, if this is not an idea fix, he is, at minimum, an original, interesting person, already deserving respect for bringing about something new" (ibid., p. 246). Accordingly, I believe that much of my informants' discomfort stemmed from equating Astana with Nazarbayev; saying that Astana "copied" Ankara (and thereby Atatürk) becomes an allegation of Nazarbayev's vision being no act of genius, but uninspired, blind mimicry. In a country where it is illegal to speak ill of the leader (Lillis, 2010), such an accusation becomes seriously dangerous.

This danger is not generally experienced as fear in Kazakhstan, however, for it has become banal: regime-praising rhetoric has largely been normalized through its fusion with nationalist rhetoric and the extremely pervasive praise of the Astana project itself. This connection between pro-regime rhetoric and nationalism is also apparent in how my informants worded the perceived critique that "we" and "Kazakhstan" copied "Turkey." It is also articulated through a trope of needing to preserve Kazakhstan's "national coloring" (*natsional'nyi kolrit*). While this discourse about "national coloring," is broadly articulated by ordinary citizens, it is performed within a discursive field defined by elites. Before I elaborate, it is important to note, however, that these Kazakhstanis nonetheless express it as their "own" opinion. My informants' offense is a true testament to the internalization of this element of the nationalist rhetoric, for challenges to it were interpreted as challenges to the individuals themselves.

SUFFICIENTLY MODERN?

This particular "nationalist" subjectivity in Kazakhstan is also articulated through certain scripts about "modernity" *elsewhere*, and Kazakhstan's imagined comparative status. I will briefly explore some of these narratives about Turkish modernity, but by way of comparison, I will first present some of the popular narratives about modernity in Dubai, which arose in the focus groups. At the beginning of this article, we saw how Astana's master planner expressed the desire that Astana be "talked about like Dubai," and this immediately raises the question of how he thinks Dubai is talked about. In Kazakhstan, Dubai has a strong association with being an exemplar of rapid development and a "high culture" (*vysokaya kultura*). During my focus groups in Almaty, when participants were

shown the images of Astana and Dubai, they uniformly expressed pride at the similarity of the two cities from certain perspectives: the waterfront apartment complexes, the modern skyscrapers, and the clean, orderly appearance of the cities in these official representations (these hypermodern views of course being extremely narrow takes on both cities; on Astana, see Koch, 2010, 2012; on Dubai, see Haines 2011). When asked what made the two cities similar beyond these views, conversations in each of the groups concentrated on the spectacularly rapid development (*razvitiye*) of the two cities and their states and how their construction was financed by oil wealth.

The focus group participants, all under the age of 30 but coming from all over Kazakhstan, were well versed in the rhetoric that the government has emphasized in advertising its development agenda, with the premise that Kazakhstan will develop along *its own* path (the "Kazakhstani way," *Kazakhstanskii put'*). In response to questions about whether Kazakhstan should aim for what Dubai has achieved, many respondents agreed that it should, but consistently qualified this with the argument that, rather than copying Dubai, Kazakhstan should preserve its "individuality" and "national coloring" (*natsional'nyi kolrit*) in its own development. As one participant explained: "Kazakhstan has its own [way] (*svoya*). Its own history, its own way of being (*byt'*), its own customs. We should stand out somehow." In another group, the conversation went on to describe how Kazakhstan should not just copy (*kopirovat'*) the architecture found elsewhere in the world, and that this was successfully achieved in Astana through its blue skyscrapers, symbolizing freedom, and its unique pyramid-shaped Palace of Peace and Reconciliation. Thus, the goal is for Astana (and by implication Kazakhstan) "to be talked about like Dubai," but not to copy Dubai—there being a dramatic difference between the two according to the nationalist script.

Popular imaginations in Kazakhstan about Turkish "modernity" follow a rather different framework, having two distinct dimensions. First is the familiar narrative coming from the Kemalist and post-Kemalist regimes' own "image project" of Turkey as a "modern" secular "Muslim country" (as opposed to some ostensibly "non-modern" Muslim countries). The second dimension is based more on a popular narrative within Kazakhstan that challenges Turkish "modernity." While the first is reproduced through common official and semi-official means (education, media, the government, etc.), the second is rarely more than a spoken narrative repeated in banal conversations and interactions. In the popular narrative (which is in no way separate from the "elite" visions), Turkey is generally considered "too" religious (see also Balci, 2011) and lacking the "high culture" ("*vysokaya kultura*") that is frequently associated with Dubai. The notion that Turkey is not considered quite modern "enough" has been underscored to me through various ethnographic moments over the years, such as when I have suggested the Astana-Ankara connection to a Kazakhstani scholars. In one case in 2011, I asked a woman studying Astana why no one had compared the two cities, and she responded with a tone of offense: "Why would we? We want to be like Washington [D.C.]!" This remark suggests that "we" (i.e., Kazakhstanis) had better direct "our" focus to a more Western and ostensibly more modern place.[8]

[8]My reading of this connotation stems from the context of the broader ethnographic experience, in which I have learned that Washington and other Western cities are commonly coded as "modern."

This notion of Turkey somehow being "insufficiently" modern was also readily apparent in the focus groups, when I asked participants to consider the relationship between Kazakhstan and Turkey, the immediate, near-automatic comment about Turks was invariably, "They are our Turkic brothers." Beyond this platitude, the only connection that they consistently drew was the common religion. Unlike the case of Dubai, there were no references to Turkey having a "*vysokaya kultura*" or being highly developed. There was instead a complete silence on Turkish "modernity" and "development," let alone Atatürk's modernization project. Part of this stems from the fact that most popular awareness about the two places comes from tourist experiences, as Turkey and Dubai are the two most popular destinations for middle-class Kazakhstanis. The influence that these tourist experiences have on popular imaginaries of the places is difficult to underestimate. Although it is clearly a selective vision, an influential stereotype in Kazakhstan suggests that Turks do not have good service, are lazy, mischievous, and generally not good people; i.e., not the traits of a "modern" and "civilized" group. As the following section further elaborates, such visions of Turkish modernity (or lack thereof) have various sources and political and implications, and are articulated in highly contextual settings.

BROTHERS, FATHERS, AND THE NATION

As I have just described, the common cliché that Kazakhs use to describe Turks is that "they are our Turkic brothers." This popular understanding simultaneously constitutes and is constituted by elite narratives about Kazakhstan's relations with Turkey, which have long drawn on this script of Turkic "brotherhood," on the basis of shared language and culture (Crews, 2006; Khalid, 2006; Bilgin and Bilgiç, 2011). Unlike the Soviet discourse, in which Kazakhs were constructed as the "younger brother" of Russians, the discourse of brotherhood with Turkey is decidedly less colonial in nature. However, in the immediate aftermath of the Soviet Union's collapse, Turkey's eagerness to get involved (economically and politically) in Central Asia made elites in Kazakhstan wary of reenacting the colonial relationship of the subordinate younger brother (Akçalı and Perinçek, 2009; Bilgin and Bilgiç, 2011; Cohen, 2011). Now that the Nazarbayev regime has consolidated its domestic political position and has asserted Kazakhstan as a player in international affairs, elites appear more comfortable drawing on the tropes of "brotherhood." As this section demonstrates, Kazakhstani elites also now find various political and economic benefits to using the rhetoric—benefits that neoliberal discourses, for example, cannot offer.

One of these political advantages is connected to the regime's nation-building project, which uses a civic nationalist script of "Eurasianism" to espouse multi-ethnic unity, but which is more accurately described as a systematic privileging of ethnic Kazakhs. Kazakhstan's demographic make-up has historically been extremely heterogeneous. Only until recently, Kazakhs did not constitute a majority share of the population (see Table 1), which elite and popular opinion regarded as problematic in the era of independence. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russians and other groups emigrated *en masse*, but the ethnic balance was further transformed through a broad set of policies to "Kazakh-ify" state institutions and the social sphere more generally (Sarsembayev, 1999; Schatz, 2000, 2004; Diener, 2002, 2005a, 2005b; Olcott, 2002; Dave, 2007).

The geopolitical discourse of Turkic "brotherhood" factors into this nationalist project, which privileges ethnic Kazakhs. When Kazakhstan's government elites describe a

Table 1. Ethnic Distribution of Kazakhstan since 1989

Ethnicity	1989 total	Percent	1999 total	Percent	2009 total	Percent
Kazakh	6,534,616	39.69	8,011,452	53.48	10,096,763	63.07
Russian	6,227,549	37.82	4,480,675	29.91	3,793,764	23.70
Uzbek	332,017	2.02	370,765	2.47	456,997	2.85
Ukrainian	896,240	5.44	547,065	3.65	333,031	2.08
Uighur	185,301	1.13	210,377	1.40	224,713	1.40
Tatar	327,982	1.99	249,052	1.66	204,229	1.28
German	957,518	5.82	353,462	2.36	178,409	1.11
Korean	103,315	0.63	99,944	0.67	100,385	0.63
Turk	49,567	0.30	75,950	0.51	97,015	0.61
Azeri	90,083	0.55	78,325	0.52	85,292	0.53
Belorussian	182,601	1.11	111,924	0.75	66,476	0.42
Dungan	30,165	0.18	36,945	0.25	51,944	0.32
Kurd	25,425	0.15	32,764	0.22	38,325	0.24
Tajik	25,514	0.15	25,673	0.17	36,277	0.23
Pole	59,956	0.36	47,302	0.32	34,057	0.21
Chechen	49,507	0.30	31,802	0.21	31,431	0.20
Kyrgyz	14,112	0.09	10,925	0.07	23,274	0.15
Other	372,996	2.27	206,879	1.38	157,215	0.98
Total	16,464,464		14,981,281		16,009,597	

Sources: ASRK, 2010; Sinnott, 2000, p. 240.

supposedly common culture and name Kazakhstan and Turkey the "two Turkic wings of Eurasia" (Kuriatov, 2007), they are explicitly privileging the Kazakh ethnic group. President Nazarbayev explicitly excludes Russian and other national groups' territorial belonging in Kazakhstan when he says that the "Kazakh land is an ancestral home of the entire Turkic world, its golden cradle, and it's our mission to bring our peoples closer together" (Kazpravda, 2010b). And when he proposed a Turkic academy in Astana, in which researchers would be united "under a single *shanyrak*" (the top of a yurt; Kazpravda, 2010b)—a banal but prominent element of ethnic Kazakh nationalist semiotics—he is inscribing this nationalist vision, albeit through the tropes of "healthy" foreign policy and benign "cultural cooperation." In the brotherhood discourse, "commonness" is taken to automatically imply accord (Kuriatov, 2007; Kazpravda, 2010b), constructing an imagined, pre-political consensus built into this "family" relationship.

Two bronze statues in Astana and Ankara epitomize the co-constitution of these nation-building and geopolitical scripts. One is of Atatürk in Astana on the Ishim riverbank, near the Turkish embassy, and the other is of Nazarbayev in Ankara on Atatürk Boulevard (Figs. 3–4). The decision to erect a monument of Atatürk in Astana was originally mentioned during Gül's first visit (upon his assuming the presidency) to Kazakhstan in December 2007 (Kuriatov, 2007). Nazarbayev dedicated the monument in October

Fig. 3. Atatürk statue in Astana, July 2011. *Source*: Author.

Fig. 4. Nazarbayev statue in Ankara, December 2010. *Source*: Author.

2009 "in the heart of the capital" (Kazpravda, 2010b), making it the first monument to the leader outside Turkey (Maldybayev, 2009). Atatürk is depicted in one of his typical European suits, holding his iconic cane, but wearing a sheepskin hat (a *kalpak*). The hat is significant here, not only because it is relatively uncommon to portray Atatürk in this fashion—generally it is only done in military-related depictions of him—but because the *kalpak* underscores a shared ethnic identity with the people of Central Asia, who traditionally wore such hats.[9]

Atatürk's statue thus becomes a vehicle for inscribing Nazarbayev's nationalist vision of the Eurasian "fusion," but one that is still ethnic nationalist, because "honoring the memory of our ancestors" (Kazpravda, 2010b) through the monument distinctly excludes Russian, German, Ukrainian, or Korean civic identities. Yet again, we see this ethnic nationalism performed as "mere" foreign policy, as the image of Atatürk is also used to stand for "fraternal" relations between "Turkic states," which Nazarbayev and others claimed to honor through the statue (Kazpravda, 2009; Kuriatov, 2009; Nur.kz, 2009). The statue was dedicated immediately before Nazarbayev's visit to Turkey, where Gül thanked him for it, and where Turkish Parliament specially applauded the point (Maldybayev, 2009). In a curious counterpart to the official ceremony of laying a wreath at Atatürk's Mausoleum Anitkabir, an obligatory ritual for all visiting diplomats in Ankara, Gül laid a wreath at the Atatürk Monument on his next visit to Astana in May 2010 (PRT, 2010).

Shortly after Kazakhstan's government accorded this honor to the founder of the Turkish state, Turkey's government countered with a similar honor to the "founder" of the Kazakh state. On June 24, 2010, a statue of Nazarbayev was inaugurated in a ceremony attended by Turkey's parliamentary chairman Mehmet Ali Şahin, Ankara mayor Melih Gekchek, and Kazakhstan's Majilis (parliamentary) speaker Ural Muhamedzhanov.[10] Turkish officials have claimed that the statue of Nazarbayev was erected "in gratitude for everything the Kazakh President has done for whole Turkic world" (Kazinform, 2010; Kuriatov, 2010a)—although the reports never elaborate on precisely what he has done. At the inauguration, both sides again sang the song of brotherhood, with Muhamedzhanov even attributing to the monument the power to "further promote the two states' friendly relations" (Kazpravda, 2010a; Kuriatov, 2010a; Kuriatov, 2010b). The symbolism of locating the monument on Atatürk Boulevard was not lost on the press in Kazakhstan. Several articles about the Nazarbayev monument also claimed that in Turkey, Nazarbayev is understood as Kazakhstan's Atatürk (e.g., Maldybayev, 2009). This is most likely a hyperbolic claim symptomatic of Kazakhstan's sycophantic and regime-controlled press, but it tellingly points to a reading (and writing) of the relationship that either the President wants to promote or his supporters know would please him.

Beyond its ethnic nationalist (and thus exclusionary) nature, the script of Turkic brotherhood implies a pre-political consensus that is anything but nonpolitical. A great deal of political economic issues are at stake in Turkish-Kazakhstani relations; especially in the spheres of textiles, logistics, construction, and infrastructure development, Turkish companies are highly active in Kazakhstan. There are about 1400–1800 Turkish companies registered in the country and official state visits always involve meetings between the presidents and Turkish and Kazakh businessmen (Kuriatov, 2007, 2010b; Akorda, 2008,

[9]Although one might never see them in Kazakhstan today, they are comparatively common in Kyrgyzstan.
[10]Notably, President Gül was not in attendance.

2010; Maldybayev, 2009; Kazpravda, 2010b; PRT, 2010). Two geopolitically important projects, which unfortunately cannot be addressed at length here, also connect the states: (1) the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway project to connect China to European markets, and (2) linking Kazakhstan to the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline (Akorda, 2006a, 2006b; Kuriatov, 2007; PRT, 2010). Both projects serve Turkish interests in carving out private profits in monopolizing the transport and infrastructure industry in Kazakhstan, and the projects serve Kazakhstani government interests in tempering its longtime dependence on Russian oil infrastructure (İpek, 2007, p. 1184; Domjan and Stone, 2010, p. 50), and in recasting Kazakhstan as a transport hub in Eurasia.

Both projects figure into and are legitimated by a script about a "new" Silk Road, upon which both President Gül and President Nazarbayev frequently draw (e.g. Nazarbayev, 2005; PRT, 2010). Quoting an Atatürk speech from 1933, in which the revolutionary leader makes extensive use of the brotherhood rhetoric, Gül stresses the need to consolidate the "spiritual bridges" (broadly applied to history, culture, language, and religion) joining the two countries (PRT, 2010). In both countries, geographic location is seen to imply an automatic and uncontentious "fusion" of people and time (with the East standing for a traditional past and the West for a modern present) that underlies both states' developmentalist nation-building projects. As part of the nationalist rhetoric, the images of the Silk Road and of East-West bridges are also important to geopolitical scripts in both countries, in which the geographic location of each state is used to legitimate foreign relations (e.g. the Turkish-Kazakhstani partnership), alongside political and economic interests at a broader, interstate scale.

In this reading of Turkish-Kazakhstani relations, I have sought to demonstrate that we need not privilege historical "facts," but are better advised to attend to spatial imaginaries and discursive practices to understand contemporary geopolitics. This approach stresses the importance of the situated *readings* of Turkey's history; the *discursive scripts* of Atatürk as the father of the nation and of the capital; the *geographic imaginaries* of Ankara developed on a *tabula rasa* at the epicenter of the state's territory, uniting the entire nation; and the consistently repeated and performed *identity narratives* of Turkish brotherhood and the notion of a "spiritual bridge" connecting the two countries. These readings are all "situated" because Nazarbayev and his supporters are working with various, shifting geopolitical imaginaries and environments, which influence the usefulness of channeling one discourse or another. Contemporary perceptions in Kazakhstan of Turkish success influence how the elites read and articulate the early history of the Republic, its new capital Ankara, and its leader Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Seeing Ankara as a model for Astana not only represents such a reading of history, but also constitutes a history in itself, enacted through various state actions, the erection of monuments, and concrete socio-economic exchanges. However, as we saw through the focus group and interview data, this official reading of Turkish history does not automatically imply its broad acceptance among ordinary Kazakhstanis. Of course, their geopolitical imaginaries are shaped by and shape elite discourses, but the offense that Kazakhstanis took at the implication that "Astana copied Ankara" highlights the tensions of certain internalized nationalist narratives (i.e., the imperative of preserving Kazakhstan's "uniqueness") with other popular imaginaries about Turkey's relative lack of "modernity."

CONCLUSION

As this analysis has suggested, the post-independence priorities of Kazakhstani elites are not easily promoted through the language of neoliberal globalization, but are better articulated through nationalist scripts of Turkic "brotherhood" and the "strong state" opposing Western geopolitical hegemony. With their emphasis on preserving national uniqueness and rejecting "hackneyed copying" of the West, these popularly and elite-performed scripts serve to justify the government's rejection of foreign interference in domestic political and economic affairs, the regime's nondemocratic arrangement of power relations, and the limited, state-controlled engagement with market capitalism. This case study challenges the assumption that actors in the "periphery" necessarily strive to connect (economically, symbolically, or otherwise) with the neoliberal "core." I have instead demonstrated how, given specific political economic concerns, actors in the periphery might privilege relationships with other periphery-based actors, rather than with the powerful, economic centers of the global system.

As a study in comparative urbanism that refuses an "imaginary of place which focuses solely on its internal construction," this article accounts for an "outward-looking local consciousness" and "those relations that run out from a place" (Massey, 2007, p. 21). This approach emphasizes the fact that power relations are not unidirectional and are never limited to center-periphery exchanges. This comparison is one that a "metrocentric" perspective would overlook, inasmuch as these cities are relegated to a peripheral white space of a neoliberalist urban geography. But besides this economistic view of the world, there are so many other peripheralized places, which demand more careful academic attention. As such, this comparative project is only a beginning. Although it was outside the scope of this preliminary work, my study touches on important questions about Islamic urban development, with more extensive work needed on comparing such cities as Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Doha, Riyadh, Putrajaya, etc. Often interpreted through orientalist lenses (Koch, 2012), the tremendous urban development projects taking place there are in need of deeply critical analysis. The heightened focus on political Islam and resource economies in the post-9/11 geopolitical order means that such an undertaking must necessarily account for the relationship between urban development, energy geopolitics, and authoritarianism. On this account (and doubtless others), urban geography can take much from the theoretical toolkit of political geography, especially as it strengthens its comparative agenda.

By undertaking a geopolitical discourse analysis of elite and popular narratives in Kazakhstan, I have illustrated how situated and contingent geopolitical imaginaries are fundamental to the constitution of diffuse and ephemeral power relations that link certain cities through mobilizing certain ideas, materials, and social practices. Astana and Ankara may not be global financial or cultural hubs, but the relationship between them is arguably more instructive for understanding the geopolitically contingent nature of urban policy transfer and the fields of power in which they are simultaneously constituted and help to constitute. This is not to argue that these "south-south" networks somehow exist "outside" of the "core" stage of global affairs, populated by the "winners" of neoliberal globalization. Rather, in their urban development project in Astana, which is founded on some of the very same policy ideas enacted in the likes of Berlin and Barcelona, Kazakhstan's elites have merely legitimated it in a different fashion than the supposedly hegemonic discourses of free markets and political liberalism. Given that the implementation of any

policy is inherently a negotiated process (the nature of models is that reality always and forever escapes their intent; Mitchell, 2002), a disaggregated and localized geopolitics is a productive place to begin the critical analysis of these negotiations and their outcomes for the world's diverse but interconnected cities.

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