



4-2013

Turkic Identity and the Depoliticization of Culture: A Case Study of the International Organization of Turkic Culture (TÜRKSÖY)

James Sawyer
University of Pennsylvania

Follow this and additional works at: http://repository.upenn.edu/uhf_2013

 Part of the [Other Political Science Commons](#)

Sawyer, James, "Turkic Identity and the Depoliticization of Culture: A Case Study of the International Organization of Turkic Culture (TÜRKSÖY)" (2013). *Undergraduate Humanities Forum 2012-2013: Peripheries*. 1.
http://repository.upenn.edu/uhf_2013/1

This paper was part of the 2012-2013 Penn Humanities Forum on Peripheries. Find out more at <http://www.phf.upenn.edu/annual-topics/peripheries>.

This paper is posted at ScholarlyCommons. http://repository.upenn.edu/uhf_2013/1
For more information, please contact libraryrepository@pobox.upenn.edu.

Turkic Identity and the Depoliticization of Culture: A Case Study of the International Organization of Turkic Culture (TÜRKSÖY)

Abstract

Since its installation as the new capital of Kazakhstan in 1997, Astana has served as an urban synecdoche for the country's post-Soviet nation-building project. Boasting a futuristic architectural landscape punctuated with abstract references to the past, the city melds universalizing aesthetics with a mythological historical narrative. My paper explores Kazakhstan's nation-building project through the activities of TÜRKSÖY, a multinational cultural organization self-styled as the "UNESCO of the Turkic World," which declared Astana the first capital of the Turkic world in 2012. I argue that as a counterpoint to the city's narrative of the future projected through architecture, TÜRKSÖY has helped project a narrative of the past onto the supposedly blank slate of the cityscape, albeit one that has been carefully edited. Actively reaching into both the future and the past, Astana sits on the margins of tradition and global modernity.

Disciplines

Other Political Science | Political Science

Comments

This paper was part of the 2012-2013 Penn Humanities Forum on Peripheries. Find out more at <http://www.phf.upenn.edu/annual-topics/peripheries>.

Turkic Identity and the Depoliticization of Culture: A Case Study of the
International Organization of Turkic Culture (TÜRKSOY)

James Sawyer

Completed as part of the honors requirements of the Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations
Major at the University of Pennsylvania
May 5, 2013

Advisor: Renata Holod

Introduction

“Dilde, fikirde, işte birlik.”

(Unity in language, thought and action.)

- Ismail Gasprinsky, quoted in TÜRKSÖY’s brochure.

When I first came across an organization called TÜRKSÖY (short for the International Organization of Turkic Culture), I fully expected that I had discovered the present-day incarnation of Pan-Turkism – the ideology that Turkic peoples from the Balkans to Siberia should unite under the banner of a common ethnicity. After all, the organization’s acronym literally signified ‘Turkic race’ in Turkish.¹ Several months later, as I sat in the office of Dr. Firat Purtaş, assistant director of TÜRKSÖY, I was genuinely surprised as he told me not only that TÜRKSÖY wholly opposed the notion of Pan-Turkism, but that the organization did not consider itself ‘ethnically motivated.’ With great caution, he warned me that TÜRKSÖY was not a racist organization, but rather believed in the ‘universal’ quality of Turkic culture. Hoping to probe the ideology of the organization, I asked what exactly constituted Turkic culture. He hesitantly replied that he supposed anything within the bounds of the Turkic-speaking world could be considered as Turkic culture.²

Dr. Purtaş’s conception of Turkic culture and the organization’s mandate both paralleled and diverged in different dimensions from historic project of Pan-Turkism. As the first modern articulation of Turkic identity, the movement had its origins in the mid-19th century among the Tatars of the Russian Empire who sought an avenue of international solidarity and a means to resist increasing Russification. The notion of Pan-Turkism, or the political unification of all

¹ *Türk* is conventionally used to designate both ‘*Turkish*’ and ‘*Turkic*’ in the Turkish language. The former primarily indicates a citizen of the Republic of Turkey, whereas the latter refers to a vast array of peoples belonging to the same linguistic family. While in the meaning of *Türk* can be ambiguous between the two, I have translated it as ‘Turkic’ in all situations that do not explicitly reference citizens of Turkey.

² Author’s interview with Firat Purtaş, January 8, 2013.

Turkic-speaking peoples under the banner of shared ethnicity soon took root in the Ottoman Empire, and a number of prominent intellectuals advocated for Pan-Turkism as imperial policy. Since Turkic peoples did not (and still do not) form a contiguous geographic population, another means for unification identified in linguistic commonality. Ismail Gasprinsky, a Crimean Tatar, played a significant role in fostering a common Turkic language through his publication *Tercüman* that also advocated for Turkic political unity within the context of nationalism.³ Pan-Turkism's most prominent advocate came to be the Ottoman Turkish intellectual and poet Ziya Gökalp who called for a Turkic homeland not within Turkey, nor the Central Asia region of Turkestan, but within "the fatherland... a large and eternal country – Turan!"⁴ Grounded in notions of a shared language above all, Pan-Turkism was conceived as a fundamentally cultural mandate that transcended (yet overlapped considerably with) religion.

As the self-proclaimed UNESCO of the Turkic world, TÜRKSÖY advocates a linguistically based and culturally focused conception of Turkic identity, similarly to Pan-Turkism. The organization differs considerably, however, on the level of politics. Pan-Turkism irrevocably constituted an irredentist ideology historically directed at Russia. In the 19th century, irredentist attitudes called for the liberation of the Turkic subjects of the Russian Empire in Central Asia, the Volga region, the Crimea and the Caucasus. During the Soviet era, similar calls were by Pan-Turkists within Turkey, although Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's enduring nationalist ideology limited the mandate of the Turkish state to its borders within Anatolia.⁵ The so-called "outside Turks" (*dış Türkleri*) were culturally and linguistically severed from the Turks of Turkey until the fall of the Soviet Union. In the years following the independence of the five

³ Jacob M. Landau, *Pan-Turkism: from Irredentism to Cooperation* (Indiana University Press, 1995), p.1-15

⁴ *Ibid*, p.37

⁵ *Ibid*, p.94

Turkic republics of the Caucasus and Central Asia, TÜRKSOY was founded between the six Ministers of Culture as a diplomatic forum for cultural rapprochement. The Pan-Turkist Project turned from irredentism to national cooperation, as the nationalist consolidation of the 20th century both inside and outside of the Soviet Union proved to be the ultimate obstacle to the Pan-Turkist dream.⁶

In many ways, TÜRKSOY lives in the shadow of Pan-Turkism as both a cultural and political phenomenon. Much of the history of Turkic thought and culture remains inseparable from the Pan-Turkist mission. At the same time, the political threat of Pan-Turkism looms over the project of TÜRKSOY as the specter of history: dependent on good relations with Russia, the organization has consequently sought to actively distance itself from (in Dr. Purtaş's words) the "racist" ideas of Pan-Turkism. In 2008, a smear campaign was launched in the Russian press proclaiming TÜRKSOY the reincarnation of political Pan-Turkism.⁷ In order to escape the irredentist and "racist" connotations of Pan-Turkism (which still constitutes the historical reference point for the formulation of a Turkic identity), TÜRKSOY has sought refuge and legitimation in the notion of universal culture. By forging alliances with UNESCO and modeling their activities on the organization's universalist understanding of culture, TÜRKSOY seeks to foster a model of "cultural diplomacy."⁸ Moreover, while political Pan-Turkism advocated international conflict through ethnic irredentism, both TÜRKSOY and UNESCO view culture as

⁶ *Ibid*, p.194

⁷ Author's interview with Firat Purtaş, January 8, 2013.

⁸ Firat Purtaş, "Kültürel Diplomasi ve TÜRKSOY" accessed May 2, 2013:
<http://mekam.org/mekam/kulturel-diplomasi-ve-turksoy>

the key to “international solidarity, peace and equality.”⁹ In this rhetoric, politics and culture are cast as fundamentally opposed categories, divorced from one another.

Contrary to TÜRKSOY’s proposition that culture stands independently of political agendas, this paper will aim to describe the ways in which TÜRKSOY’s activities are thoroughly intermeshed within the realm of the political. At the center of this project stands the argument that the act of claiming culture as depoliticized – whether as an organic, politically neutral phenomenon or as a pre-political fact – remains profoundly political. In the context of TÜRKSOY, the disavowal of politicized culture is couched in the organization’s appeal to the universal ideals of cultural exchange and world peace. At the same time, the organization can only claim to aspire to universal culture within the limits of “the Turkic world” – consequently, the project of TÜRKSOY is that of a regional UNESCO; a culturally specific instantiation of universal values. This paper will serve the dual objectives of revealing the means by which TÜRKSOY claims to divorce culture from politics, while at the same time exploring the peculiarities of a localized UNESCO at the service of Turkic ideals. My contention is that rather than reenacting the ideal of a unified Turkic nation, TÜRKSOY acts in the service of a national coalition of the political interests of its member states. Furthermore, the organization plays an important political role in the symbolic ratification of national culture by conferring upon it the appearance of the primordial – an intrinsic cultural feature that both predates and constitutes the premise of national consciousness.

While a comprehensive overview of the organization’s massive scope of cultural activities, I have sought to highlight three important instances of TÜRKSOY’s politics across three chapters. The first chapter will provide a brief history of the organization and discuss the

⁹ Bjarke Nielsen, “UNESCO and the ‘right’ kind of culture; Bureaucratic production and articulation.” *Critique of Anthropology* 31.4 (2011), p.274.

important role of cultural form in the development of TÜRKSOY's ideology. The second chapter will discuss the rise of *Nevruz* as the organization's trademark event. *Nevruz* has been pioneered to international audiences as the Turkic world's contribution to universal culture, yet the holiday has also been monopolized by TÜRKSOY's constituent countries to assert the entitlement of titular ethnicities at the exclusion of ethnic and cultural minorities. The third and last chapter will deal with how TÜRKSOY's model of the Cultural Capital of the Turkic World, first held in Astana in 2012, has become complicit in Kazakhstan's nation-building process. As a counterweight to Kazakhstan's aim of achieving global modernity, TÜRKSOY's activities marked Kazakhstan as culturally particular. This claim to primordial Kazakh culture both lends legitimacy to President Nursultan Nazarbayev's authoritarian vision of a particular "Kazakhstani way," while ratifying his notion of national culture as organic and inherently pre-political.

Chapter 1 A Brief History of TÜRKSOY Across Cultural Forms

The collapse of the Soviet Union marked a watershed in Turkish foreign policy. While Turkey's importance to Western powers as a member of NATO diminished, the newly independent states of the Caucasus and Central Asia offered the promise of new regional alliances. Turkey's immediate response to the emergence of six predominantly Muslim republics in the Caucasus and Central Asia, five of which comprised an ethnically Turkic titular majority, was marked by an extraordinary tone of fraternity. Couched in an almost spiritual rhetoric, Turkish politicians expressed an innate connection between Turkey and the Turkic nations of the Caucasus and Central Asia. On an official visit in Kazakhstan in 1993, Turkish President Turgut Özal pronounced, "Anatolia is the motherland for us, while Kazakhstan is the land of our

ancestors.”¹⁰ A year later, former Prime Minister and then President Süleyman Demirel maintained that Turkey had inescapable “moral responsibilities” rooted in Turkey’s shared history with the ex-Soviet Turkic republics.¹¹ This notion of an intrinsically common Turkic culture and history between Turkey, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan paved the way for the institutionalization of TÜRKSÖY.

TÜRKSÖY’s Founding and the Bülbülođlu Years

Founded in 1993 as the Joint Administration of Turkic Arts and Culture (Türk Kültür ve Sanatları Ortak Yönetimi, abbreviated as the acronym TÜRKSÖY), the organization comprised the Ministers of Culture of the six Turkic republics. The name of the organization itself was an overt reference to the idea of common ethnic origins: the Turkish words *Türk* and *soy* meaning ‘Turkic race’ or ‘Turkic ethnicity.’ The initial scope of activities was mostly limited to formal diplomatic activities. Under the leadership of the Azerbaijani Minister of Culture Polad Bülbülođlu, the TÜRKSÖY of the 1990s had a relatively limited scope of activities. The organization served primarily as a forum for the Ministers of Culture to establish diplomatic ties. In TÜRKSÖY’s first serial publication in 2000, Bülbülođlu cited the fourteen summits, or biannual meetings of the Ministers of Culture of the organization’s constituent nations as the main index of the organization’s success. Apart from the maintenance of diplomatic relations in the realm of culture, Bülbülođlu highlighted the organization’s publication of fifteen books as another major achievement.¹²

¹⁰ Anthony Hyman, "Turkestan and pan-Turkism revisited." *Central Asian Survey* 16.3 (1997), p.11

¹¹ Idris Bal, *Turkey's Relations with the West and the Turkic Republics: The Rise and Fall of the 'Turkish Model'* (Ashgate, 2000), p.44

¹² Bülbülođlu, “Yola Cikarken” Pg.1-3 Cilt: 1, Sayı: 1 Haziran 2000

Bülbüloğlu's tenure as director of TÜRKSOY from 1993 to 2007 can be summarized as a period of internal rapprochement among member states. This rapprochement was presented as a means to rectify the divide that the Soviet period had imposed on the Turkic world. Within the rhetoric of the organization, the bridging of the historical divide between Turkey and the ex-Soviet Turkic republics was also cast as a spiritual endeavor. More than freedom from the Soviet state's atheist policy, the notion of 'spiritual awakening' extended into the national realms of history, culture and language as well as religion.¹³ This 'spiritual awakening' across the Caucasus and Central Asia paralleled the search for national identity.¹⁴ A shared conception of common 'spiritual' values underscored the nascent cultural diplomacy of the six founding member states. In 1998, the status of observer member was extended to the autonomous Republics of Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, Yakut, Hakassia, Altai and Tuva of the Russian Federation, as well as to the independent Gagauz region of Moldova and to Northern Cyprus. The addition of these observer states effectively brought Russia into the organization's project, and the attendance of Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev at the 10th anniversary celebration of TÜRKSOY evidenced Russian support of TÜRKSOY's mandate.¹⁵

TÜRKSOY's early emphasis on diplomatic relations was mirrored by the organization's scope of cultural activities. The proliferation of academic publications evidenced a more sophisticated approach to Turkic culture that served two purposes. The first was to catalog, as it were, major figures, works and monuments in the domain of Turkic culture. This took place across a number of literary and ethnographic academic publications, focusing on topics such as

¹³ Natalie R. Koch, "Why not a world city? Astana, Ankara and geopolitical scripts in urban networks." *Urban Geography* 34.1 (2013), p.123

¹⁴ Bülbüloğlu, "Yola Cikarken" Pg.1-3 Cilt: 1, Sayı: 1 Haziran 2000

¹⁵ Purtaş, "Kültürel Diplomasi ve TÜRKSOY" <http://mekam.org/mekam/kulturel-diplomasi-ve-turksoy>

Bashkurt and Hakas folk legends, poetry anthologies and biographies of important literary figures. [[MORE DETAIL?](#)] These studies served to “reacquaint” Turks in Turkey with the culture of the Caucasus, and Central Asia in particular.¹⁶ As a second objective, a number of publications sought to highlight common elements of Turkic culture. Most notable among these was an ambitious book titled *Shared Motifs of the Turkic World from the Altai Mountains to the Danube* (1995), but there were also other titles such as *A Poetry Anthology of the Turkic World* (2000) and *Architectural Monuments of the Turkic Republics* (1996). The latter publications aimed at legitimating claims to a common Turkic identity from an academic platform. Though the majority of the organization’s early activities were directed towards elite audiences both in the realms of politics and academia, a number of other activities interfaced more directly with artists.

One of the more curious priorities of Bülübüoğlu’s tenure was the inauguration of yearly photography and painting exhibitions beginning in 1998. Both projects were the personal initiative of Bülübüoğlu, who believed that any respectable international culture organization ought to host painting and photography exhibitions.¹⁷ For both series of exhibitions, a number of painters and photographers were gathered from across TÜRKSOY’s member states and commissioned to produce original work under the rubric of a particular theme – typically a specific location or region. While the photography exhibitions have featured a wide geographic scope of subject matter, from various locales in Turkey to Central Asia, the painting exhibitions have always been hosted in Turkey. Every year, between ten and fifteen painters have been brought from across TÜRKSOY’s member states – sometimes even from minority Turkic communities in Montenegro, Kosovo, Bosnia or Iraq – to participate in a two week long

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ TÜRKSOY Painting Exhibition Catalog, Istanbul 1998.

competition. Often held in Western Turkey along the Mediterranean, Aegean or Black Sea coasts in a rented-out villa, the painters are given two weeks to produce a number of works to be exhibited, judged and considered for a prize. TÜRKSOY's painting exhibitions have become a hallmark of the organization's yearly cultural events. After sixteen cycles and over a thousand paintings – all of which belong to TÜRKSOY – the organization has even discussed the possibility of erecting a museum for Turkic art.¹⁸

The first fifteen years of the organization can be characterized by an appeal to high culture and an awareness of certain universal standards in the domain of international cultural. In 1996, a protocol was signed between TÜRKSOY and UNESCO, outlining the two organizations' intent to collaborate. While the cooperation between the two existed only nominally throughout Bülbüloğlu's directorship, he nonetheless referred to TÜRKSOY as the UNESCO of the Turkic world. Paralleling the organization's conception of itself as a localized UNESCO and in line with Bülbüloğlu's background as a diplomat, TÜRKSOY's early activities courted an elite crowd of politicians, academics and high-profile artists. In the same vein as the photography and painting exhibitions, a program of "Opera Days" took place annually.¹⁹ As was evidenced in Bülbüloğlu's comment on the necessity of certain types of events, his criteria for what constituted "international" culture denoted specific artistic forms – none of which could be said to be specifically Turkic. With the exception of the organization's Nevruz celebrations (to be further elaborated in chapter 2), the Bülbüloğlu years saw little in the way of popular engagement.

Transformations Under Kaseinov

¹⁸ Author's interview with Firat Purtaş, January 8, 2013

¹⁹ Purtaş, "Kültürel Diplomasi ve TÜRKSOY" <http://mekam.org/mekam/kulturel-diplomasi-ve-turksoy>

With the end of Polad Bülbüloğlu's tenure and the accession of Dusen Kaseinov, the organization entered a period of transformation. As the former Kazakhstani Minister of Culture and an artist himself, Kaseinov has instituted major changes both in the organization's ideological outlook and repertoire of events. While Bülbüloğlu sought internal rapprochement among member states, in the words of Dr. Purtaş, "the fundamental character of [Kaseinov's] period has been an effort to acquaint Turkic culture to the world."²⁰ As the first major step to raise awareness of Turkic culture beyond the boundaries of the Turkic world, TÜRKSOY actively built upon the organization's partnership with UNESCO to host a series of events in Europe and the US. In 2010, TÜRKSOY staged a large-scale Nevruz performance at UNESCO's headquarters in Paris, followed by a series of Nevruz celebrations at major venues in New York, Boston and Washington D.C. in 2011. Some of the high-profile venues included the UN headquarters, the New York Town Hall, the Lincoln Theater and Harvard and Georgetown Universities.²¹ TÜRKSOY has also established bilateral relations with other like cultural organizations, such as the European Commission and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, through which they have held exhibitions and seminars across Europe and the Islamic world.

The other main aspect of transformation during Kaseinov's tenure has been relative to the scale of events. While the first fifteen years of TÜRKSOY's activities revealed a commitment to publications and exhibitions, Kaseinov's period has been characterized by large-scale productions featuring performance. Examples of these events have been the organization's "trademark" Nevruz activities hosted both abroad and in Turkey, but also such large productions

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ "TÜRKSOY Nevruz Coşkunu ABD'ye Taşıyor," <http://www.turksoy.org.tr/TR/belge/1-92203/turksoy-nevruz-coskusunu-abdye-tasiyor.html?vurgu=nevruz+abd>

as the K rođlu Opera and the Yunus Emre Oratorio. The K rođlu Opera featured upwards of 200 performers from Turkey, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Bashkortostan and Tatarstan and was staged in Istanbul, Ankara, Baku, Bishkek, Almaty and Astana. The Yunus Emre Oratorio toured the US with an orchestra of over 80 members in a production featuring the poetry of the 13th century Turkish mystic. T RKSOY’s International Youth Chamber Orchestra has also toured the US and Europe.²² Such large productions have aimed to attract both popular and elite audiences; domestic as well as international recognition. Most importantly, these new activities are no longer concerned with *proving* the existence of a common Turkic identity; rather, they aim at actively *creating* it. T RKSOY’s focus has shifted from a niche, intellectual domain to the public realm of participation.

Despite these changes, the organization’s activities have maintained a fair amount of continuity. The painting and photography exhibitions, as well as the Opera Days have been maintained as annual traditions. The Nevruz celebrations have remained the same in terms of content while increasing in terms of scale.²³ Sporadic celebrations of important figures of Turkic history, such as the 70th birthday of Cengiz Aytmatov have been systematized into a calendar of “memorial years:” 2010 was the year of Zeki Velidi Togan, followed by the year of Abdullah Tukay in 2011, Mirza Fatali Ahundzade in 2012 and Mukan T lebayev in 2013. Dr. Purtaş has noted that the institution of “memorial years” has constituted one of the organization’s most important new projects, alongside the institution of the annually rotating “Cultural Capital of the Turkic World” (to be elaborated in Chapter 3).²⁴ The inauguration of “memorial years” appears to have supplanted the organization’s academic publications, which have essentially come to a

²² Purtaş, “K lt rel Diplomasi ve T RKSOY” <http://mekam.org/mekam/kulturel-diplomasi-ve-turksoy>

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Author’s interview with Firat Purtaş, January 8, 2013

halt since Kaseinov's tenure. In the past five years, TÜRKSOY has largely succeeded in expanding its repertoire of activities to include all types of artistic media: as the organization has launched large-scale productions on an unprecedented level, older events have been consolidated as annual traditions. While Bülbüloğlu stressed the fine arts – specifically painting – as a means to global recognition, Kaseinov has stressed an all-inclusive approach to culture. This attitude is evident in his personal rhetoric, as the phrase “diversity and authenticity” is often applied to TÜRKSOY's wide array of activities “from painting to music, from theater to cinema, from architecture to intangible cultural heritage, from literature to fine arts...”²⁵ In line with the notion of TÜRKSOY as a localized UNESCO, Kaseinov has sought to expand the scope of Turkic culture to the broadest definition.

A Cultural Agenda?

Frequently and formulaically invoked in the organization's publications and presentations, TÜRKSOY's goals are to build friendly relations between Turkic countries and peoples, to research, develop and protect Turkic culture, language, history and art to pass on to future generations and lastly, to acquaint the world with Turkic culture.²⁶ All of these objectives are set within the context of achieving world peace through cultural understanding.²⁷ Paralleling TÜRKSOY's commitment to the ideal of world peace – no doubt appropriated from the model of UNESCO – the organization appears similarly committed to the realization of Turkic culture within a “universal scope.”²⁸ This appeal to universal standards of cultural recognition was

²⁵ Activity Report 2008-2011 (Ankara: TÜRKSOY, 2011).

²⁶ “TÜRKSOY'un Amaçları” <http://www.turksoy.org.tr/TR/belge/1-73744/amaclari.html>

²⁷ Purtaş, “Kültürel Diplomasi ve TÜRKSOY” <http://mekam.org/mekam/kulturel-diplomasi-ve-turksoy>

²⁸ *Ibid.*

evident in Bülbüloğlu's commitment to painting and the fine arts and in Kaseinov's dedication to "authenticity and diversity" across all cultural mediums.

In an interview with Dr. Purtaş, the assistant director maintained that no one cultural form is privileged above any other within the ideology of the organization. Similarly, no one medium is more 'Turkic' than another – everything contained within the broadest plausible boundaries of the Turkic world is affirmed as culture.²⁹ Dr. Purtaş rightfully stressed the dimension of logistics: as a kind of sub-UNESCO, TÜRKSOY has the blessing of a reduced bureaucracy, which permits the facile staging of events. Most importantly, the staging of events is contingent upon the possibilities at hand and the individuals and organizations that are willing to participate at any given time. Dr. Purtaş framed TÜRKSOY as an all-inclusive platform for cultural agents to gain broader recognition, particularly within an international (or at least regional) context – a kind of neutral vehicle of culture. TÜRKSOY asserts neither cultural ideology nor political agenda, and does not privilege one cultural form above another within an ethnic context. Instead, the organization maintains its commitment to universal ideals: raising global awareness of culture and the project of world peace.

While TÜRKSOY's commitment to such ideals is undoubtedly admirable, the organization's pretension to universality and the democracy of cultural forms serves important political objectives. Foremost among these political achievements is the projection of an "apolitical" agenda; in other words, because TÜRKSOY claims to function as a neutral, non-discriminatory vehicle of culture, it cannot have any political objectives of its own. Through the act of restaging culture that is supposedly pre-existing, TÜRKSOY disavows its own agency in cultural production. Similarly, the proposition of all-inclusiveness through the equality of

²⁹ Author's interview with Firat Purtaş, January 8, 2013

cultural forms serves to erase the different histories each form of culture. Opera, folk dance and photography become reduced to interchangeable categories of “culture.” Particularly within the domain of ethnicity, the universalization of culture elides the specific historical contexts that gave rise to such cultural forms: “high culture” and fine arts become disassociated with their colonial European roots. Similarly, the complex historiography of Turkic culture is reduced within its Islamic context, as the interplay between Persian, Arabic and Turkic cultures is elided in the same way as Europe’s cultural influence. More than anything, this “apolitical” ideology serves to make culture appear neutral, or simply as a “given” in much the same way that the ethnically-based nation states of the Turkic world are taken as organic formations. These questions will be explored in the subsequent chapters.

Chapter 2

‘*Nevruz*’ and the Staging of Turkic Culture As Universal Heritage

In January of 2013, TÜRKSOY released a special magazine publication on the occasion of the organization’s 20th anniversary. Detailing the organization’s events held in the past year, the magazine highlighted TÜRKSOY’s *Nevruz* celebrations as the most popular of the organization’s activities. The fact that TÜRKSOY’s *Nevruz* celebrations were held in such prestigious venues as the UNESCO headquarters in Paris, the General Assembly Hall of the United Nations in New York and the Lincoln Center in Washington D.C. was presented as the main index of success, although the magazine also stressed the prevalence of TÜRKSOY’s *Nevruz* activities across 17 different cities within Turkey.³⁰ Accordingly, the cover of the 20th anniversary magazine featured a woman dressed in elaborate Central Asian folkloristic costume. She is pictured handing a ceremonial *Nevruz* tray to Turkish President Abdullah Gül, bearing

³⁰ TÜRKSOY Magazine (Vol.39, number 4, 2012), p.3

painted eggs, wheat sprouts and candles, all wrapped in a red ribbon proclaiming “TÜRKSÖY – 2012.” In the words of TÜRKSÖY’s assistant director Dr. Firat Purtas, *Nevruz* has not only become TÜRKSÖY’s “trademark” event³¹ – mirroring the emblazoned ribbon in the photograph – but also a tradition exemplifying “the common cultural heritage of humanity” central to TÜRKSÖY’s mission.³²

TÜRKSÖY’s optimistic proposition of *Nevruz* as a tradition common to all Turkic peoples belies the holiday’s nuanced and contested genealogy in recent years. Since the 1980s, both within Turkey and across the Caucasus and Central Asia, *Nevruz* has served as a public site for the contestation of political identities. Within Turkey, *Nevruz* was politicized as a site of Kurdish resistance both within the civic sphere. The holiday was seized as an occasion for popular protest and even terrorism organized by the Kurdish Workers’ Party. Within Azerbaijan and Central Asia, however, *Nevruz* emerged as an important symbol of independence from the Soviet system. As relatively separate and geopolitically independent phenomena, these two trajectories of *Nevruz* converged within Turkey following the collapse of the Soviet Union. At the center of this cultural convergence, TÜRKSÖY has played an active role in determining and propagating a new definition of *Nevruz* within Turkey and on to global audiences. TÜRKSÖY’s immediate objective has been to reclaim *Nevruz* from the context of Kurdish resistance; the implicit result, however, has been to depoliticize *Nevruz* and to assert the divorce of politics from culture.

The Case of Turkey: ‘*Nevruz*’ versus ‘*Newroz*’

³¹ Author’s interview with Firat Purtas, January 8, 2013

³² TÜRKSÖY Magazine (Vol.39, number 4, 20120, p.9.

Though publicly celebrated during Ottoman times, *Nevruz* was absent from the Republic of Turkey's official calendar of holidays until 1991.³³ Largely associated with the Iranian diaspora during the Ottoman period and up through the Second World War, in the 1970s the holiday began to acquire a different connotation within Turkey. With the crystallization of organized Kurdish resistance to the Turkish state, *Nevruz* (*Newroz* in Kurdish) came to encapsulate a narrative of ethnic resistance mobilized to unite Kurds against their oppressors. From the narrative of *Nevruz* [pers. *Nowruz*] present in the Persian *Shahname*, the main character Feridun was replaced in popular Kurdish mythology by the character of Kawa [pers. Kaveh], an ethnic Kurd who goes on to defeat the oppressive Assyrian King Dahhak and liberating his people.³⁴ As an anti-hegemonic myth of ethnic resistance, *Newroz* presented both an ideological rallying call among Kurdish activists as well as an annual site for political protest during holiday celebrations.

By the 1980s, *Newroz* had become broadly associated with Kurdish resistance. In response, mass *Newroz* celebrations were outlawed by the Turkish government and state security forces remained on high alert during the holiday. Paradoxically, around the same time, government officials decided to institute *Nevruz* – spelled with a ‘v’ rather than a ‘w’ to conform to the Turkish rather than Kurdish alphabet – as a state holiday. The institutionalization of *Nevruz* as a Turkish holiday constituted an implicit rejection of the way in which it was being utilized within Kurdish resistance. Interestingly, this official rebuke of *Newroz* associated with Kurdish resistance did not explicitly denounce the holiday itself, nor focus solely on the Kurdish Worker's Party's use of terrorism, but rather stressed that the latter group had portrayed *Nevruz*

³³ Lerna K. Yanik, "'Nevruz' or 'Newroz'?: deconstructing the 'invention' of a contested tradition in contemporary Turkey." *Middle Eastern Studies* 42.2 (2006), p.287

³⁴ Hirschler, K. 2001. "Defining the Nation: Kurdish Historiography in Turkey in the 1990s" in *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 37. No.3, pp.145-166. Page 152

incorrectly. By shifting the locus of debate from resistance itself to the site of resistance, Turkish officials were able to elide the motives for resistance without having to confront them directly. By maintaining *Nevruz* as a peaceful, fraternal and tolerant celebration with the capability of “erasing hatred and animosity,”³⁵ it is my contention that officials attempted to neutralize the symbolic vehicle of Kurdish dissent within public discourse.

Since the early 1990s, the Turkish government’s interpretation of *Nevruz* has cast the holiday as an ancient celebration of nature. This primordialist conception has been maintained with remarkable consistency by Turkish politicians ever since, and some have even assigned the holiday an important role in the formation of Turkish nationalism. In the early 1990s, Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel admitted that ethnic groups within Turkey had a right to retain their own identity and culture. At the same time, however, Demirel maintained that *Nevruz* was an essentially unifying holiday rather than one divided along ethnic grounds. While asserting that most communities that celebrate *Nevruz* have Turkish origins, referring to the Turkic peoples formerly bound within the Soviet Union, Demirel also proposed that “like all traditions, [*Nevruz*] has a cohesive nature that looks into the future rather than the past.”³⁶ Postulating that cultural identity fundamentally exists in the present and is forward-looking, Demirel denied the historical narrative of political marginalization that has constituted the very premise of Kurdish resistance. While not explicitly denying Kurds the right to celebrate *Nevruz*, the government deemed any reference to the holiday as *Newroz* as illegal based on the fact that there is no ‘w’ in the Turkish language, and as an official state holiday it must be spelled as *Nevruz*.³⁷

³⁵ Ismail Kahraman, Minister of Culture in *Sabah*, 21 March 1997 in Yanik, “‘Nevruz’ or ‘Newroz’?” p.289

³⁶ *Milliyet*, 21 March 1996 in *Ibid*, p.288

³⁷ *Ibid*, p.293

This promotion of *Nevruz* by Turkish political elites coincided with Turkey's rapprochement with the Turkic republics of the Caucasus and Central Asia. If anything, the Central Asian and Azerbaijani practices of *Nevruz* were imported by Turkish cultural elites as a more favorable definition of the holiday. This alternative *Nevruz* gave the Turkish government an opportunity to redefine the holiday instead of merely suppressing it.

Navro'z in Central Asia

At roughly the same time, *Navro'z* (Uzbek: *Navr'oz*, Kazakh: *Nauryz*) emerged as a locus of identity politics within the Turkic republics of the Soviet Union during the 1980s. The holiday had been banned under Soviet authority under the premise of being a religious holiday alongside the Muslim holidays of *Eid al-Fitr* and *Eid al-Adha*. The idea of *Navro'z* was revisited in the context of a more ambiguously defined spring holiday during the Gorbachev era.³⁸ While recognized then as a pre-Islamic holiday with motifs primarily evocative of nature rather than religious belief, the Soviet engagement with the idea of a spring holiday was both a concession to the Soviet populations that had celebrated *Navro'z*, as well as an opportunity for the festivities to be reframed in terms of agricultural labor along the lines of May Day.³⁹

Throughout the 1980s, the implementation of a Soviet-style spring holiday at the same time as *Navro'z* had varying success across the Central Asian republics. In Uzbekistan, a new holiday called *Navbahor* (new spring) was introduced as a replacement for the Uzbek *Navro'z*. However, the installation of *Navbahor* coincided with the beginnings of *perestroika* and

³⁸ Laura Adams, *The Spectacular State: Culture and National Identity in Uzbekistan* (Duke University Press Books, 2010), p.52

³⁹ Hilda C. Eitzen, "Nawriz in Kazakhstan: scenarios for managing diversity" (pp.73-102) in *Contemporary Kazaks: Cultural and Social Perspectives*, ed. Ingvar Svanberg (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), p.76

glasnost, opening up a public forum for debate on the cultural significance of the new Soviet holiday. On the heels of the notorious “cotton affair,” an incident in which many Uzbek officials were sacked for corruption for having exaggerated the Uzbek SSR’s cotton export figures, *Navbahor* fell on ethnic Uzbeks at a time of national humiliation and resentment towards the Communist Party. The institutionalization of *Navbahor* was taken as further insult to the injury of the cotton scandal by the Uzbeks and consequently never took hold.⁴⁰

At the same time, however, in Kazakhstan, the introduction of a deliberately vague Soviet spring holiday proved to be more of a success. The holiday juxtaposed Russian or generally Slavic pre-Christian figures such as Grandfather Frost (*D’ed Moroz*) with elements of Central Asian culture such as the Kazakh *batirs* or horseback heroes, and even more widespread figures of Turkic folklore such as Nasreddin Hoja. As a fusion of both Slavic and Turkic cultures, the holiday even allowed for ethnic intermingling as Kazakhs parodied Russian folk dances. In Hilda Eitzen’s account, an ethnically Ukrainian Kazakhstani was reported as saying that “*Nauryz* is a universal holiday for all of us different nationalities here in Kazakhstan”⁴¹ A significant factor in the delineating Kazakhstani and Uzbekistani reintroductions of Nevruz-like festivals in the 1980s can likely be attributed to the demographic composition of the two Central Asian republics. Kazakhstan retained no dominant majority (not even ethnic Kazakhs) throughout the late Soviet years, but comprised a variety of ethnicities and roughly equal populations of Slavs and Central Asians.

In the post-independence era, however, *Navro’z/Nauryz* acquired distinctly ethnic overtones in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan paralleling the rise of national primordialism. In Uzbekistan, *Navro’z* became internalized as a fundamental aspect of Uzbek culture that was

⁴⁰ Adams, *The Spectacular State*, p.52

⁴¹ Eitzen, “Nawrīz in Kazakstan: scenarious for managing diversity,” p.75

unfairly suppressed during the Soviet period. Nonetheless, as Laura Adams points out, “when [Uzbek] artists talk about the renaissance of folk culture, they claim that culture was repressed while at the same time admitting that it has always existed.” This reveals the slippery categories of “true” culture, as cultural activities referred to as “entertainment” during the Soviet period become “Uzbekistan’s ancient arts” in the post-Soviet period.⁴² As *Navro’z* became a trope of Uzbek independence, the concept of a primordial Uzbek nationalism was inscribed upon the tradition of *Navro’z*. What has certainly changed is the holiday’s official status, as state-sponsored *Navro’z* celebrations reached the caliber of Olympics-scale production during the post-independence period.⁴³

Similarly in Kazakhstan, *Nauryz* acquired ethnic overtones that differentiated it from the broader Russian and Slavic elements of the Soviet spring holiday, although without the outright condemnation of Russian or Soviet culture as in Uzbekistan. Immediately following independence, Kazakhstan was faced with the problem that Kazakhs constituted a minority of the country’s population at 40%.⁴⁴ While Russian was kept as a de facto *lingua franca*, the post-independence regime implemented Kazakh as the sole official language of the country. Consequently, the state sought to privilege an ethnic definition of the state without actively marginalizing its non-titular elements, namely Russians (37%), Ukrainians and Germans. This privileging of ethno-national identity within Kazakhstan was similarly evident in *Nauryz* celebrations. Ethnic Kazakhs adopted an exclusionary stance, claiming that *Nauryz* derived from an exclusively Central Asian context, but also intersecting (in an ironic contrast to Uzbekistan)

⁴² Adams, *The Spectacular State*, p.57

⁴³ *Ibid*, p.3

⁴⁴ Natalie R Koch, *The City and the Steppe: Territory and Technologies of Government* (Dissertation, University of Colorado, 2012), p.45. Retrieved from http://www.nataliekoch.com/docs/Koch_2012_Dissertation.pdf

with Islamic elements.⁴⁵ However, whereas Uzbekistani celebrations of *Navro 'z* solely portray Uzbek ethno-national elements, *Nauryz* in Kazakhstan is necessarily formulated on Kazakh culture but critically buttressed with appeals to multiculturalism, as President Nazarbayev delivers his speeches first in Kazakh and then in Russian.⁴⁶ Whereas Uzbekistan has done much to build a national identity based on distinctly Uzbek nationalism, the Kazakhstani government “focuses on broad models of efficiency and progress that only superficially propagate ethno-national and historical content.”⁴⁷

In both cases, the spring holiday has been associated with a primordialist commitment to local sovereignty invested in the titular ethnicities of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. The difference between the two cases remains whether or not this primordial identity implies an ethnically exclusive cultural policy. In Uzbekistan this is certainly the case, as *Navro 'z* came to symbolize an anticolonial understanding of the Soviet experience and a subsequent ‘return’ to Uzbek sovereignty. In Kazakhstan, the prominent Slavic population raised fears of an erosion of Kazakh ethnic identity within the new state. Concern over ethnic sovereignty peaked during the 1990s as the government sought to define Kazakhstan as a fundamentally Kazakh state that was nonetheless interested in retaining multiculturalism. Like Turkey, both of these Central Asian republics witnessed the framing of *Navro 'z/Nauryz* in inherently primordial terms intertwined with preexisting concepts of ethnic nationalism. In all of these cases, the state sought to monopolize the definition of *Nevruz/Navro 'z/Nauryz*. At the same time, the government’s claim to the holiday also implied its status as a primordial element of the state.

⁴⁵ Eitzen, “Nawrīz in Kazakstan: scenarious for managing diversity,” p.98

⁴⁶ Laura L. Adams, and Assel Rustemova. "Mass spectacle and styles of governmentality in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan" in *Europe-Asia Studies* 61.7 (2009), p.1259

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p.1251

On an international level, *Nevruz* is consequently defined as a consensus of national definitions. A striking example of the contested definition of *Nevruz* on the international stage occurred in 1997 in Kazakhstan, when several thousand Kurds took to the streets of Almaty in protest of the municipality's decision to revoke permission for a Kurdish *Nevruz* celebration. While the reasons for the cancellation were not officially announced, one informant reported that the event organized by the cultural body representing the 35,000 Kurds in Kazakhstan, known supporters of the Kurdish Worker's Party, would have shown an "anti-Turkish character... infringing on the interests of friendly Turkey."⁴⁸ More so than a truly universal concept, then, the character of *Nevruz* has been made subordinate to national interests.

TÜRKSÖY: Staging the universal

Epitomizing the tension between universal heritage and national identity at work in the reconceptualization of *Nevruz* is the process by which TÜRKSÖY has pioneered the holiday as its international 'trademark.' TÜRKSÖY and its sister organization TİKA (the Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency) played a central role in 'importing' the non-Kurdish definition of *Nevruz* into Turkey in light of the Turkish 'rediscovery' of Central Asia. Both TÜRKSÖY and TİKA provided a number of scholarships in the 1990s for Caucasian and Central Asian students to study in Turkish universities. In turn, TÜRKSÖY began to organize its own *Nevruz* celebrations to help provide these students with a sense of cultural familiarity (ironically, this same process of acculturation was simultaneously at work in their home countries). *Nevruz* was institutionalized as one of TÜRKSÖY's first annual celebrations. TÜRKSÖY's staging of *Nevruz* highlighted the symbolic and folkloric elements of the holiday:

⁴⁸ Eitzen, "Nawrız in Kazakstan: scenarious for managing diversity," p.100

folk dancing, Central Asian traditional dress and the iconic objects associated with the holiday, such as painted eggs, candles and bundles of wheat sprouts.

An important shift in the organization of TÜRKSOY – both on the level of activities and their underpinning ideology – occurred with the appointment of Dusein Kaseinov to the position of Secretary General in 2008. Though TÜRKSOY had initiated bilateral relations with UNESCO in the early 1990s, this affiliation remained largely symbolic until Kaseinov’s arrival. The pact of cooperation was finally substantiated in 2010 when TÜRKSOY organized a large-scale *Nevruz* production to be held at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris. Featuring over 100 artists from six of TÜRKSOY’s constituent members (Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Bashkortostan, Tatarstan and Turkey), TÜRKSOY went on to organize performances of similar scale to tour the US the following year. These *Nevruz* performances, held in such prestigious locations as the UN Headquarters, Carnegie Hall and the Lincoln Theater in Washington DC, stood at the forefront of TÜRKSOY’s mission to acquaint the world with Turkic culture.⁴⁹ Despite the holiday’s arguably more central role in Persian culture, *Nevruz* became the primary vehicle by which Turkic culture achieved international recognition.

Within TÜRKSOY’s globalizing vision, *Nevruz* has paradoxically become both a metaphor of primordial Turkic identity and a universal aspect of humanity. While maintaining that Turkic peoples have celebrated *Nevruz* for over 5,000 years,⁵⁰ TÜRKSOY has also repeatedly invoked the universal character of coming-of-spring celebrations. The juxtaposition of these two concepts seems to suggest that *Nevruz* is the Turkic world’s (and consequently TÜRKSOY’s) contribution to human heritage. This conceptualization of *Nevruz* thus frames it

⁴⁹ Purtaş, “Kültürel Diplomasi ve TÜRKSOY” <http://mekam.org/mekam/kulturel-diplomasi-ve-turksoy>

⁵⁰ <http://www.turkishny.com/headline-news/2-headline-news/51145-turksoy-nevruz-ateini-abdde-yakt/printing>

as a dimension of universal culture brought into existence through the primordial sieve of Turkic culture. This somewhat contradictory notion has been summarized poetically by Dr. Firat Purtaş:

“As it is known, since ancient times Turkic people have celebrated [Nevruz] as a symbol of life’s vibrancy, continuity and colorfulness. In fact, it is man’s inner self that awakens with each spring. This joyous side of life brought along with it a vast culture of tolerance. This day which has been treated as a holiday for centuries has become an example of friendship and brotherhood.”

Depoliticization and Exclusion from the Universal

In contrast to TÜRKSOY’s proposition of a universalizing holiday of fraternal, humanistic solidarity, the organization has reproduced the Turkish government’s exclusionary rhetoric aimed at silencing Kurdish resistance. In the same vein as Süleyman Demirel and subsequent heads of state in the 1990s and 2000s, TÜRKSOY has also become a platform for denouncing the Kurdish ‘politicization’ of *Nevruz* in the 1980s and 90s. In an interview for TÜRKSOY’s magazine published in 2012, Ertrugrul Günay, the Turkish Minister of Culture and Tourism, explained the increasing interest in *Nevruz* as such:

“*Nevruz* has been released from the wrong political connotations of subversiveness and is being rehabilitated. *Nevruz* means ‘brand new day.’ *Nevruz* is the awakening of nature. *Nevruz* is a common festival of all agrarian societies, communities and nations, which is why the previous attempts to assimilate *Nevruz* into a single community’s domination shall be evaluated as an eclipse of reason. I believe that now we are over these illusions.”⁵¹

Günay rightly points out that *Nevruz* cannot successfully be assimilated into the dominant hegemony of a single community; rather, *Nevruz* has been assimilated into a hegemonic coalition of nations that has worked together to exclude certain voices, such as Turkey’s Kurds. This consensus that has determined *Nevruz* an element of universal cultural heritage is formulated within a constituency of nations. To varying degrees, each of these nations claims that the holiday stands as an ontological aspect of national consciousness. Peoples without representative nations, specifically minority communities who refuse the ethno-national premise of sovereignty

⁵¹ TÜRKSOY Magazine, Vol. 36, 2012, p.13

in states such as Turkey, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan consequently have no right to participate in this assumption of political identity.

In an interview with Dr. Purtaş, he explained the Kurdish co-option of Nevruz as an act of politicization that changed the *true nature* of the holiday. He contrasted this ‘politicized’ interpretation of Nevruz with its allegedly correct status as a ‘peoples’ holiday.’ The irony of TÜRKSOY’s portrayal of the ‘true nature’ of Nevruz as solely a cultural holiday is evident in the deeply political act of its ‘depoliticization.’ Rather than liberating the holiday from politics, TÜRKSOY has merely asserted a monopolizing claim to the politics of Nevruz: that the holiday – at least in Turkey – will remain under the joint proprietorship of a coalition of national interests under the guise of Turkic fraternity.

More broadly, *Nevruz* has been a primary site for the divorce of politics from culture. When asked about the significance of TÜRKSOY’s *Nevruz* being held at a political organization like the United Nations, Kaseinov responded: “Our activities are not political; rather, they are humanistic, cultural and artistic. With our celebrations, Turkic culture and fraternity will be shown to the whole world.”⁵² By appealing to the universally positive qualities of humanity, culture and art, Kaseinov preempted a discussion of politics. Through the deeply political act of monopolizing the holiday’s meaning, TÜRKSOY has claimed the apolitical nature of the holiday.

Chapter 3

Nation Building: Astana as Cultural Capital of the Turkic World

In 2012, TÜRKSOY declared Astana as the first annually rotating Cultural Capital of the Turkic World. Astana’s tenure as Capital featured numerous events organized between

⁵² <http://www.turkishny.com/headline-news/2-headline-news/51145-turksoy-nevruz-ateini-abdde-yakt/printing>

TÜRKSÖY, the Astana Municipality and various local foundations and government agencies. A number of conferences and gatherings throughout the year were bookended by opening and closing ceremonies featuring popular and folk songs and dances. Dr. Firat Purtaş, Assistant Director of TÜRKSÖY, identified the idea of a Capital of Turkic Culture as one of the organization's most important new initiatives moving forward and defining projects realized under Dusen Kaseinov's leadership.⁵³

The impact of TÜRKSÖY's declaration of Astana as Capital of Turkic Culture for 2012 was twofold: on one hand, TÜRKSÖY garnered the financial and institutional support of the city to host a high concentration of events, thus raising the organization's profile within Kazakhstan. On the other hand, TÜRKSÖY contributed to the greater project of Astana – the focal point of President Nursultan Nazarbayev's national "image project"⁵⁴ – by staging a program of cultural events underscoring Astana's international centrality in the realm of culture. Astana presently stands at the forefront of Nazarbayev's campaign to establish a positive image for Kazakhstan. Under the telos of economic development, Nazarbayev has channeled immense resources into the creation of a city corresponding to his vision of Kazakhstan's future. Moreover, as political vision-turned-urban environment, Kazakhstanis are called upon to participate in Nazarbayev's grand vision of Astana as workers, consumers and inhabitants of the city. Through its hyper-modern appearance and symbolic geography of monuments, sports arenas, education facilities and government buildings, the city also seeks to communicate Kazakhstan's prominence on the world stage.

While Nazarbayev has employed an internationally recognized cadre of architects to validate Astana's claim to global modernity, the project of Kazakhstani nation building is

⁵³ Author's interview with Firat Purtaş, January 8, 2013

⁵⁴ Koch, *The City and the Steppe*, p.2

simultaneously dependent on the notion of Kazakh tradition and ethnic particularity. TÜRKSOY has provided an avenue for Astana's international recognition on the grounds of a shared Turkic past rather than an imagined modernist future. The role of the past is critical in Nazarbayev's conception of a particular "Kazakhstani way," or a uniquely Kazakh avenue towards national development.⁵⁵ Nazarbayev's insistence on the particularity of the Kazakhstani nation-building project serves two goals: to counter foreign teleologies of development, whether Soviet or neoliberal, while simultaneously consolidating Nazarbayev's singular authority as the national leader. Moreover, while TÜRKSOY's recognition of Astana as the Cultural Capital of the Turkic World sought to establish the centrality of Astana beyond the borders of Kazakhstan, it implicitly validated Nazarbayev's conception of Kazakh culture. As a dually modernist and traditionalist project, Astana stands for a uniquely Turkic teleology fusing primordialism with the promise of a bright, national future.

Capital of Culture: a Globalizing Template

The model of an annually rotating "Capital of Culture" was first implemented by the European Council in 1985. The idea was coined between the Ministers of Culture of France and Greece, Jack Lang and Melina Mercouri, who named Athens as the first European Capital of Culture. To strengthen Europe's regional identity, the initiative was proposed primarily as a means to cultural integration. The selection of Athens as the first Capital of Culture also marked a kind of civilizational overtone within the project. Each year, a different city would come into the spotlight as the placeholder for the region's cultural image – a democratic model aimed at

⁵⁵ Natalie R. Koch "Urban 'utopias': The Disney stigma and discourses of 'false modernity.'" *Environment and Planning A* 44(10) 2012, p.4

fostering common identification while also promoting infrastructural investment.⁵⁶ More critically, the Capital of Culture aimed to foster a regional sense of shared propriety. In the words of José Barroso, President of the European Commission,

“... the Capitals have always been an opportunity for Europeans to meet, to learn about their diversity, but at the same time to enjoy together their common history and values, to cooperate in new initiatives and projects: in other words, to experience the feeling of belonging to the same European community.”⁵⁷

Barroso highlights a central aspect of the “Capital of Culture” paradigm: citizens of a region are taught to identify with culture at the level of region rather than nation. Only one (although later, up to two or three) of Europe’s cities is selected to receive an entire region’s economic and cultural capital. In a process of synecdoche, the façade of the city becomes the face of the region, giving substance to an abstract idea of “Europe.” This mode of integration is both economic and symbolic, as capital flows to the Capital, while the Capital itself becomes a symbol of regional identity. This formulation of regional identity appears inclusive, democratic and development-oriented through the process of annual rotation. Above all, the idea of a “Capital of Culture” was intended to breathe life into a bureaucratic entity and to foster, as it were, a regional identity to transcend national identities.

Following its success in Europe, the “Capital of Culture” model was adopted by a number of regional entities outside of Europe. The Arab League implemented its own Arab Capital of Culture in 1996, while the Organization of American States has sponsored the American Capital of Culture since 2000. TÜRKSOY’s own Cultural Capital of the Turkic World was first declared in Astana in 2012, while 2013 will belong to the city of Eskisehir in Turkey

⁵⁶ European Capitals of Culture: the Road to Success from 1985 to 2010, 3

⁵⁷ José Manuel Barroso, European Capitals of Culture: the Road to Success from 1985 to 2010, 1

and 2014 to Kazan. In each regional instantiation of “Cultural Capitals,” the program bore a dual identity: regional in content, globalized in form. In the same vein of TÜRKSÖY’s self-identification as a localized UNESCO, the organization conceived of its Cultural Capital of the Turkic World project in the same language as the European Council.⁵⁸ By identifying with a European precedent, TÜRKSÖY not only sought to validate its specific program of events, but to equate a Turkic regional identity on par with that of Europe – at least in the realm of culture.

The Project of Astana

According to Nursultan Nazarbayev, President of Kazakhstan, “Astana is a city-sign, a sign of dreams, incarnated in reality... the pride and heart of Kazakhstan.”⁵⁹ Astana stands as the flagship of President Nazarbayev’s vision for national development. In power since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Nazarbayev has maintained power through a patrimonial style of government sometimes referred to as a “teleocracy” – in other words, a system of government legitimated by the regime’s promise and achievement of a set agenda for development.⁶⁰ Through Soviet-style five-year plans for economic progress, each situated within the master plan of “Kazakhstan 2030,” Nazarbayev seeks to monopolize discourse on the trajectory of the state. By and large, Nazarbayev’s style of government has succeeded: as he remains firmly entrenched in all aspects of Kazakhstani politics, the country has also prospered economically under his reign as president.⁶¹

Probably the single most monumental step in Nazarbayev’s program of development was the decision to relocate the capital of independent Kazakhstan from Almaty to Aqmola, later to

⁵⁸ TÜRKSÖY Magazine vol. 29, p.19

⁵⁹ Nazarbayev 2006, p 459-350 in Koch dissertation 4

⁶⁰ Koch monumental and miniature 773

⁶¹ Koch, *The City and the Steppe*, p.63

be renamed Astana. The move was announced in 1994 and realized in 1997. Since the capital's relocation and renaming – from Aqmola (“white mausoleum”) to Astana (simply “capital” in Kazakh) – the city has been the site of a massive building project under the direct supervision of the government.⁶² While Almaty had served as Kazakhstan's main urban center since Russian colonization of the steppe in the 19th century, Astana constituted a material incarnation of the new, post-independence nation-building project and a *tabula rasa* for the legacy of the Nazarbayev regime. Both physically and symbolically, Astana has become the centerpiece of the Nazarbayev's Kazakhstan.

Astana is also the privileged site of Nazarbayev's national vision of progress. Though Almaty remains Kazakhstan's largest city and the main urban hub of southern Kazakhstan, Nazarbayev has maintained that those who wish to live in the past should stay in Almaty – Astana, conversely, represents the future.⁶³ Realistically, the shift of the nation's capital has meant a major reorientation of economic capital. Following the relocation of all government officials from Almaty to Astana, both the construction and service industries of the new capital have exploded to accommodate the influx of government personnel. Simply the building of Astana has constituted a massive enterprise worth tens of billions of dollars. The city's futuristic skyline of glittering skyscrapers, government buildings, sports arenas and shopping malls is portrayed as an indicator of national economic success. As the government reaps the profit of vast oil and gas reserves through state-owned companies, Nazarbayev maintains that wealth will be distributed through a trickle-down paradigm centered on the physical construction of the city.

⁶² Mateusz Laszczkowski, "Building the Future: Construction, temporality, and politics in Astana" *Focaal* 2011.60 (2011): 77-9278

⁶³ Koch monumental and miniature 768

The appeal of economic prosperity has led the population of Astana to triple in the first ten years, luring Kazakhstanis from rural and smaller towns to the capital.⁶⁴

In the same way that the model of a “Cultural Capital” symbolically stands as a representation of regional identity, official discourse casts the development of Astana as synecdoche for the development of Kazakhstan as a whole. The creation of jobs in Astana was meant to imply the creation of jobs across Kazakhstan; images of Astana’s futuristic cityscape were circulated widely as national images.⁶⁵ However, the official image of the city remains only partially representative. Astana functions not so much as a utopia, but rather as a heterotopia in Foucault’s terms: a city that is divided powerfully along socioeconomic lines, with a clear spatial delineation between the pristinely utopic government district and the middle- and lower-class sections of the city.⁶⁶ Outside of the new government district, much of the city’s infrastructure remains from the Soviet period. More dilapidated yet, the rapid influx of job seekers has led to the formation of shantytowns, sometimes tucked away behind showcase architectural monuments.⁶⁷ The centerpiece of Astana, its government district known colloquially as the “Left Bank” after its location on the previously undeveloped side of the Ishim River stands in harsh juxtaposition to the socio-economic reality experienced by the majority of the city’s residents.

As Mateusz Laszczkowski has poignantly argued, the juxtaposition of the utopic and the outdated or dilapidated parts of the city powerfully serves the narrative of development.

Polarizing the ultramodern and the sub-standard, the two halves of Astana create a spatialization of progress: traveling from the poorer neighborhoods to the Left Bank, one literally experiences

⁶⁴ Koch, *The City and the Steppe*, p.165

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p.153

⁶⁶ Laszczkowski, "Building the Future" p.87

⁶⁷ Koch, *The City and the Steppe*, p.156

a change in temporality from the old to the new. While the masses inhabit the underdeveloped parts of the city, the elites and government occupy the epicenter of progress, symbolically locating the state at the vanguard of the national project. Furthermore, the materiality of the Left Bank is levied as evidence of the feasibility of Nazarbayev's vision: because it stands as glass and concrete, the future is a reality incarnate in the present. Nazarbayev's Left Bank – meticulously designed and laid out on a monumental, axial grid – stands within reach of the population of Astana as a tangible instantiation of national progress.⁶⁸

It is precisely the disparity between Astana's projected utopia and lower-class reality that makes Nazarbayev's program of development promising: the difference between the two indicates a tangible (spatialized) trajectory of progress. Moreover, all residents and visitors to Astana are called upon to participate in the futuristic geography of the city. Shopping malls, sports arenas and the iconic Bayterek observation tower are designed as the premier loci of public space with the express purpose to engage the populace. These structures constitute a kind of materialized urban script in which citizens participate and act out Nazarbayev's vision of the city as consumers, spectators, inhabitants and visitors. While Nazarbayev and his bureau of city planners have carefully guided Astana's development, the appearance of the city's monuments are also depicted as striving towards international aesthetics and standards. Much in the same way that Nazarbayev maintains power by articulating a vision of development for the Kazakhstani citizenry to fulfill, progress is also framed as a collective effort to achieve recognition on an international scale.

In a bid to situate Kazakhstan on an international map of culture, world-renowned architects have been commissioned to design a number of the city's iconic structures. Kisho

⁶⁸ Laszczkowski, "Building the Future" p.77

Kurokawa, famous Japanese architect and pioneer of the Metabolism movement submitted the winning design for the city's conceptual layout and designed the Astana airport. A concert hall was designed by Italian architect Manfredo Nicoletti. Meanwhile, Norman Foster has been behind the design of two of the city's most iconic structures: the pyramid-like Palace of Peace and Reconciliation and the recently completed Khan Shatyr shopping complex. The commissioning and publicizing of architectural projects by high profile, internationally recognized firms is aimed at putting Astana on a global map of culture. In light of this objective, local architects are nominally sidelined while international profiles are given precedence. In many ways, the high importance accorded to international architects justifies the massive expenditure on the monuments they help to create.⁶⁹

Architectural prestige aside, Astana's landmark structures are themselves oriented towards an international functionality. A number of venues, from conference centers and sporting arenas to music halls and shopping malls are designed to accommodate events of regional and even international profile. The Palace of Peace and Reconciliation, one of the city's most striking monuments, was conceptualized to house the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions.⁷⁰ The congress has been hosted four times in Astana and has been cast as the Nazarbayev regime's flagship project in international diplomacy. Meanwhile, the pyramid also houses the 1,500-seat opera hall in which TÜRKSOY held the opening and closing festivities for the Astana's tenure as Cultural Capital of the Turkic World. The unveiling of the Khan Shatyr – a six-story shopping mall with an indoor gulf course and water park built in the form of a giant tent – was attended by the heads of state of Russia, Ukraine, Turkey, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Armenia, Abu Dhabi and Jordan on the occasion of Nazarbayev's 70th

⁶⁹ Bissenova dissertation 40

⁷⁰ <http://www.astana-piramida.kz/MenuItems/view/32>

birthday.⁷¹ The Republican Velodrome, the Astana Arena (Football) and the Astana Ice-Skate Center were designed to accommodate an international spectatorship for the occasion of the 7th Winter Asian Games held in 2011.⁷² The spectacle of these monuments is two-fold: first, their physicality creates a spectacular environment decisively separated from the everyday quarters of the city. Secondly, the structures themselves are categorized by the spectacular events which they are meant to house – as such, the Republican Velodrome becomes the symbol of Kazakhstani cycling, while the Palace of Peace and Reconciliation marks Astana’s unique role in the promotion of international peace.

Broadly, the project of Astana aims to monopolize the discourse of national progress across multiple domains. The new highrise apartments in the central districts of the city and the magnificent Khan Shatyr shopping mall purport to facilitate a consumerist lifestyle of international standards. The Palace of Peace and Accord, the newly inaugurated Nazarbayev University and other performing arts and education centers epitomize the highest achievements of Kazakhstani citizens in the domains of arts and culture. Ultramodern sporting facilities locate Kazakhstan on a global map of athleticism. While the sum of Astana’s monuments undoubtedly conveys a sense of achievement and the realization of human and cultural capital, the entire construction project remains profoundly didactic. Citizens are instructed how to interact within the environment of Astana, and more broadly how to live the correct lifestyle; since Nazarbayev’s vision is embodied in the physicality of the city, Astana offers no alternative telos. Independent of the final outcome, the process of constructing Nazarbayev’s vision is precisely the means in which power is enacted: whether or not Astana achieves Nazarbayev’s goal as

⁷¹ “Giant indoor park opened for Kazakh president's birthday,” *The Daily Telegraph* (July 5, 2010), <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/kazakhstan/7873035/Giant-indoor-park-opened-for-Kazakh-presidents-birthday.html>

⁷² Koch, *The City and the Steppe*, p.170

“becoming one of the largest megalopolises of Eurasia,”⁷³ Nazarbayev and his elite cadre of politicians, architects and international collaborators such as Norman Foster and Sembol construction will have made immense profits. In the way that Nazarbayev seeks to monopolize the discourse of development, so does the urban fabric of Astana seek to dominate national symbolism and meaning through a participatory reality.

A Turkic Capital?

While Astana’s bid for international recognition is evident on many levels, the city’s claim to Turkic culture is both more nuanced and less overt. Since national independence, the question of ethnicity has constituted a locus of anxieties over the future of the state. At the heart of the dilemma are two oppositional definitions of Kazakhstani nationalism – one ethnic, the other civic. The Nazarbayev regime has toed the line between the two, verbally maintaining its commitment to a multiethnic state founded on internationalism while in reality implementing measures that favor the titular entitlement of ethnic Kazakhs.⁷⁴

In the years leading up to Kazakhstan’s independence, the republic contained one of the most diverse arrays of ethnicities across the entire Soviet Union. In 1989, ethnic Kazakhs constituted 40% of the population, while Russians represented 38%, Ukrainians 5.5% and Germans 6% of the Kazakh SSR. Following independence, by 1999 the percentage of Kazakhs had risen to 53%, while the Russian population diminished to 30% and the German and Ukrainian contingents decreased by half. By 2009, Kazakhs represented 63% of the republic, while the Russian population continued to sink to 24% and the Ukrainian and German

⁷³ *Ibid*, p.100

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p.55

populations dwindled to a mere 2% and 1% respectively.⁷⁵ While European steadily migrated out of Kazakhstan in years since independence, the much smaller communities of Turkic and Central Asian ethnicities have grown overall. These demographic trends have largely coincided with the so-called Kazakhification of the state, although outmigration of Russians has been a steady factor since 1975.⁷⁶

At the moment of Kazakhstan's independence, the republic's large Russian component nevertheless presented a dilemma: would Kazakhstan retain both Russian and Kazakh as official languages, as during the Soviet period? On one hand, preferential treatment of Kazakh risked alienating the sizeable Russian minority and relations with Russia. Conversely, eighty years of Russification had already done considerable damages to the linguistic integrity of Kazakhstan's titular ethnicity, as many ethnic Kazakhs were raised with no knowledge of the Kazakh language during the Soviet period.⁷⁷ Several arguments came out in support of Kazakh as the sole language of post-independence Kazakhstan: namely that ethnic Kazakhs were entitled to Kazakhstan in the same way that Russians were entitled to Russia and that Kazakhstan must be restored as the primordial homeland of the Kazakhs.⁷⁸ Ironically, these claims merely restaged the Leninist concept of a total correspondence between language, nation and territory, albeit in nativist terms. More realistically, the proposition of two official languages could have led to the possibility of two states, as northern Kazakhstan posed the danger of separatism by virtue of its ethnically Russian majority.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p.45

⁷⁶ Bhavna Davé, *Kazakhstan: Ethnicity, Language and Power* (New York: Routledge, 2007), p.103

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p.75

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p.99

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p.103

The privileged location occupied by Russian in Kazakhstan – both as a language and an ethnic identity – was finally subverted in 1993 by the constitution’s enshrinement of Kazakh as the sole official language alongside the concept of the ‘self-determination of the Kazakh nation.’⁸⁰ Nonetheless, Russian has continued to maintain its status as a *de facto* lingua franca and President Nazarbayev typically delivers his speeches first in Kazakh and then in Russian. The real impact of language reform has been in the realm of government. The official policy that mandates proficiency in Kazakh among government employees effectively discourages Russians from entering civil service. In the context of Nazarbayev’s patrimonial state, isolation from the government often means exclusion from power, hence knowledge of Kazakh privileges a native state structure. The extension of national entitlement to ethnic Kazakhs through the state’s official language is also mirrored in the move to Astana; many Kazakhs nationalists and foreigners alike suspect the real motive behind the capital’s relocation was to effectively “colonize” the Russian north.⁸¹

Nonetheless, the concept of internationalism and ethnic cosmopolitanism has retained its important status in post-independence Kazakhstan. Official discourse surrounding Astana is latent with Nazarbayev’s vision of Kazakhstani “Eurasianism.” As a concept, Eurasianism posits Kazakhstan as a naturally diverse, multi-ethnic (and consequently international) polity, due in part to its geographic centrality within the expansive continent of Eurasia. Eurasianism paints Kazakhstan as a crossroads – a meeting point between many different cultures.⁸² This ideology serves two goals central to overcoming international and national challenges: on one hand, Eurasianism accomodates the state’s active integration within a global capitalist market aimed to

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p.154

⁸¹ Koch, *The City and the Steppe*, p.137

⁸² *Ibid*, p.171

push Kazakhstan towards the center of the global stage; secondly, Eurasianism neutralizes tensions between both Russian and Kazakh, European and Central Asian identities, situating each at home within an ambiguous cultural geography of “Eurasia.” Nazarbayev’s Eurasianism also stresses the civic basis of the state over the ethnic, favoring a *Kazakhstani* identity over a Kazakh one.⁸³

The masking of Kazakh primordialism beneath the veneer of “internationalism” or “Eurasianism” is reflected in a number of Astana’s monuments. These iconic structures bear symbolic reference to Kazakh culture yet remain concealed beneath abstract architectural forms. The Khan Shatyr constitutes an architectural monument of international caliber and a world-class shopping center, while simultaneously bearing reference to the tent culture of Kazakh nomads. A similar allusion to Kazakh nomadism is contained in the Ak Orda, or presidential palace: an interior reception room within the four-story neoclassical structure is styled in the form of a giant yurt.⁸⁴ The Ak Orda itself is a synthesis of globalizing and particularizing styles: contrasting the neoclassical façade, the building’s massive blue dome displays Kazakhstan’s national colors. At the same time, the dome also embodies Nazarbayev’s conception of a national architectural idiom. In Nazarbayev’s words:

“The dome is the reflection of the national feature in architecture. It goes without saying that a shape of a dome resembles the shape of the top of the Kazakh yurt. Thus, while keeping to the traditional we at the same time embrace all that is new and modern. This is the unique feature of this city.”⁸⁵

Nazarbayev’s statement is somewhat striking, not in the least because he suggests that the shape of a dome (as universal an architectural feature as any) should naturally be read as a Kazakh symbol. Though Nazarbayev maintains the dome as a Kazakh symbol because of its likeness to a

⁸³ *Ibid*, p.46

⁸⁴ <http://www.akorda.kz/en/category/akorda>

⁸⁵ Koch, *The City and the Steppe*, p.160

yurt, a more evident analogy might extend to the turquoise dome of the Mausoleum of Ahmad Yasavi, a UNESCO site in southern Kazakhstan. Nazarbayev's concept of a national architectural idiom clearly privileges a traditional, popular and even folkloristic symbolism to communicate Kazakh identity. At the same time, implicit meaning is obscured behind a post-modern aesthetic of abstracted shapes.

A similar juxtaposition of implicitly ethnic symbolism and explicitly 'modern' aesthetic is present in the Bayterek, the city's most iconic architectural symbol. The structure is a 97-meter tall tower, composed of a white shaft topped with a massive golden sphere. Visitors can ride to the top of the tower and take in a panorama of the city from the golden globe of tinted glass. The tower's shaft and the golden sphere represent a poplar (*bayterek* in Kazakh), or the Tree of Life and the egg of the Samruk (pers. Simurgh), a mythical bird of Turco-Persian legend. The structure is conceived to symbolize a new age of the Kazakh nation, growing from the soil of history towards a bright future represented by the egg. In the words of Nazarbayev, "the monument's architecture reflects the seamless integration of the Kazakh peoples' spiritual culture with today's technology."⁸⁶ Formally, the modern design of the Bayterek betrays nothing of its mythical connotations. Nonetheless, the reading of the Bayterek as a symbol of particularly Kazakh Turkic culture exists within Nazarbayev's vision and the local imagination.⁸⁷ Much like the implicit entitlement of ethnic Kazakhs within the governmental structure of post-independence Kazakhstan, the architectural symbolism of Astana masks a tone of cultural primordialism beneath its modern architectural style. Thus, much of Astana's aesthetic communicates a dual orientation, simultaneously embracing a global, contemporary aesthetic

⁸⁶ TÜRKSÖY Magazine vol.13, p. 27

⁸⁷ Short descriptions of the monument's symbolism are ubiquitous on tourist sites such as <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/kazakhstan/northern-kazakhstan/astana/sights/monument/bayterek-monument>

while remaining implicitly rooted in a particular ethno-national context. Past and future are intermeshed in Nazarbayev's ideology of Astana:

“The history of Astana and the Kazakhstani's destiny are inseparable from each other. The capital embodies power, dynamical development and stability of our country. Astana has become a bright, strong, prospering city that unites all Kazakhstanis and aspires to the future. Our capital is the heart of our motherland, the symbol of people's belief in its power and great mission.”⁸⁸

The Staging of Turkic Culture

The designation of Cultural Capital undoubtedly located Astana as a central node within TÜRKSOY's symbolic geography, while also alluding to Astana's ethnic identity. Moreover, TÜRKSOY's nomination revealed Astana and Kazakhstan's location relative to other Turkic polities. As is evident throughout the majority of TÜRKSOY's major events, the activities featured Turkey and Kazakhstan as the two major players. The existence of strong cultural ties between the two countries mirrors an important economic relationship as well. Turkish companies have had a large hand in the physical construction of Astana: the Turkish Sembol Construction stands as one of the two main clients of the Kazakhstani government and has carried out construction of some of the city's iconic monuments, among them the works of Norman Foster. As Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan stated during a diplomatic visit to Kazakhstan in the context of the 2012 capital of Turkic culture:

“There is no doubt about the fact that the declaration of Astana as the capital of the Turkic World 2012 is a source of pride for us all. Turkish companies have also strongly contributed to the development of the city of Astana, which stands for the rapid advancement of Kazakhstan. I personally am proud of this”⁸⁹

Erdogan's statement underscores the notion of fraternity between nations central to TÜRKSOY's mission, but also Turkey's investment in Kazakhstan's nation-building project.

⁸⁸ <http://www.akorda.kz/en/category/astana>

⁸⁹ TÜRKSOY Magazine vol. 39, p. 11

Though the festivities of the yearlong program highlighted the close relationship between Turkey and Kazakhstan, a nod to the “diversity and authenticity” of the Turkic world was made in both the opening and closing ceremonies. Both spectacles featured a huge cast of musicians, dancers and singers from across the Turkic world brought together on the stage of the Palace of Peace and Reconciliation. The opening ceremony contained performances by Kazakh, Turkish, Azeri, Kyrgyz, Volga Tatar, Bashkort, Khakass, Altai, Tuvan, Gagauz, Northern Cypriot and Crimean Tatar artists, spanning the genres of folk and pop music.⁹⁰ At one point in the spectacle, a line of singers in various styles of traditional dress sang the names of various Turkic “tribes,” from Turkmen, Tatars, Uighur to Karakalpak, Uzbek and Kazakhs comprising the vast geography over which Astana stood as capital.⁹¹ While merely symbolic, this performance on stage evidenced TÜRKSOY’s conceptualization of the Turkic world as a fraternity of tribes – some with corresponding nation-states, and some without.

While Astana was designated Culture Capital of the Turkic World, this did not mean an erosion of the national or inter-ethnic divides comprised within TÜRKSOY; rather, the spectacle attested to the diversity and distinctiveness of ethnic nationalities. If Astana’s hypermodern landscape of monuments points forward towards the bright future of Kazakhstan’s development, the city’s designation as Cultural Capital of the Turkic World pointed backwards to an equally glorified, mythical past. Just as Nazarbayev maintains a traditional interpretation of modernity, inscribing a primordial Kazakh mythology onto symbols of national progress such as the Bayterek, Kazakhstan and TÜRKSOY stand by a modern interpretation of tradition by maintaining the ethno-national groupings of Turkic peoples. Paralleling Nazarbayev’s

⁹⁰ “Astana Türk Dünyası’nın Başkenti Muhteşem Açılış” <http://www.turksoy.org.tr/TR/belge/1-98476/2012-astana-turk-dunyasi-kultur-baskenti-yilina-gorkeml-.html?vurgu=astana>

⁹¹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pToJjMsLAX4>

unwavering commitment to the teleology of economic development, Kazakhstan's commitment to a primordial past is similarly portrayed as an irrefutable fact in official discourse.

Conclusion

Although this paper has only been a cursory exploration of TÜRKSOY's truly vast repertoire of cultural events, it has been my intent to highlight the most persuasive cases of what the organization really *does*. Culture does not exist outside of politics, and even TÜRKSOY's proclamation of non-ideology vis-à-vis cultural content and form is in itself a powerful ideology. Most of all, culture can never be beyond the realm of human interactions and sovereignty, because even the most ancient of cultural traditions is given new life and power with each re-instantiation. As TÜRKSOY stages its activities, the meaning of tradition is inevitably reinterpreted and reenacted as it is restaged over and over again, sometimes by new performers and sometimes in front of new audiences.

As Ronald Suny argues in the case of Armenian and Kazakh nationalism, a primordial conception of ethno-nationalism serves to legitimate its very existence: political communion under the rubric of ethnicity constitutes a telos in itself. The insistence on the primordial, ancient foundations of the modern nation-state stand in contrast to its status as a relatively recent phenomenon.⁹² While TÜRKSOY concedes political sovereignty to the paradigm of the ethnically based nation-state, the legitimation of its philosophy still rests in the present-day reiteration of a shared, primordial culture. On a pragmatic level, this notion of ontological likeness at the level of the nation-state is the premise for a special kind of diplomacy. As we

⁹²Ronald Grigor Suny, "Constructing primordialism: Old histories for new nations," *The Journal of Modern History* 73.4 (2001), p. 870.

have seen in the case of Astana, this idea allows for the external validation of the nation-building project. On an ideological level, this implies a kind of spiritual interconnectedness between fraternal nations. The particularities of the shared past provide a counter-balance to the homogenizing global modernity inherent both in Soviet and neoliberal ideologies. Most importantly, the cultural notion of primordialism affirms the status quo. This is evident in the notion of ethnic sovereignty in Kazakhstan and Turkey as Russians and Kurds are excluded from entitlement to the state. Most importantly, the primordialist understanding insists on the tautology of culture being what culture is, and nothing else. In the context of Nazarbayev's regime, this facilitates the state's monopoly on culture and consequently development. More broadly, the understanding of culture as an intrinsic fact removes it from the domain of inquiry and into a didactic, participatory reality.

Bibliography

- Adams, Laura L. "Invention, institutionalization and renewal in Uzbekistan's national culture." *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 2.3 (1999): 355-373.
- Adams, Laura L., and Assel Rustemova. "Mass spectacle and styles of governmentality in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan." *Europe-Asia Studies* 61.7 (2009): 1249-1276.
- Adams, Laura L. "Modernity, postcolonialism, and theatrical form in Uzbekistan." *Slavic Review* (2005): 333-354.
- Adams, Laura. *The spectacular state: culture and national identity in Uzbekistan*. Duke University Press Books, 2010.
- Alexander, Catherine, Victory Buchli and Caroline Humphrey eds. *Urban Life in Post-Soviet Central Asia*. UCL Press, 2006.
- Bal, Idris. *Turkey's Relations with the West and the Turkic Republics: The Rise and Fall of the Turkish Model*. Ashgate, 2000.
- Butler, Judith, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek. *Contingency, hegemony, universality: contemporary dialogues on the left*. Verso Books, 2000.
- Davé, Bhavna. *Kazakhstan: Ethnicity, Language and Power*. New York: Routledge, 2007.
- Davé, Bhavna. "Getting by as a gastarbeiter in Kazakhstan"
<http://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/bhavna-dave/getting-by-as-gastarbeiter-in-kazakhstan>
- Eitzen, Hilda C. "Nawrīz in Kazakstan: scenarios for managing diversity" (pp.73-102) in *Contemporary Kazaks: Cultural and Social Perspectives*, ed. Ingvar Svanberg, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999.
- Hyman, Anthony. "Turkestan and pan-Turkism revisited." *Central Asian Survey* 16.3 (1997): 339-351.
- Koch, Natalie R. *The City and the Steppe: Territory and Technologies of Government* (Dissertation, University of Colorado, 2012) Retrieved from http://www.nataliekoch.com/docs/Koch_2012_Dissertation.pdf

Koch, Natalie. "The monumental and the miniature: imagining 'modernity' in Astana." *Social & Cultural Geography* 11.8 (2010): 769-787.

Koch, Natalie R. 2012. "Urban 'utopias': The Disney stigma and discourses of 'false modernity.'" *Environment and Planning A* 44(10): 2245-2462.

Koch, Natalie R. "Why not a world city? Astana, Ankara and geopolitical scripts in urban networks." *Urban Geography* 34.1 (2013): 109-130.

Laszczkowski, Mateusz. "Building the future: Construction, temporality, and politics in Astana." *Focaal* 2011.60 (2011): 77-92.

Landau, Jacob M. *Pan-Turkism: from irredentism to cooperation*. Indiana University Press, 1995.

Purtas, Firat. "Kültürel Diplomasi ve TÜRKSOY." Accessed May 2, 2013:
<http://mekam.org/mekam/kulturel-diplomasi-ve-turksoy>

Suny, Ronald Grigor. "Constructing primordialism: Old histories for new nations." *The Journal of Modern History* 73.4 (2001): 862-896.

Suny, Ronald Grigor, and Terry Martin, eds. *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin*. Oxford University Press, USA, 2001.

Yalçinkaya, Alaeddin. "The frontiers of Turkestan*." *Central Asian Survey* 16.3 (1997): 431-438.

Yanık, Lerna K. "The Metamorphosis of Metaphors of Vision: "Bridging" Turkey's Location, Role and Identity After the End of the Cold War." *Geopolitics* 14.3 (2009): 531-549.

Yanık, Lerna K. "'Nevruz' or 'Newroz'? deconstructing the 'invention' of a contested tradition in contemporary Turkey." *Middle Eastern Studies* 42.2 (2006): 285-302.