

TOWARD RUSSOPHONE SUPER-LITERATURE:
MAKING SUBJECTIVITIES, SPACES AND TEMPORALITIES IN POST-SOVIET
KAZAKHSTANI RUSSOPHONE WRITING

ОРЫС ТІЛДІ ҮСТЕМ ӘДЕБИЕТТІЛІК: ПОСТСОВЕТТІК ҚАЗАҚСТАНДЫҚ ОРЫС ТІЛДІ
ӘДЕБИЕТТЕГІ КЕҢІСТІК ПЕН МЕРЗІМНІҢ СУБЪЕКТИВТІЛІГІНІҢ ЖАРАТЫЛУЫ

К РУССКОЯЗЫЧНОЙ НАД-ЛИТЕРАТУРЕ: СОЗДАВАЯ СУБЪЕКТИВНОСТИ,
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РУССКОЯЗЫЧНОЙ ЛИТЕРАТУРЕ

by

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Abstract

This thesis is devoted to the analysis of literary works by a number of the leading post-Soviet Russophone Kazakhstani writers: Anuar Duisenbinov, Bakhyt Kairbekov, Diusenbek Nakipov, Nikolai Verëvochkin, Il'ia Odegov and Iurii Serebrianskii. Kazakhstan is a country where Russian literature has been developing quite successfully since the collapse of the USSR. There has been a transformation of writing in Russian in Kazakhstan since the country's independence – with the rise of the new generation of the writers in the 2000s, Russian literature in Kazakhstan transformed into Russophone Kazakhstani literature. In this thesis, I argue for the difference between the younger and older generations of the contemporary Russophone Kazakhstani writers – the latter is focused on post-traumatic sense of loss and absence, while the former is characterized by a more positive identification concentrated on the new national post-independent realities of Kazakhstan. The concept of Russophone super-literature fits most the younger generation of the authors. The main argument of the thesis is that Russophone Kazakhstani literature is a supralinguistic and supracultural realm where complex subjectivities of Russophone Kazakh-ness, “other” Russian-ness and Kazakhstani-ness are produced and expressed. While increasing their community, the younger writers reconsider the imperial and colonial aspects of Russian-ness, incorporate (Russian-Kazakh) bilingualism, keep pace with literary modernity, accumulate their international literary capital and seek for independence from the political and nationalizing agendas of both Kazakhstan and Russia. Despite its growing importance, post-Soviet Russophone Kazakhstani literature is almost unexplored in English-language scholarship. While relying on textual analysis of prose and poetry as well as on in-depth interviews with the Kazakhstani writers, I conclude that now Russophone Kazakhstani literature demonstrates a high degree of vitality, first of all by nurturing new generations of

Russophone writers in the Almaty Open Literary School; however, the bright possible future of the literature should not be overestimated, because of a number of problems such as poor national book market, the lack of audience and the continuing de-Russification of the country.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter 1. Between the Poetics of Space and the Poetics of Power: The Afterlife of Utopia in Nursultan Nazarbayev’s <i>At the Heart of Eurasia</i>	28
Leonid Brezhnev’s Memoirs <i>The Virgin Lands: “The Fate of the Land that was to be Ploughed”</i>	34
Building a New National Capital in Nursultan Nazarbayev’s <i>At the Heart of Eurasia: From the Poetics of the City to the Poetics of Power</i>	39
Chapter 2. Making Russophone Kazakh-ness and “Other” Russian-ness in Contemporary Kazakhstani Literature	50
After Utopia: Traumatic Temporality and Landscapes in Nikolai Verëvochkin’s <i>Man Without a Name</i> and <i>Mammoth Tooth: Chronicles of a Dead City</i>	51
Other Russianness and Russophone Kazakhstani Subjectivity in Il’ia Odegov and Iurii Serebrianskii’s Prose.....	65
Russophone Kazakh-ness in Anuar Duisenbinov, Auezkhan Kodar and Zira Naurzbaeva ...	76
Chapter 3. Identity and Imagination of Kazakh Bodies and Landscapes in Anuar Duisenbinov, Bakhyt Kairbekov, and Diusenbek Nakipov	86
Dancing Body and the Ontology of Imagination in Diusenbek Nakipov’s <i>The Circle of Ashes</i>	89
The Steppe as Primordial Landscape and Body.....	103
Conclusion	117
Bibliography	121

Introduction

“Literature ad marginem”— this is how Pavel Bannikov, one of the informal leaders of the younger generation of contemporary Kazakhstani writers, refers to Russophone Literature in Kazakhstan.¹ This definition plays with hierarchical ideas about the centre and periphery, the superior and inferior. By invoking the sense of being on the edge that refers to stereotypical and imperial geographical imagination this qualification rejects a subordinate view of Central Asian literature as a cultural province of Russian literature. A similar idea that margins matter is expressed in another metaphor for Russophone literature in Kazakhstan, “the Almaty anomaly”, proposed by a Central Asian writer and critic Evgenii Abdullaev.² This locution brings to the foreground the fact that Russophone literary life in Almaty is highly energetic, and in this sense, it is abnormal for the post-Soviet literary landscape outside Russia.³

The metaphor of “literature ad marginem” points to an important feature of post-Soviet Russian literature. The modifier “Russian” is problematic, because it fails to recognize the complexity of literary landscape in the newly independent states. Instead, the term Russophone literature that follows an established pattern of the concepts of Francophone and Anglophone literatures was proposed.⁴ This term, on the one hand, stresses the deep connection between Russian and Russophone literature as written in the same language, and, on the other hand, emphasizes the difference between them.⁵ Naomi Caffee argues that the term Russophonia refers to “the totality of social, linguistic, and geo-political environments in

¹ Pavel Bannikov, “Literature ad marginem,” *Novyi Mir*, no. 12 (2015): 196-203, 196.

² Evgenii Abdullaev, “Almatinskaia anomaliia. O novoi russkoi literature Kazakhstana,” *Novyi Mir*, no. 12 (2015): 188-95, 188.

³ *Ibid.*, 195.

⁴ Naomi Caffee. “Russophonia: Towards a Transnational Conception of Russian-Language Literature.” PhD diss., University of California, 2013.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 28.

which Russian-speaking authors write and live”.⁶ According to her, Russophonia includes “both ethnic Russian and Russian-speaking diasporas outside of the Russian federation, notably in émigré centers of the United States, Israel, Western Europe, Central Asia, and the Caucasus”.⁷ The concept of Russophone literature is rooted in postcolonial methodology, and refers to the fact that literature in Russian can be heterogeneous, and it can express non-Russian-ness while giving voice to the other.⁸ Dirk Uffelmann stresses the cyber-dimension of Russophonia and argues that linguistic identities of Runet users in Kazakhstan are flexible and therefore “the Russophone identity of the Eurasian web community provides no more than a situational linguistic habit”.⁹ This means that Russophone identity can be combined with many other identities.

An important question that arises with regard to Russophone literature is the way it differs from the literature of the Russian diaspora. While Caffee includes literature of diaspora in Russophone writing, I argue that they can have some differences. The main dissimilarity is connected with the writers’ self-identification – whether or not they feel themselves as representatives of a diaspora whose identity is determined by the sense of attachment to the mother country. I argue that it is very difficult to find signs of such diaspora self-consciousness in the works by the writers with Slavic ethnic background analysed in this thesis. On the contrary, the writers tend to embrace their Kazakhstani identity. To illustrate this, in one of his interviews Il’ia Odegov, a winner of Russian Prize, whose works were published in major Russian literary journals, said “Kazakhs are closer and more dear to me than Russians from Russia”.¹⁰ This indicates that Odegov incorporated Kazakh-ness as part of

⁶ Ibid., 20.

⁷ Ibid., 28.

⁸ Ibid., 36.

⁹ Dirk Uffelmann, “Post-Russian Eurasia and the proto-Eurasian usage of the Runet in Kazakhstan: A plea for a cyberlinguistic turn in area studies,” *Journal of Eurasian Studies* no. 2 (2011): 172–83.

¹⁰ “Kazakhi mne blizhe i rodnee, chem rossiiskie russkie: Interv’iu s Il’ei Odegovym,” Sandzhar Ianyshiev, *fergananews.com*, November 20, 2016, <http://www.fergananews.com/article.php?id=9167>

his subjectivity and identity. The recent book by another Russian Prize winner Iurii Serebrianskii *Kazakhstani Fairy Tales* demonstrates the author's fascination with the country's landscapes as his native environment and shows that he does not perceive himself as a representative of diaspora.¹¹ By proposing his "Kazakhstani folklore" Serebrianskii constructs his version of what can be called Kazakhstani super-ethnic national and literary imaginary. This makes clear that the community of Kazakhstani Russophone writers is diverse. It demonstrates a complex postcolonial situation that strongly affects the ethnic group associated with metropolia – there are not only Kazakhs writing in Russian and not identifying themselves as Russians, but there are also ethnic Russians (or Slavs) writing in Russian and identifying themselves as other Russians. This makes the situation of Russophone literature in Kazakhstan more complex than that of literature of diaspora.

In the history of Russian culture, the most vivid example of diaspora literature was "White émigré" writing which took place in a situation different from the contemporary political and cultural circumstances.¹² This literature (at least its first wave) was written by those who immigrated from Russia and probably tried to preserve Russian culture that from their point of view was being destroyed in the USSR. This intention to keep, rather than to change makes the literature of diaspora different from Russophone literature that rather seeks to express non-Russian-ness in Russian.

The importance and specificity of Russophone literature that appreciates the diversity of the Russian-speaking world is increasingly recognized in Russia. This is evident from the fact that both metaphors of "literature ad marginem" and "Almaty anomaly" come from an iconic Russian/Soviet journal *Novyi Mir* – from a special issue completely dedicated to contemporary Kazakhstani literature. In the same December 2015, another significant Russian

¹¹ Iurii Serebrianskii, *Kazakhstanskii skazki* (Almaty: Aruna, 2017).

¹² Margaret Meklin, "Many Countries, One Language: Literature of the Russian Diaspora," *Toronto Slavic Quarterly*, Accessed April 30, 2017, <http://sites.utoronto.ca/tsq/11/meklin11.shtml>

thick literary journal, *Neva*, also devoted an issue to the literary works by contemporary Kazakhstani writers.¹³ These two issues are not isolated. They are evidence of the growing recognition of Kazakhstani writers' creative merit. They rather indicate a trend towards the increasing importance of Russophone Literature that is more and more recognized by the literary establishment in Moscow and St Petersburg. As a clear sign of this importance, the Russian literary awards also look carefully at contemporary Kazakhstani literature, which is especially true about Russian Prize – one of the top five Russian literary awards that is focused on writings by authors living outside Russia.¹⁴ Since the prize was established in 2005 Kazakhstani writers have received it seven times.¹⁵ Russian literary journal *Druzhba Narodov* specializing in Russian literature outside Russia also looks closely at Kazakhstani authors – their works are published in this journal regularly.¹⁶ Such an interest in the Russophone literature exhibited by the well-known Russian journals and the literary awards speaks to an important change: Kazakhstani writers are no longer on a literary periphery; they are now in a new developing centre of Russophone literature which by definition can have many centres. As Edith Clowes argues, space and spatial metaphors became intrinsic to contemporary Russian consciousness preoccupied with “imagined geographies” with periphery being the most important of them.¹⁷ Kevin Platt accentuated the significance of this spatial notion by showing that within Russophone world a center can be located on periphery, for example, Latvian Russians consider themselves as representatives of high Russian culture

¹³ *Neva*, no. 12 (2015).

¹⁴ ““Russkaia Premiia” ob’iavila imena laureatov konkursa po itogam 2016 goda”, *Russkaia Premiia*, April, 21, 2017, <http://russpremia.ru/>

¹⁵ “Kazakhstanskii pisatel’ Mikhail Zemskov vnov’ stal laureatom “Russkoi Premii””, *Radiotochka.kz*, April, 22, 2017, <https://radiotochka.kz/31975-kazahstanskiy-pisatel-mihail-zemskov-vnov-stal-laureatom-russkoy-premii.html>

¹⁶ Nezavisimyi literaturno-khudozhestvennyi i obshchestvenno-politicheskii zhurnal *Druzhba Narodov*, <http://xn--80aabgdk2dkbof7a.com/>

¹⁷ Edith Clowes, *Russia on the Edge. Imagined Geographies and Post-Soviet Identity* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2011), 4.

that one probably cannot find in Russia. Platt calls this situation the “center on periphery”.¹⁸ Clowes explains how such “imagined geographies” work in literature – contemporary Russian writers reconsider their identities and formulate their self by creating “fictional spaces of self and other”.¹⁹ Russophone writers in Kazakhstan create their own spatial metaphors and geographies to express their Kazakhstani or global identities, and by that they contribute to decentralization of Russophone world. The reconsideration of the notion of the center and periphery impacts the writers’ self-consciousness and identification. I realized the importance of this reconsideration during my interviews with some of the Kazakhstani authors who said that they feel quite independent of what is going in Moscow both politically and aesthetically, and they believe that the Russian capital is no longer the only centre of Russian culture.

However, the idea of marginality that is embedded in Bannikov’s metaphor of “literature ad marginem” in fact refers not only to external imperial spatial imagination, but to the internal state of affairs in Kazakhstan as well – the Russophone writers are on margins in their own society. In the interviews, while emphasizing their own trajectory, situation, and dignity, my interlocutors stressed the sense of marginality, alienation and uncertainty that is present in Bannikov’s metaphor.

These feelings are largely caused by the social and cultural situation within Kazakhstan with its split linguistic environment: although Russophone literature can be used to express Kazakh-ness, it is still written in Russian, and therefore can be considered as an obstacle in the way of nation-building and the development of national culture. The state language of Kazakhstan is Kazakh. At the same time, Russian is still actively used in the public domain, especially in the cities and in the North and the East of the country. According

¹⁸ Kevin Platt, “Gegemonia bez gosподstva / Diaspora bez emigratsii: Russkaia kul’tura v Latvii,” *Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie* 127 (2014): 195-215, 210-211.

¹⁹ Clowes, *Russia on the Edge*, 4.

to last 2009 census, 88, 2% of Kazakhstani population fluently read in Russian.²⁰ There is some tendency for Russian to lose its importance. At the same time, there are reasons to assume that Russian can have its own niche (for example, as a tool of interaction between different ethnic groups, in mass media and higher education) that it can keep regardless of the growing use of Kazakh.²¹ As Alexander Morrison point out, “it is clear that proficiency in the Kazakh language has increased significantly in the last 20 years, but it has not come at the expense of Russian”.²² One can assume that on the one hand, shrinking of Russian-language public domain can potentially damage Russophone literature, but, on the other hand, many Kazakh speakers can still be potentially interested in reading and writing Russophone literary works due to wide-spread bilingualism among Kazakhs. The continuing demand for books in Russian can be illustrated by the fact that in 2016 34,9% of all books published in Kazakhstan were in Russian and 48,3% in Kazakh.²³ However, what poses a problem is little connection between Russophone and Kazakh literatures and media in the country. The two linguistic domains sometimes seem to inhabit parallel worlds. In this regard, it should be noted that some Russophone writers with Kazakh ethnic background (Anuar Duisenbinov and Diusenbek Nakipov) try to bridge this gap by translations and incorporation of Kazakh into their texts in Russian.

The official language policy in the country has an inherent problem of uncertainty about what nation – Kazakh or Kazakhstani – it is supposed to build, and this ambiguity affects the government’s approach to publishing and support for writers: as a result, contemporary Russophone literature in Kazakhstan is almost completely ignored by the

²⁰“Itogi Natsional’noi perepisi naseleniia Respubliki Kazakhstan 2009 goda”. Analiticheskii otchët. Astana (2011), 23.

²¹ William Fierman, “Russian in Post-Soviet Central Asia: A Comparison with the States of the Baltic and South Caucasus,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 64, no. 6 (2012): 1077–1100, 1097.

²² Alexander Morrison, “Russian Beyond Russia,” *EurasiaNet*, April 20, 2017, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/83296>

²³ Adi Turkaev, “Izdatel’skii biznes na grani vyzhyvaniia,” *kursiv.kz*, April 5, 2017, <https://www.kursiv.kz/news/kompanii1/odnoj-iz-glavnyh-pricin-padenia-proizvodstva-izdateli-nazyvaut-ekspansiu-elektronnyh-knig-i-internet-magazinov/>

state.²⁴ In 2004-2011, Kazakhstani authorities implemented an important program *Madeni Mura* designed to compensate for the lack of translations of world literature in Kazakh and to publish many important text of Kazakh cultural heritage (over the years of the program, 537 titles of books on the history, archeology, ethnography and culture of Kazakhstan were published in more than 1.5 million copies in Kazakh).²⁵ As it is contended in *The Concept of Cultural Policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan*, “it is necessary to focus attention on the further development of Kazakh literature”.²⁶ The priority of the state cultural policy is “the publication of socially significant literature”.²⁷ The government funds this kind of literature,²⁸ although in no available official document is it clearly defined what “socially significant literature” is. In 2013, to implement the Republican budget program titled “Publication of socially important literature” 7 367 000 USD was spent which is not little for Kazakhstan. 359 books were published, with 58.5% being fiction, mainly Kazakh literary heritage.²⁹ It is also unclear what are the criteria for awarding the President’s and State Stipends to writers as well as State Prize of the Republic of Kazakhstan in the field of literature and art.³⁰ While commenting on the situation with the stipends and prize, Aigerim Tazhi, a poet well-known among the younger generation of Kazakhstani writers, said about those who were awarded the stipends and prize: “I do not see contemporary authors whose works are visible, who receive prestigious international prizes and whose works are published in well-known foreign

²⁴ “Literaturnyi samotek,” *Esquire Kazakhstan*, April 9, 2015, http://esquire.kz/1974-literaturniy_samotek

²⁵ Izdanie knig v ramkakh gosudarstvennoi programmy «Kul'turnoe nasledie», *madenimura.kz*, accessed May 2, 2017, <http://www.madenimura.kz/ru/culture-legacy/books/>

²⁶ O Kontseptsii kul'turnoi politiki Respubliki Kazakhstan, *tengrinews.kz*, accessed May 2, 2017, https://tengrinews.kz/zakon/prezident_respubliki_kazahstan/kultupa/id-U1400000939/

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Kuatphan Ualiev, Almaz Seidumanov, Zhanat Seidumanov, “Gosudarstvennaia politika v oblasti izdatel'skogo dela i normativno-zakonodatel'naia baza knizhnogo dela v Kazakhstane,” *Visnik Knizhkovoi palati* 6 (2016): 47-49.

²⁹ “Knizhnoe delo v Kazakhstane: igroki i potrebiteli,” *kursiv.kz*, April 14, 2014, https://www.kursiv.kz/news/retail/knizhnoe_delo_v_kazahstane_igroki_i_potrebiteli/

³⁰ “O Gosudarstvennoi stipendii vidnym deiateliam literatury i iskusstva Kazakhstana,” *tengrinews.kz*, accessed May 2, 2017, https://tengrinews.kz/zakon/pravitelstvo_respubliki_kazahstan_premier_ministr_rk/kultupa/id-P000000812/

journals”.³¹ Tazhi’s comment shows her perception (and probably of some other young writers) that the government does not tend to support young writers.

At the same time, one could argue that the main problem hindering the development of Kazakhstani Russophone literature is not the lack of state support, but severely underdeveloped publishing and book market in the country. As both publishers and writers acknowledge, it is unprofitable to publish a book by a Kazakhstani author, because the book can be sold at cost price at best.³² There are only rare exceptions, with Iurii Serebrianskii’s *Destination. Road Pastoral* (published in 2010) being one of them. One of the main reasons for the weak publishing and book market is difficult competition with Russian publishers.³³ Kazakhstani publishing houses (usually with the governmental support) satisfy the national needs for different kinds of learning materials, textbooks and classic Kazakh literature, while Russian and world literature segments are mainly filled by Russian publishers.³⁴ This is one of the reasons why many young Kazakhstani authors try to publish their works abroad, predominantly in Russian literary journals and publishers. Bookstores are also reluctant to sell book by local authors, because of little audience for this literature and due to the sellers’ ignorance in contemporary literature. In addition, many readers have a biased view of Kazakhstani literature as inferior to Russian and foreign ones.³⁵ This forces Kazakhstani writers to publish their works either on their own expense or relying on sponsors’ funds. For years in Kazakhstan there was no fiction book by a contemporary author published at the expense of a publishing house.³⁶

³¹ Liubov’ Koretskaia, “Pochemu kazakhstanskim avtoram legche probit’sia v SSHA i Rossii, chem doma,” *informburo.kz*, April 23, 2017, <https://informburo.kz/stati/pochemu-talantlivym-kazahstanskim-avtoram-legche-probitsya-v-ssha-i-rossii-chem-doma-.html>

³² Mariiam Munbaeva, “V Kazakhstane izdateli pobaivaiutsia novykh avtorov, a pisateli ne veriat izdateliam,” *zakon.kz*, April 30, 2013, <https://www.zakon.kz/4554534-v-kazakhstane-izdateli-pobaivajutsja.html>

³³ Turkaev, “Izdatel’skii biznes na grani vyzhyvaniia”. <https://www.kursiv.kz/news/kompanii/odnoj-iz-glavnyh-pricin-padenia-proizvodstva-izdateli-nazyvaut-ekspansiu-elektronnyh-knig-i-internet-magazinov/>

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Munbaeva, “V Kazakhstane izdateli pobaivaiutsia...”

³⁶ Ibid.

All these circumstances again speak to marginality of Kazakhstani Russophone authors.³⁷ At the same time, this crisis of literature as a social and cultural institution and “the compartmentalization of the literary field” is present not only in Kazakhstan.³⁸ According to Evgeny Dobrenko and Mark Lipovetskii, it characterizes the larger context of post-Soviet Russian literature.³⁹ The turbulence of post-Soviet history determined the current situation of Russian and Russophone literature. This historical background is important to fully understand the condition of contemporary Russophone Kazakhstani literature.

The trajectory of Kazakhstan’s becoming a center of Russophone literature was largely determined by the post-Soviet states’ nation-building policies in and their relations with Russian Federation. After the collapse of the USSR, Tashkent could have been called the center of Russian literature in Central Asia, but Uzbekistan under President Islam Karimov adopted a more exclusivist national and linguistic policy than Kazakhstan under President Nursultan Nazarbayev.⁴⁰ According to Evgenii Abdullaev, Tashkent and Uzbekistan in general used to have lively Russophone literary life in the 90s and 2000s, but subsequently those who made this surge possible left the country.⁴¹ However, the Russian language still plays a significant role in everyday life in Uzbekistan, especially in Tashkent – even after the majority of Russians immigrated. Abdullaev (who himself is one of the key representatives of Uzbekistani Russophone literature, and a highly successful writer and critic who regularly publishes his works in major Russian literary journals; as a fiction writer he writes under a pseudonym Sukhbat Aflatuni⁴²) asserts that now there are two major centres of Russian

³⁷ “Kazakhstanskii poet kak vechnyi marginal: Interv’iu s Pavlom Bannikovym,” Svetlana Romashkina, *vlast.kz*, September 18, 2015, <https://vlast.kz/writers/13106-pavel-bannikov-poet-kazahstanskij-poet-kak-vecnyj-marginal.html>

³⁸ Evgeny Dobrenko and Mark Lipovetskii, “The Burden of Freedom: Russian Literature after Communism”, in *Russian Literature since 1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 1-19.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Evgenii Abdullaev, “Russkii iazyk: zhizn’ posle smerti. Iazyk, politika i obshchestvo v sovremennom Uzbekistane,” *Neprikosnovennyi zapaz*, 4 (66), 2009, <http://magazines.russ.ru/nz/2009/4/ab21.html>

⁴¹ “Byt’ russkim literatorom v Srednei Azii: Interv’iu s Evgeniem Abdullaevym,” Mikhail Nemtsev, *Gefter*, December 23, 2015, <http://gefter.ru/archive/17057>

⁴² Sukhbat Aflatuni, <http://magazines.russ.ru/authors/a/aflatuni>

literature on the post-Soviet space – the first one is Ukraine and the second one is Kazakhstan.⁴³ Abdullaev points out to fact that Kazakhstani literature has developed and changed over the last decade – in mid-2000s Kazakhstani writers mainly ignored local context and tended to imitate literary life in Moscow, but now their writing demonstrates more connection with the country’s environment.⁴⁴ Abdullaev highlights that what differentiates Kazakhstan from other centres of Russian literature outside Russia, for example, from Latvia, is the fact that in Kazakhstan there are young authors which gives some hope for the future of Russophone literature in the country.⁴⁵

While arguing for Kazakhstan as one of the centres of literature in Russian, one should be more specific and acknowledge that this status ought to be given to a particular city in Kazakhstan – to Almaty. As the capital of Soviet Kazakhstan, Almaty had been the centre of cultural life of the republic for decades. As Alima Bissenova demonstrates, from its founding in the middle of the 19th century Almaty was designed as a proper European or Russian city.⁴⁶ “The perception of Almaty as a ‘Russian fortress’, in which Kazakhs were permitted to live albeit on ‘Russian’ terms, continued through Soviet times despite Almaty’s designation as capital of the Kazakh Soviet Republic”.⁴⁷ This situation meant that literary life in the city was dominated by Russian language and Russian literature. At the same time, there was some degree of independence from Moscow: the Writer’s Union of Kazakhstan (established in 1925) was located in the city, and its members enjoyed relative freedom from ideological pressure (particularly in the 1960s).⁴⁸ In this regard, it should be noted that despite the social and generational break caused by the collapse of the Soviet Union, the younger generation of

⁴³ “Byt’ russkim literatorom v Srednei Azii”

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Alima Bissenova, “The Fortress and the Frontier: Mobility, Culture, and Class in Almaty and Astana,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 69, no. 4 (2017): 643.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 651.

⁴⁸ Diana Kudaibergenova, “Imagining community” in Soviet Kazakhstan. An historical analysis of narrative on nationalism in Kazakh-Soviet literature,” *Nationalities Papers* 41, no. 5 (2013): 843, doi: 10.1080/00905992.2013.775115

contemporary Russophone writers (who mainly live in Almaty) did not appear in vacuum. In the republic, Russophone writing was an important phenomenon already in late Soviet time with some well-known authors of Kazakh ethnic background writing in Russian such as Olzhas Suleimenov, Bakhytzhan Kanap'ianov, Anuar Alimzhanov.⁴⁹ There also were significant number of recognized writers of non-Kazakh ethnic background – Herold Belger, Moris Simashko, Ivan Shchegolikhin.⁵⁰ Much attention was paid to good quality translation of works by major Kazakh writers such as Mukhtar Auezov, Oralkhan Bokeev, Sabit Mukanov, Saken Seifullin, Il'ias Yessenberlin.⁵¹ This means that in general literary life in Almaty was quite energetic in Soviet time.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, literary traditions and institutions in its former republics were shattered. In Kazakhstan the Writers Union continued to exist.⁵² However, being deprived of state support, it became a rather symbolic organization that is located in a building in the center of Almaty recognized as an architectural heritage. From time to time the effectiveness of the institution and its current leadership is questioned not only by external critics, but also by the Union members.⁵³ Some of younger writers are also highly critical about the institution.⁵⁴ In the 90s, due to radical social and cultural changes the Union's monopoly over national literature was challenged by new independent literary communities. This was a difficult period for Kazakhstani literature when no major literary works by Russophone writers were published. One of the new communities was a group of writers

⁴⁹ Raikhan Tuksaitova, "Bilingvisticheskaia situatsia v sovremennom Kazakhstane," *Russkii iazyk za rubezhom* 1 (2007): 100.

⁵⁰ Baian Dzholdasbekova, "O russkoiazychnykh pisateliakh Kazakhstana," *group-global.org*, December 12, 2016, <http://group-global.org/ru/publication/40684-o-russkoyazychnyh-pisatelyah-kazahstana>

⁵¹ Ol'ga Malysheva, "Kazakhstan-Rossia: literaturnye sviazi," *Neva* 9 (2015), <http://magazines.russ.ru/neva/2015/9/14ast.html>

See also Pavel Sirkes, "Skvoz' vremia: Nurpeisov i Kazakov," *Zarubezhnye Zadvorki*, accessed July 11, 2017, <http://old.za-za.net/old-index.php?menu=authors&&country=ger&&author=sirkes&&werk=020>

⁵² "Prezident pozdravil Soiuz Pisatelei Kazakhstana s 80-letiem," *National Digital History of Kazakhstan*, November 03, 2014, <http://e-history.kz/ru/publications/view/791>

⁵³ Gul'mira Kamziyeva, "Zachem Kazakhstanu dva Soiuz pisatelei?" *radiotochka.kz*, July 16, 2015, <https://radiotochka.kz/12971-zachem-kazahstanu-dva-soyuza-pisateley.html>

⁵⁴ "Molodoi poet i 'naftalin' Soiuz pisatelei: Interv'iu s Pavlom Bannikovym," Alma Kenzhebekova, *azattyq.org*, August 9, 2014, <http://rus.azattyq.org/a/interview-poet-pavel-bannikov/25479933.html>

cooperating with *Musaget* fund and publishing house (and journal *Apollinarij*, 1993-2009)⁵⁵ and the other was a community associated with *Iskander* publishing house (and journal *Knigoliub*, 2001-2014).⁵⁶ After the fund *Musaget* ceased to exist in 2008, Almaty Open Literary School was opened in 2009 by the former members of *Musaget* fund.⁵⁷ Within 10-15 post-independent years a gap between the older and younger generations of writers appeared, and if the former was formed within the Soviet context with its established literary institutions and canon, the latter “brought up itself”.⁵⁸ However, already in the early 2000s the work of the independent communities resulted in some publications in Russian high quality literary journals and in the series “Contemporary Kazakhstani Novel” (2001-2003, sponsored by Fund Soros Kazakhstan).⁵⁹ As the generalization of these difficult years, one of the writers referred to the whole post-Soviet time as a period of alienation: “Alienation from the reader, from the publisher, alienation of the generations from each other, and the alienation of the authors of the national literary traditions”.⁶⁰ This multifaceted estrangement meant that not only writers struggled to find their place and identity – the reader (and the publisher) was in no less uncertain position.⁶¹ Still Kazakhstani Russophone literature is in the search of its reader.⁶² Some writers – those connected with Almaty Open Literary School – try to nurture their audience. The school apart from educating its students in creative writing and literary criticism regularly holds public events (for example, literary festivals *Polifoniia* and *Sozyv*)

⁵⁵ Meklin, “Many Countries, One Language...”.

⁵⁶ Pavel Bannikov, “Preodolenie otchuzhdeniia,” *Literratura*, December 21, 2014, <http://litteratura.org/criticism/757-pavel-bannikov-preodolenie-otchuzhdeniya.html>

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Vera Savel’eva, “Pokolenie, vospitavshee sebia samo,” *Prostor*, no. 12 (2016): 163-70, 163.

⁵⁹ Abdullaev, “Almatinskaia anomaliiia”, 189.

⁶⁰ Bannikov, “Preodolenie otchuzhdeniia”.

⁶¹ “Kazakhstanskii poet kak vechnyi marginal: Interv’iu s Pavlom Bannikovym,” Svetlana Romashkina, *vlast.kz*, September 18, 2015, <https://vlast.kz/writers/13106-pavel-bannikov-poet-kazahstanskij-poet-kak-vecnyj-marginal.html>

⁶² Abdullaev, “Almatinskaia anomaliiia”, 189.

and organizes promotional actions in the social media such as *Read the Kazakhstani (Chitai Kazakhstanskoe, 2016)*.⁶³

In this thesis, I emphasize the difference between the younger and older generations of the contemporary Russophone Kazakhstani writers and argue that the post-traumatic sense of loss and absence is more typical of the latter that has more negative sort of identification focused on the trauma, while the former is characterized by more positive identification concentrated on the new national post-independent realities of Kazakhstan. This means that the writers who formed the independent literary communities write about post-independent identities and realities – Kazakhstani or/and cosmopolitan – rather than regret the previous ones. I consider as younger writers those Kazakhstani authors who are now under 45 (they have no or little Soviet experience), and I take as older writers those who are now more than 60 (they grown and were educated in the Soviet Union). The gap between them is about 15-20 years. There are some exceptional cases such as Diusenbek Nakipov who in terms of his age belongs to the older generation (he was born in 1946), but in terms of his poetics and literary contacts he can be associated with the younger generation. This gap between the older and younger generations of the Kazakhstani writers can be clearly seen from how representatives of these generations answered to several questions regarding the contemporary literary situation in Kazakhstan asked by the editorial board of *Neva* journal.⁶⁴ The first question was “What names define the literary landscape of Kazakhstan today?”⁶⁵ It is peculiar that the three representatives of the younger generation (Mikhail Zemskov, Iurii Serebrianskii and Il’ia Odegov – all associated with Almaty Open Literary School; Zemskov is the director of the school) and the two figures from the older generation (Svetlana Anan’ieva, a literary scholar and critic, and Valerii Mikhailov, a poet and an editor-in-chief of *Prostor* journal –

⁶³ Anna Darmodekhina, “Proekt “Chitai Kazakhstanskoe” opredelil luchshikh retsenzentov,” *artparovoz.com*, December 9, 2016, <http://www.artparovoz.com/11001>

⁶⁴ “Astana-Sankt-Peterburg. Dialogi kul’tur,” *Neva*, no. 12 (2015), 58, 141, 166, 222, 232.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 58, 141, 166, 222, 232.

the official Russian-language outlet of the Writers Union of Kazakhstan) listed completely different names.⁶⁶ The former group named younger writers and the latter group referred to authors from the older generation.⁶⁷ This discrepancy demonstrates how deep the gap between the two generations is. In the questionnaire, there also was a question about the “specific features” of “young literature” in Kazakhstan. In the questionnaire, Zemskov shared his overall vision of what the younger generation of the writers does. He pointed out to the diversity and cosmopolitanism which is the result of the “break with the traditions of Soviet and Russian literature after the collapse of the Soviet Union”.⁶⁸ He emphasised that world literature is as important for the writers as Russian Literature is.⁶⁹ Anan’eva mentioned experimental styles, intellectualism and mixed genres of “young literature”, but did not refer to any particular name. Mikhailov expressed some irony by saying that ““young literature” is perhaps relatively young, but it is not very much literature”.⁷⁰ He referred to writings by many young authors as “texts” rather than works.⁷¹ In my view, by stressing the word “texts” Mikhailov associated the writings by the young authors with postmodernist approach to literature, with the very word “text” being highly important in poststructuralist theory. Mikhailov sees the tendency for mimicry and construction, production of literary texts in the young writers who, according to him, follow fashion.⁷² At the same time, he does not value originality much, and for him “tradition” is more important. I agree that Mikhailov’s points are crucial to understanding the difference between the two generations of writers – the older generation is preoccupied with tradition and canon, while the younger generation looks for sources of inspiration in different traditions, genres and styles.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 59.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 233.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

Relying on Pascale Casanova's concept of literary time and literary modernity that she introduced in her book *The World Republic of Letters*,⁷³ I argue that the difference between the two generations attests to the fact that there are two different models of literary time or two (at least) different literary temporalities in Kazakhstan. According to Casanova, literary modernity is the key organizing principle of the world literary space.⁷⁴ It is the true centre of the space.⁷⁵ "The continually redefined present of literary life constitutes a universal artistic clock by which writers must regulate their work if they wish to attain legitimacy."⁷⁶ The main preoccupation of the younger Kazakhstani writers is to be modern, or, as they often put it, "to be actual", new.⁷⁷ This is the main criterion by which they evaluate contemporary literary phenomena. According to Pavel Bannikov, the Writer's Union and the majority of its members do not meet this criterion.⁷⁸ For this reason, they are considered as anachronistic by the younger writers.⁷⁹ In the questionnaire, while Zemskov stresses the productivity of the break with the past and the tradition, Mikhailov emphasizes the importance of continuity and praises the position of being within the literary tradition. This reveals the younger writers' sensitivity to global time centred on the present and the future and the older writers' desire to keep pace with literary and cultural tradition understood as associated with the national glorious past. I argue that this desire to be modern is directly connected with the younger writers' challenging their position of being on margins or on a periphery of Russian literature. The writers overcome their alleged peripheral position by struggling for literary modernity. To use another Casanova's concept of the literary capital that symbolizes modernity

⁷³ Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ At a first meeting of literary club *Literaturnoe sobytie* held 18 May, 2017 in Astana a poet Kanat Omar presented contemporary Russophone Kazakhstani poetry by talking about a number of poets whom he considers to be "modern" and "actual" (Anuar Duisenbinov, Pavel Bannikov, Ivan Beketov, Ivan Poltoratskii, and Iurii Serebrianskii)

⁷⁸ "Molodoi poet i 'naftalin' Soiuzna pisatelei".

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

(according to her, this is Paris),⁸⁰ the writers aspire to enter the world literary space by synchronizing themselves with the present, modernity that is embodied in such literary capitals as Moscow, New York and Paris. This generational gap affects the writers' attitude to the concepts of Eurasianism and postcoloniality – the representatives of the older generation of the Russophone writers often refer to Eurasianism (in my assumption, for them it may symbolize the continuity of historical and literary time and of identity, because the Eurasian identity can be seen as the continuation of big Soviet identity) and are silent about postcoloniality. While answering to the *Neva* journal's questionnaire, the younger writers (all the three) dismissed the idea of Eurasianism completely, whereas the older literary figures praised it.⁸¹ Eurasianism and postcoloniality are the two main discourses that are available to the writers to make sense of their position of writing in Russian outside Russia. The two discourses are rather competing, because the former tends to present Kazakhstan as a colonized country that was damaged by Russian/Soviet rule, and presupposes the possibility of decolonization that can involve the rejection of Russian language.⁸² At the same time, the Eurasianist view of Kazakhstan presents the country as rather a part of a bigger supranational unity called Eurasia.⁸³ However, the real situation is much more complicated because, first, the discourses are simultaneously employed by the Kazakhstani authorities, and, second, as Marlene Laruelle shows, there are different kinds of Eurasianism – Russian, non-Russian, political, cultural, etc.⁸⁴ In Kazakhstan, the idea of supranational Eurasia has been advocated for decades (at least since publication of Olzhas Suleimenov's *AZ i IA* in 1975) within the literary tradition of neo-Eurasianism introduced by a famous Kazakh poet and intellectual

⁸⁰ Casanova, *The World Republic*, 23-24.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 58, 141, 166, 222, 232.

⁸² See Diana T. Kudaibergenova, "The Use and Abuse of Postcolonial Discourses in Post-independent Kazakhstan," *Europe-Asia Studies* 68, no. 5 (2016): 917-935, DOI: 10.1080/09668136.2016.1194967

⁸³ Marlene Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism. An Ideology of Empire* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 176.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 10-12.

Olzas Suleimenov.⁸⁵ He and supporters such as Murat Auezov and Diusenbek Nakipov (all from the older generation of Russophone writers and intellectuals) consider Eurasianism as a kind of cosmopolitanism, and they see Slavic-Turkic long historical interactions as a model of intercultural dialog and even mutual enrichment. “Many Kazakhstani texts on Eurasia diverge from the classical definition of the concept as given by the interwar Eurasianists, turning it into a form of universality”.⁸⁶ From this perspective, Eurasianism is not excluding, but inclusive, and potentially it is not tied only to post-Soviet space.⁸⁷ For these Kazakhstani intellectuals Eurasia and Eurasianism is rather a type of cosmopolitanism that is probably associated with the Russian language.

In this thesis, I argue that Suleimenov laid the foundations of Russophone Kazakhstani super-literature, but this type of writing could not be fully developed during the Soviet era for a number of reasons, and first of all because it undermined Soviet political and cultural hierarchy where Russian (or Slavic) language and culture was privileged as a kind of model for other national cultures, including Turkic ones. According to Harsha Ram, Suleimenov’s *AZ i IA* can be read as not a scientific book, but as a “cultural manifesto that deliberately blurs the distinction between poetry, historiography, and linguistics”.⁸⁸ I argue that this type of writing is the precursor of Kazakhstani Russophone super-literature, because it is synthetic and transcending boundaries (of different languages, literatures and cultures, arts, genres and styles, of the past and the present). The epistemological peculiarity of the super-literature is the role of imagination within it. Ram considers *AZ i IA* within the context of Velimir

⁸⁵ Ibid., 172; Harsha Ram, “Imagining Eurasia: The Poetics and Ideology of Olzas Suleimenov’s *AZ i IA*,” *Slavic Review* 60, no. 2 (2001): 289-311. See also “Glavnoi ego mishen’iu byl evropotsentrism: Interv’iu s Madinoi Tlostanovoi,” Afanasii Mamedov, *morebo.ru*, August 31, 2012, <http://morebo.ru/tema/segodnja/item/1346433186554>

⁸⁶ Ibid., 176.

⁸⁷ According to Victor Shnirelman, “Russian ideologists have lost the monopoly over Eurasianism. The Eurasian constructs and rhetoric are extensively and beneficially used by some non-Russian native intellectuals and politicians for the construction of a new ethno-political reality”. Victor Shnirelman, “To Make a Bridge: Eurasian Discourse in the Post-Soviet World,” *Anthropology of East Europe Review* 27, no. 2 (2009): 68.

⁸⁸ Ram, “Imagining Eurasia,” 289.

Khlebnikov and Nikolai Marr’s “speculative imagination” that sought “to rethink the relationship between the center and southern peripheries of the Russian Empire”.⁸⁹ Following Ram, I think that similarly to these two figures, in *AZ i IA* Suleimenov first of all imagines Eurasia (his studies of the history of Slavic and Turkic languages are as if subordinated to imagination; he imagines Eurasia by presenting it as shared space of Slavic and Turkic peoples) in his rather poetic interpretations of the history of the Russian language in *The Song of Igor’s Campaign*.⁹⁰ Although *AZ i IA* was presented and largely received as a scientific book, Suleimenov approached the issue of the history of language as a poet.⁹¹ To provide the context for such type of thinking, one can argue that from the very start Eurasianism was mixture of study and imagination even in such figures as Lev Gumilëv. Many Eurasianists saw concrete historical and linguistic facts within the framework of some cultural and historical vision of Russia’s destiny to be the core of Eurasia.⁹² I argue that Diusenbek Nakipov in *The Circle of Ashes* follows and creatively develops many features of Suleimenov’s writing. The most significant and obvious of these similarities is the search for the origin of language (language in general, and Russian and Kazakh language in particular). Both Suleimenov and Nakipov are interested in some kind of “palaeontology” of Slavic and Turkic languages.⁹³ If Suleimenov imagines the past of medieval Russian language by depicting the history of *The Song of Igor’s Campaign* as a dramatical piece in four acts,⁹⁴ Nakipov plots a mythic storyline about the tribe of samions who framed the proto-language. This means that both writers approach the past mainly through imagination, and they see in it what corresponds to their historical and cultural vision above all. At the same time, this poetic

⁸⁹ Ibid., 290.

⁹⁰ Olzhas Suleimenov, *Esse, publitsistika. Stikhi, poemy. AZ i IA* (Alma-Ata: Zhalyñ, 1990).

⁹¹ Suleimenov argued: “Only poets can explain the meaning of words, created by the ancient forgers of language”. Suleimenov, *Esse, publitsistika*, 13.

⁹² “Speculative imagination” of classic Eurasianists manifested in such imaginative concepts as *simfonicheskaia lichnost’* (symphonic personality) that can combine the human and non-human. Vitalii Pashchenko, *Sotsial’naia filozofia evraziistva* (Moscow: Al’fa-M, 2003), 81.

⁹³ About Suleimenov see: Ram, “Imagining Eurasia,” 300-304.

⁹⁴ Suleimenov, *Esse, publitsistika*, 406-410.

view of the history of language and etymology is not the only way of how Suleimenov's foundations of the super-literature are put into practice by the post-Soviet Kazakhstani authors. My assumption is that Eurasian(ist) cosmopolitanism inspired by Suleimenov directed Nakipov in coining his concept of Eurasian literature that will be analysed in the second chapter.⁹⁵ I also argue that some Suleimenov's ideas about strong mutual influences between Slavic and Turkic peoples are indirectly or directly impacted Diusenbek Nakipov and Anuar Duisembinov's attempts to create Russian-Kazakh super-language as well as Il'ia Odegov and Iurii Serebrianskii's "other" Russian-ness and aspiration towards Kazakhstani identity.

The question whether or not the post-Soviet situation is a postcolonial one is a debatable one.⁹⁶ As Diana Kudaibergenova argues, there is not only use but also abuse of postcolonial discourse in Kazakhstan. According to her, political rather than intellectual usage of the concept of the postcolonial can cause a problem of misunderstanding and division within the society.⁹⁷ In my view, one of the main reasons for some fear of the term postcolonial among Russophone writers (the fear can be found, for example, in the same Nakipov's publication where he proposes the concept of Eurasian literature⁹⁸) is the fact that they perceive it as an ideological rather than a theoretical and non-normative stance. Because of the misunderstanding (which is most probably caused by the lack of public debates on postcoloniality in Russian) the term postcolonial is not fully appropriate for the writers – for them it implies a somewhat inferior position to Russia.

The perception of Eurasianism and postcolonialism is connected with the problem of the Russophone Kazakhstani writers' self-identification. Traditionally literature is classified

⁹⁵ Diusenbek Nakipov, "Rasshiriaia gorizont", *Megalit*, no. 3 (2010): 420-422, 421.

⁹⁶ David Chioni Moore, "Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Toward a Global Postcolonial Critique", *PMLA* 116, no. 01 (2001): 111-128, 112, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/463645>

⁹⁷ Kudaibergenova, "The Use and Abuse of Postcolonial Discourses", 933.

⁹⁸ Nakipov, "Rasshiriaia gorizont".

by languages, but in the post-Soviet context (as much as in many postcolonial situations) this type of classification is complicated by national-building agendas of the independent states as well as the writers' personal political, cultural and linguistic agendas. The topic of language comes here to the fore. After the collapse of the USSR there was a decline of Russian outside Russia because of energetic nation-building policies adopted by all the post-Soviet states. However, after this crisis of the 90s, starting from 2000s the Russian language partially restored its presence outside Russia.⁹⁹ As an example of this re-emergence, Russian became lingua franca in many internet-based networks.¹⁰⁰ These trajectories of "global Russian" allows Lara Ryazanova-Clarke to speak of the language "divergence according to the pluricentric model".¹⁰¹ During my interviews with the Russophone writers and my reading of their published interviews and journalism I learnt that, while acknowledging the decentralization of a Russophone world, the majority of Kazakhstani writers would not like to be called *russkoiazychnyi pisatel'/poet* (literally Russian-language writer/poet). For example, Nakipov rejects the differentiation between Russian-language (Russophone) and national (Kazakh) literature of Kazakhstan. In his view, the new situation appeared during the XX century should not be disregarded, and it needs new interpretation.¹⁰² In this sense, many Russophone writers in Kazakhstan do not follow established model of coining a term for literature written on the language of a former metropolia by adding prefix *-phone (-iazychnyi)*. According to this model, terms Anglophone and Francophone were created. The writers would like to avoid the term *russkoiazychnyi*, and they would prefer to be called by their nationality, citizenship (in most cases) or as Russian writers (in rare cases). I argue that the rejection of the term *russkoiazychnyi* indicates a problematic character of "literature on

⁹⁹ Lara Ryazanova-Clarke, "Introduction: The Russian Language, Challenged By Globalization", in *The Russian Language Outside The Nation*, ed. Lara Ryazanova-Clarke (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 11.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 14.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 15.

¹⁰² Nakipov, "Rasshiriaia gorizont".

margins”. On the one hand, Kazakhstani Russophone writers sees themselves as having their own trajectory and dignity, but on the other, many of them are still sensitive to former Soviet cultural hierarchy of nationalities within which the term *russkoiazychnyi* could mean “not fully Russian”, “secondary”. Still for many writers “Russian” is better than “Russian-language”. At the same time, by rejecting the term *russkoiazychnyi* they claim their right to the Russian language, and they as if assert that their Russian is not worse than Russian of ethnically Russian writers in Moscow or St. Petersburg.

This thesis is the first extensive treatment in English of a number of leading post-Soviet Russophone writers whose contribution to the contemporary Russophonia is increasing. My choice of the authors and literary works was determined by the hypothesis of the difference between the younger and older generations of the writers and by the necessity to analyze both Russian and Kazakh subjectivities within Russophone texts. I consider Nikolai Verëvochkin’s (born in 1949) writing as a very important testimony of trauma of the collapse of the USSR and the decline of previous identities. Il’ia Odegov (born in 1981) and Iurii Serebrianskii’s (born in 1975) short novels and short stories demonstrate how self-consciousness of Russian writers in Kazakhstan changed over time. Diusenbek Nakipov’s (born in 1946) *The Circle of Ashes* (published in 2005) is a literary text that reveals a wide range of opportunities to express Kazakh-ness in a Russophone work. The same is true about Bakhyt Kairbekov’s (born in 1953) poetry – one of most important manifestations of Russophone Kazakh-ness in literature. Poetry by Anuar Duisenbinov (born in 1985) is an exceptional example of bilingual Russophone literature where Kazakh is an essential part of a Russian text.

In my analysis of prose and poetry by these authors, I explore primarily how Russophone Kazakh-ness and other Russian-ness is constructed and expressed in the

Russophone literary text and what makes it a super-literature. I also analyse spatial, temporal and body imagery, combination of Russian and Kazakh and narrative identities developed by the Russophone writers. My main argument is that Kazakhstani Russophone literature is supralinguistic and supracultural realm where complex subjectivities of Russophone Kazakh-ness, other Russian-ness and Kazakhstani-ness are produced and expressed. In this sense, contemporary Kazakhstani Russophone literature can be called a super-literature. By the term super-literature, that I propose for the first time in this thesis, I mean literature that can express different national cultural worlds, traditions and even poetics. This literature also incorporates (Russian-Kazakh) bilingualism. The literary works by the younger generation of the Kazakhstani authors are Russophone literature that is tied only to Russian culture and literature, although it is written in Russian. Kazakh-ness is an essential part of this Russophone literature, and the literature can be considered by the authors and the readers as a natural way to express their Kazakh-ness. One of the major differences between Russian and Russophone literature is that there is no clear distinction between the “other” and “one’s own” in Russophone literature. Following Caffee’s discussion of complex subjectivity of Russophonia,¹⁰³ I argue that Russophone literature embodies complex mixed subjectivities and sensibilities (sensitivities) of different groups of Russian-speaking Kazakhstani population, including those of Kazakhs, and it expresses Russophone imagination.

This thesis looks at the post-Soviet Russophone literature within the context of the radical transformation of post-independent Kazakhstan’s social and linguistic landscape. I consider this context by analyzing the memoirs by the political leaders (President Nursultan Nazarbayev’s *At the Heart of Eurasia* and Leonid Brezhnev’s *The Virgin Lands*) who largely influenced the transformation of Kazakhstan, with its contemporary history of large scale

¹⁰³ According to Caffee, “Russophonia occupies a distinct space in the mind, directing the process of self-identification and the positioning of the self in relation to the outside world” 33. To demonstrate this complexity, Caffee analyzes Eduard Bagirov’s novel *Gastarbaiter* with its main character being a Russian in Asia and a “black” in Russia. Eduard Bagirov, *Gastarbaiter* (Moscow: Populiarnaia literatura, 2007), 5.

Russification and later de-Russification. The utopia of the Virgin Lands Campaign was predominantly a Russian (ethnically, culturally and linguistically) utopia, that presupposed the Russification of Kazakhstan, whereas the utopia of Astana as a “city of the future” is rather a Kazakh utopia (ethnically and linguistically). In Soviet time, the Russification gave much privilege to writing in Russian and put it over writing in Kazakh, and now the contemporary Russophone writers deal with the far-reaching complex consequences of the Soviet policies. The writers reconsider imperial and colonial aspects of Russian-ness, incorporate Kazakh-ness into their works and produce Kazakhstani-ness by creating a bicultural, bilingual (or multicultural and multilingual) super-literature. The contemporary de-Russification does not mean the disappearance of the Russian language that was the main language of Soviet ideology and still is the main language of the ideological poetics of Astana as a new national capital. As a proof of this, President Nazarbayev uses Russian in his writing about the past and the future of Kazakhstan.

To account for the situation of the post-Soviet Russophone literature in Kazakhstan, I use the concept of linguistic cultural capital and literary capital.¹⁰⁴ I argue that the trajectories of the development of contemporary Russophone Kazakhstani literature is closely connected with to what extent fluency in Russian will continue to be cultural capital in the country. If Russophone literature in Kazakhstan to be considered as super-literature, it can acquire additional capital of cosmopolitanism and at the same time it can be considered as Kazakhstani (and even Kazakh) national literature as well, with ability to express both Russian-ness and Kazakh-ness as well as many other identities and subjectivities. According to Casanova, “Literary capital is both what everyone seeks to acquire and what is universally recognized as the necessary and sufficient condition of taking part in literary competition”.¹⁰⁵ Literary capital is determined by a glorious past of a literature, its prominent books and

¹⁰⁴ Casanova, *The World Republic*.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

authors.¹⁰⁶ The structure of contemporary literary space is conditioned by unequal distribution of the capital in the world.¹⁰⁷ There are at least two main reasons why literary capital of Russian literature is high in Kazakhstan. First, Russian and Russian literature was strongly incorporated into the life and culture of the Kazakhs during imperial and Soviet time. They were an essential part of school curricula, and they were praised as necessary for Kazakhs by such important for Kazakh culture figures as Abay (considered to be the founder of contemporary Kazakh culture) and Mukhtar Auezov (the most well-known Kazakh writer).¹⁰⁸ The second major reason is that writing in Russian was and is practiced by some figures who are considered as highly important for Kazakhstan's culture and global visibility such as Olzhas Suleimenov, Chingiz Aitmatov and some others.

To analyze in what ways Russophone Kazakh-ness and other Russian-ness are constructed and manifested in the literary works examined in this thesis, I employ textual analysis of the works relying on the phenomenological concepts of embodiment and the flesh of the world. In my textual analysis, I have also utilized some larger theoretical concepts and more specific literary approaches. The theoretical concepts methodologically important for this thesis are those of the production of space (Henri Lefebvre), narrative identity (Paul Ricoeur), post-Soviet trauma, traumatic identity and memory (Alexander Etkind, Serguei Oushakine) and of the body without organs (Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari). In terms of literary approaches, I drew on ideas of Pascale Casanova (the concepts of literary capital and literariness of a language), a Russian metarealist poet and theoretician Konstantin Kedrov (the concept of metametaphor). To account for the context of the writer's creativity, their personal identities and their perception of the cultural and literary situation in Kazakhstan, I draw on 5

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Abai Kunanbaev, Slova nazidaniia, slovo 25, <http://www.abay.nabr.kz/index.php?page=content&id=106>. See also Mukhtar Auezov, "O znachenii russkogo iazyka dlia nashogo naroda," *el.kz*, December 5, 2012, <http://el.kz/kz/news/archive/content-4726>

in-depth interviews with the writers I conducted in person and via Skype in July 2016. I have conducted long phenomenological interviews, at least one hour each (my interview with Anuar Duisenbinov was about 3 hours). In the interviews, I asked a few sets of different questions – about the writers’ self-identification, the issue of language, their view of the literary situation in Kazakhstan and about their own writing. As part of my research, I have also conducted participant observation of a number of literary events organized in Astana in 2016 and 2017. In the three chapters of the thesis, I argue that in the contemporary Kazakhstani situation, on the one hand, the writers and literature more generally have lost the highly significant role they enjoyed in Soviet time (in Soviet utopias), but on the other hand their works are still important as ways to narrate national identity, articulate new Kazakhstani subjectivities and to plot memory narratives. In the first chapter, I analyse two memoirs by President Nursultan Nazarbayev (*At the Heart of Eurasia* devoted to Astana as a new capital of the country) and Leonid Brezhnev (*The Virgin Lands* devoted to The Virgin Lands Campaign). I am interested in the memoirs as a type of writing that demonstrate utopian interpretations of Kazakhstani landscape and particularly of the steppe. These two non-fiction texts provide a social and rhetorical background in which Russophone literature in Kazakhstan has been developing during last several decades – the background of Soviet Russification of the Northern Kazakhstan and its post-Soviet de- Russification. The memoirs demonstrate the radical change of cultural and linguistic landscape in the region of the Northern Kazakhstan since the Virgin Lands Campaign in the mid-1950s when Russian became certainly dominant language in the region. I argue that now Russian still retains its status as a super-language on which major messages about the Kazakhstani nation and identity are delivered, and President Nazarbayev himself can be called a Russophone writer.

In the second chapter, I first consider the literary works that depict what might happen between the two utopias described in the memoirs by Nazarbayev and Brezhnev. These works

are Nikolai Verëvohkin's short novel *Man Without a Name* (published in 2006) and novel *Mammoth Tooth: Chronicles of a Dead City* (published in 2003) as texts that represent the sense of trauma of the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the fate of Russian intelligentsia in post-independent Kazakhstan. I argue that *Mammoth Tooth* demonstrates the apocalypse of former Soviet identity, temporality and identity vacuum caused by their decline. In the second section of the chapter, I read Odegov's short novel *Lubaia Liubov'* (published in 2012), his short stories and Serebrianskii's short novel *Destination. Road Pastoral*, and I regard them as proof that the younger generation of the Russophone writers embraced their Kazakhstani identity and developed a new type of Russian subjectivity which I call other Russian-ness. It is different from Russian Federation's Russian-ness and can be easily combined with many other identities. I argue that Russophone literary works by the younger writers reflect the transformation of Russian-ness within the Kazakhstani society. The last section of the chapter is devoted to the issue of Russophone Kazakh-ness. I examine the theoretical works by Auezkhan Kodar and Zira Naurzbaeva who argued for the importance of the Russian language for contemporary reflections and literary representations of Kazakh-ness. I show that these theoretical ideas are in line with Anuar Duisenbinov's poetic reflections on Russian-Kazakh bilingualism and Diusenbek Nakipov's concept of Eurasian literature.

Starting from my analysis of Nakipov's own version of Russophone super-literature (Eurasian literature, in his words) in the second chapter and continuing with my examination of Kazakh subjective space within Russophone literature in the third chapter, I show how the super-literature works. I demonstrate that Anuar Duisenbinov, Bakhyt Kairbekov, and Diusenbek Nakipov transform their Russophone writing into the expression of Kazakh-ness. The third chapter deals with bodily and spatial images, tropes that were developed by Diusenbekthe writers as an expression of their hybrid Russophone Kazakh identities. To understand artistic implications of this identity, I rely on theoretical ideas of writing as

embodied, emplaced and affective activity. I show that the images and tropes are means of articulation of Kazakh subjectivities, and the Russophone literary text is imaginary space where the complex process of the formation of new Kazakh subjectivities and identities unfolds. I show that hybrid identities of the authors, their bilingualism produce intricate centauric imagery that goes back to the image of nomadism, the horseman. I argue that while considering the body as a model of space (the steppe), the three authors produce sophisticated imagery of the wondrous body of the steppe as maternal landscape of Kazakh culture. I show that the spatial and bodily images developed by the three writers enrich the Russophone literature by developing a specific kind of Kazakh Russophone imagination which is an important part of the super-literature.

In this thesis, I would like to demonstrate that the situation of contemporary Kazakhstani Russophone literature is paradoxical, because it is “young” and old simultaneously. It is young, because it starts a new tradition of writing in Russian in independent Kazakhstan and develops its distinctive features. It is old, since it is written in Russian and is a part (although specific) of Russian literature. This paradoxical situation of being young and old simultaneously means that, while the Russophone writers already have some literary capital, they have to accumulate it as if from scratch at the same time, especially within the context of the whole Russian literature and world literature. I show that the writers have already achieved some success in accumulating the prestige which can be seen in the growing international interest in their works.

**Chapter 1. Between the Poetics of Space and the Poetics of Power: The Afterlife of
Utopia in Nursultan Nazarbayev's *At the Heart of Eurasia***

In this chapter, I examine the role of spatial images and utopian poetics in President Nursultan Nazarbayev's memoir *At the Heart of Eurasia* and Leonid Brezhnev's memoir *The Virgin Lands* devoted to the development of Astana and the Virgin Lands Campaign respectively.¹⁰⁹ Although these texts are different from fiction literary works by post-Soviet Kazakhstani Russophone writers that will be analyzed in the following chapters, the two memoirs allow to see the radical changes in spatial, social, cultural and linguistic landscape of the region on the Northern Kazakhstan (and Kazakhstan as a whole) as well as the shift in the status of the Russians and the Russian language in the country. The analysis of the two memoirs provides the background for the poetics that both fiction and non-fiction writers use to describe and imagine the post-Soviet condition and the new Kazakhstani identity. The memoirs attest to an intriguing fact that the same geographical area located in the centre of the Great Steppe has witnessed two different large-scale utopian projects – of the Virgin Lands Campaign and construction of Astana – during last 60 years. Brezhnev's and Nazarbayev's writing memoirs became an important part of authoritative right to imagination and established the ways the spatial text of new landscapes should be read and what associations are attached to it. My main argument is that in the memoirs the poetics of space (the ploughed steppe and Astana's urban landscape) plays a vital role in the justification and development of new social and spatial order of the Virgin Lands and Astana. In both cases, ideological poetics of space serves as the basis for imagination of bright utopian future of (Soviet or independent) Kazakhstan. By analysing tropes in the two memoirs I show that the poetics of the steppe and

¹⁰⁹ Nursultan Nazarbayev, *V serdtse Evrazii* (Almaty: Zhybek Zholy, 2010) – all translations are mine. Leonid Brezhnev, *The Virgin Lands* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1979).

Astana transforms into the poetics of utopia that combine the human, the social and the spatial. I also argue that *The Virgin Lands* and *At the Heart of Eurasia* are supposed to construct different identities. The former encouraged the Soviet identity that practically meant Russification of the Northern Kazakhstan and the whole country, and the latter promoted the new national identity aimed at political, linguistic and public sector Kazakhification.

If one compares the political, cultural and linguistic contexts of the Virgin Lands Campaign and the establishment of the new capital, one can see that in the period between the two projects the Russian language and writing in Russian undergone significant changes in the country. These changes are directly connected with independent Kazakhstan's policies of nationalization, Kazakhification as well as with outmigration of Slavic populations that during late Soviet time constituted 70-80% of the whole population of the Northern Kazakhstan.¹¹⁰ Brezhnev's memoir is a historical narrative that describes a tremendous shift in Kazakhstan's history that resulted in the fact that the country was the only Soviet republic where the titular nationality was a minority.¹¹¹ At the same time, President Nazarbayev's text witnesses a completely different situation when many of those who came during the Virgin Lands Campaign and their descendants left the country in 1990-2000s. Since the dissolution of the USSR the status of the Russians changed from "the status of a people representing the Soviet state to a minority symbolizing the former colonizer".¹¹² As a result of "Kazakhification of the North",¹¹³ only "between 1989 and 1999, Russians went from 6 to 4.5 million or from 40 to 30% of Kazakhstan's population, with an average departure of 150,000 individuals per

¹¹⁰ In the 1989 census, the Russians represented from 70 to 80% of the population in the seven northern regions of Kazakhstan – Akmolinsk, Karaganda, Kokchetau, Kustanay, North-East, Northern-Kazakhstan, and Pavlodar. Sebastien Peyrouse, "The "Imperial Minority": An Interpretative Framework of the Russians in Kazakhstan in the 1990s," *Nationalities Papers* 36, no. 1 (2008): 107.

¹¹¹ Juldyz Smagulova, "Language Policies of Kazakhization and Their Influence on Language Attitudes and Use," *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* 11, nos. 3-4 (2008): 446.

¹¹² Peyrouse, "The "Imperial Minority," 105.

¹¹³ Alima Bissenova, "The Fortress and the Frontier: Mobility, Culture, and Class in Almaty and Astana," *Europe-Asia Studies* 69, no. 4 (2017): 652.

year”.¹¹⁴ Now Astana is one of the major cities of the country with the biggest Kazakh population.¹¹⁵ According to the official statistics, by the beginning of 2015 ethnic Kazakhs constituted 75% of Astana’s population, while ethnic Russians made up 15.63%.¹¹⁶ In Almaty, the demographic situation was different, with 57.17% for Kazakhs and 28.47% for Russians.¹¹⁷

All these figures mean that the two memoirs tell the story of the rise and fall of the presence of the Russians in the Northern Kazakhstan and the whole country. Brezhnev’s text raises an important question of the history and legitimacy of the presence. Brezhnev has no doubt that the Soviet State and the virgin landers have the right to settle in the steppe and to change it which means that for him the Russian presence in the region is completely legitimate. Nazarbayev’s memoir represents a rather competing historical discourse of the region’s past. This is evident even in how the two authors refer to the same territory – “the Virgin Lands” as opposed to “the Great Steppe”, Saryarka, “the Kazakh steppe”. In addition, Nazarbayev closely associates the steppe with the new national capital that symbolizes independent Kazakhstan. This historical and discursive background of the presence of the Russians in Kazakhstan is an important aspect of the context of contemporary Russophone literature in the country, because the present and the future of the literature is considerably dependent on the way the Russian presence is understood within and incorporated into Kazakhstani identity. Later in the thesis I will show that the younger generation of Russophone writers are deeply incorporated into the new Kazakhstani society. They cannot be considered as belonging to “imperial minority” (as Peyrouse called Kazakhstani Russians in 1990s).¹¹⁸ The new generation of the writers come to term with the national realities described

¹¹⁴ Peyrouse, “The “Imperial Minority,” 107.

¹¹⁵ Bissenova, “The Fortress and the Frontier,” 644.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Peyrouse, “The “Imperial Minority,” 105.

in President Nazarbayev's *At the Heart of Eurasia*. However, both memoirs can be analyzed not only as historical sources, but also as literary works, although of a very specific kind. My assumption is that the literary techniques employed by Nazarbayev and Brezhnev can help us to understand the perspective, the images through which they looked at the Kazakh steppe, and its imagined utopian promise. In my view, while approaching these two memoirs one should not simply dismiss them as a piece of propaganda. Although they are propaganda to some extent, they are more complex and have other meaning as well. First of all, the texts are good sources to study the imagination associated with the Virgin Lands Campaign and the construction of Astana. What one can dismiss as mere propaganda was a part of mass cultural production. This aspect of cultural production and production of images was studied in literature on the Virgin Lands Campaign and Astana.¹¹⁹ Most likely, by developing their visions of Astana and the Virgin Lands both Nazarbayev and Brezhnev in fact proposed blueprints for the vision of post-Soviet and Soviet Kazakhstan respectively. By impacting public rhetoric, literature and art, they largely influenced if not determined the discourses on Astana and the Virgin Lands Campaign, respectively. The other important shared feature of the memoirs is that, as examples of cultural propagandistic production, both books combine poetics and politics, poetics and social life.

Theoretically, I rely on Marxist understanding of the human experience of space and time. Within this paradigm, space and time are rather produced within social life than they are given: "In its broad sense, humans as social beings are said to produce their own life, their own consciousness, their own world".¹²⁰ Ernst Bloch grounded this idea in an ontological notion that the world is incomplete without human activity.¹²¹ Within this framework one can

¹¹⁹ Michaela Pohl. "The Virgin Lands Between Memory and Forgetting: People and Transformation in the Soviet Union, 1954-1960." PhD diss., Indiana University, 1999, 75-95. Mateusz Laszczkowski, "Demo version of a city': buildings, affects, and the state in Astana," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute (N.S.)* 22 (2015): 148-165.

¹²⁰ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 68.

¹²¹ Ernst Bloch, *Tiubingenskoe vvedenie v filosofiuu* (Yekaterinburg: 1997).

say that the social production of space and time is production in a broad sense, the result of social relations. While analyzing the poetics of space production in the two memoirs, I rely on the concept of social production of space developed by Henri Lefebvre.¹²² Lefebvre argued that “(Social) space is a (social) product... the space thus produced also serves as a tool of thought and of action... in addition to being a means of production it is also a means of control, and hence of domination, of power”.¹²³ This means that having being produced space produces itself – it produces new relationships. In this thesis, I consider the literary texts and images (of Astana and the Kazakh steppe) as important ways to produce space and by that to produce Kazakh or Russophone imagination, identity and subjectivities. Combining spatial theory with literary analysis, I argue that a literary trope can be seen as a constructivist tool. Tropes can be embodied in material, architectural forms. The poetics of production can unite literature, art and real life within a utopia.

The historical context of the Virgin Lands Campaign is largely connected with Nikita Khrushchev’s agricultural policy, his policy of de-Stalinization and the need to invigorate the Soviet State again after Stalin’s death.¹²⁴ The decision to start the Virgin Lands Campaign was made on February and March plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. In 1954 and 1955 18 million hectares of land were upturned in Kazakhstan.¹²⁵ In this period, 90 new grain state farms and many new settlements were created.¹²⁶ According to Michaela Pohl, the Virgin Lands Campaign was “agrarian utopianism”.¹²⁷ It was a promise of utopia in difficult circumstances – in the region with severe climate, exile history and the flaws in the management of the campaign. In 1954

¹²² Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 68-168.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹²⁴ Polly Jones, “Introduction: The Dilemmas of de-Stalinization”, in: *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization. Negotiating cultural and social change in the Khrushchev era* (London, New York: Routledge, 2006), 1-18, 2.

¹²⁵ “Tselina: ekonomicheskie, politicheskie, demographicheskie i ekologicheskie posledstviia,” *National Digital History of Kazakhstan*, August 06, 2013, <http://e-history.kz/ru/contents/view/430>

¹²⁶ Vladimir Shepel’, “Khrushchev i Kazakhstanskaia Tselina,” *National Digital History of Kazakhstan*, March 07, 2014, <http://e-history.kz/ru/publications/view/507>

¹²⁷ Pohl, “The Virgin Lands”, viii.

Leonid Brezhnev was appointed the second and later the first Secretary on the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan. Nursultan Nazarbayev became the last leader of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan in 1989. In his memoir he remembers his experience as a Soviet leader. With regard to the main historical background of the memoir the capital of Kazakhstan was relocated from Almaty to Astana in 1997. The city became a place of grandiose construction. 10 million square meters of housing was built in Astana by 2016.¹²⁸ Dozens of huge public buildings were constructed. The total area of only one of them House of Ministries is 228 thousand square meters.¹²⁹ The population of the city has increased more than thrice, since it became a capital.¹³⁰ From the start of the project of Astana construction the government was preoccupied with the cultural capital of the city, and the architectural concept of the city was expected to embody the brilliant utopian future of the whole Kazakhstan. To increase the capital, international expertise was attracted.¹³¹ As a result of an international competition for the best project, Kisho Kurokawa's Master Plan of Astana was adopted by the government in 1999.¹³² Kurokawa was a Japanese architect and the leader of metabolist movement. His architectural vision is important to understand the imagination of space and utopia in *At the Heart of Eurasia*, and especially the concept of growth in the book. In this chapter, I argue that Nazarbayev draws not only on the Soviet utopian tradition that he knows well as a former Soviet leader, but he also relies on discourse created within metabolism.

¹²⁸ "History of Astana," *The official website of Astana city*, June 20, 2016,

<http://astana.gov.kz/en/modules/material/42>

¹²⁹ "Astana – gorod, ustremlyennyi v budushchee," *National Digital History of Kazakhstan*, July 27, 2013, <http://e-history.kz/ru/contents/view/175>

¹³⁰ "Uchastie v torzhestvennoi tseremonii podniatiia gosudarstvennogo flaga", *Akorda. Ofitsial'nyi sait Prezidenta Respubliki Kazakhstan*, July 4, 2016, http://www.akorda.kz/ru/events/akorda_news/uchastie-v-torzhestvennoi-ceremonii-podnyatiya-gosudarstvennogo-flaga-1

¹³¹ Alima Bissenova, "The Master Plan of Astana: Between the 'Art of Government' and the 'Art of Being Global', in *Ethnographies of the State in Central Asia: Performing Politics*, eds. M. Reeves, J. Rasanayagam, & J. Beyer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 127-148, 128.

¹³² Bissenova, "The Master Plan of Astana", 129.

Leonid Brezhnev's Memoirs *The Virgin Lands*: "The Fate of the Land that was to be Ploughed"

To trace the transformation of the poetics of space into the poetics of power in Nazarbayev's *At the Heart of Eurasia* and Brezhnev's *The Virgin Lands*, I will proceed in the chronological order first examining briefly Brezhnev's text and then in more details Nazarbayev's memoir. This will allow me to establish continuity between the two texts. I will also pay attention to different visions and images embodied in the two memoirs. Soviet utopian thinking was largely based on a set of tropes. Many of them were coined in Stalin's era within the framework of Socialist Realism, but some remained in use till the late Soviet time.¹³³ Stephen Kotkin in the *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* quotes important metaphors and expressions that dominated Soviet discourse on industrialization and internal colonization of the steppe: "the building of socialism"; the steppe is a "battlefield", and it is "retreating"; "catch and overtake"; "Time, Forward"; "Bolshevik tempo".¹³⁴ One of the most popular metaphors of the Virgin Lands Campaign was "the Planet of the Virgin Lands". This trope is very interesting, because it presents the Virgin Lands as a body, or an separate continent. The most routinely used metaphor about Astana – "the city of the future" – has much in common with Soviet utopianism. There were many "cities of the future" in Soviet time. One of them was Tselinograd (the name of the city in 1961-1992) that had experienced a construction boom during the Virgin Lands Campaign. Astana was privileged to become "the city of the future" for the second time as a capital of independent Kazakhstan. At the same time, many Soviet Virgin Lands settlements were partially or completely destroyed after the collapse of the USSR. A literary account of such a traumatic demise of a utopian city in Nikolai

¹³³ Evgenii Dobrenko, *Political Economy of Socialist Realism* (New Haven: Yale University, 2007).

¹³⁴ Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California, 1995), 33.

Verëvochkin's novel *Mammoth Tooth: Chronicles of a Dead City* (published in 2003) will be analyzed in the second chapter.

Brezhnev's memoirs *The Virgin Lands* to a large extent determined late Soviet official discourse about the Virgin Lands campaign since the book was published in 1974. The book as a part of the discourse sets imaginary framework that has a number of key features. First, it contains romantic images of the Virgin Lands which Brezhnev sees in his dreams while being already in Moscow: "At such moments I look out of my window here in Moscow and see nothing but the endless expanse of the new lands, the worried faces of the combine operators, the agronomists, the Party district committee officials and, though far away from these good friends, I again feel as if I were at their side".¹³⁵ Here The Virgin Lands are depicted nostalgically, as some pleasant memories. Second, Brezhnev imagines the Virgin Lands while describing them as a map which can be seen as connected with his view of the lands from his cabinet in Kremlin. For Brezhnev, mapping is vision: "In my office at the Central Committee I had a big map of Kazakhstan on the wall. Just as in the old days at the front I used to mark the positions of army units, their zones of operation and lines of attack, so now I would mark on the map the deployment of hundreds of farms and operational centres".¹³⁶ The process of mapping of the lands reflects their conquest – the more points on the map the more successful the campaign. A map here is the symbol of modernization of the Virgin Lands. The metaphor of the map is also a way of thinking about the steppe. It projects the map, its organized structure on the steppe. The map is seen as what people can make out of the steppe – they can conquer, modernize it. In addition to this, by employing the metaphor of the map Brezhnev

¹³⁵ "В такие минуты смотришь из окна на Москву, а перед глазами – бескрайние целинные поля, озабоченные лица комбайнеров, агрономов, райкомовцев, и, будучи далеко от этих дорогих мне людей, я снова ощущаю себя рядом с ними." Leonid Brezhnev, *The Virgin Lands* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1979). Russian text from: Leonid Brezhnev, *Tselina*, <https://www.e-reading.club/book.php?book=83900>

¹³⁶ "В моем кабинете в ЦК висела большая карта Казахстана. Точно так же как в былые времена на фронте я обозначал на картах расположение армейских частей, районы их действий и направления ударов, так и теперь на карте республики отмечал дислокацию сотен хозяйств и опорных пунктов." Ibid., 14.

emphasizes his status as both one who was in charge of the Virgin Lands Campaign and one who is now in charge of the whole country. From the point of view of Soviet ideological and utopian thinking, Brezhnev's ability to observe the steppe in a single imaginary glance like a bird is very important. This kind of vision and the whole text of the memoirs indicate Brezhnev's special right for utopian imagination, because he was the head of the party that was responsible for ideology and utopian mobilization.

Third, Brezhnev's frequent usage of war vocabulary and metaphors is the next key feature of the imaginary framework of the Soviet official discourse about the Virgin Lands that is set in the memoirs – here the production of space is understood as a battle. In the text mapping of the Virgin Lands is considerably connected with military language and the memory of the World War II. We have seen this in the citation about how Brezhnev marked the “offensive” against the steppe on a big map of Kazakhstan in his office at the Central Committee. Again, this makes the mapping highly ideological and utopian, because mapping here means exercise of power, control and the production of the new social order. Another point is that military metaphors reveal the mobilizational nature of the campaign: “The great battle in the Kazakh steppes began.”¹³⁷ The battle means that many people participated in the project, and they should have felt themselves as fighters. Brezhnev is explicit about the link between the Virgin Lands Campaign and World War II: “Of course, in the virgin lands there was no shooting, no bombing, no shelling, but all the rest was like a real battle. To begin with, speaking in the same military terms, the first thing to do was to regroup our forces and bring up our reserves. This was no simple matter”.¹³⁸ As much as with mapping it is clear that here Brezhnev relies on the tradition of Socialist modernization – thinking about the steppe as

¹³⁷ Ibid., 10.

¹³⁸ “Конечно, не было на целине стрельбы, бомбежек, артобстрелов, но все остальное напоминало настоящее сражение. Чтобы начать его, надо было прежде, говоря все тем же военным слогом, перегруппировать силы, подтянуть тылы, и было это непросто”. Ibid., 7-8.

backward and retreating because of an offensive of development and modernization initiated by the Soviet State. Although Brezhnev mentioned a number of times the beauty of the steppe, for him it was just empty space (although attractive) that should be developed. One can also argue that the metaphors of war with the steppe makes it a subject, a body of a rival.

In the memoir, the Kazakhs are seen as the oriental Other and as people who live their lives against the background of simple nature. By this approach Brezhnev demonstrates an orientalist imagination about the Virgin Lands and their dwellers. As I mentioned, in the text, the steppe is beautiful, but underdeveloped and empty. It needs radical development. Kazakhs are described in accordance with this general oriental view of the steppe as contemplative and naïve people. To illustrate this, Brezhnev is remembering his encounters with Kazakhs during WWII: “Sometimes when I heard a Kazakh singing one of his melodious and mournful songs, I would go up to him and ask, “What are you singing about?” “About the steppe. About the herd. I’m thinking about my girl. ...” “A man can miss his girl and miss his home, but the steppe... You have the Ukrainian steppe here. Isn’t it just as good?” “Well, it’s all right. It’s just that our steppe is different”.¹³⁹ It is interesting that the special character (not like the Ukrainian steppe) of the Kazakh steppe is stressed here. For Soviet propaganda it was vital to stress an extraordinary character of the steppe that should be mastered, because it could only stress “the feat” of the virgin landers. There is an important assumption in this quotation that people are like landscapes they live in. In the memoir, the Kazakhs are as if transformed (produced) into true Soviet people by the campaign. Brezhnev aspires to show there was one type of landscape and people in the steppe before the Virgin Lands Campaign, and after the campaign a different, truly modern, type of landscape and its inhabitants appeared.

Brezhnev’s orientalisising view of the Kazakhs is connected with the fact that many Russians

¹³⁹ “Услышав, бывало, мелодичную и печальную песню казаха, подойдешь, спросишь: “О чем поешь?” “Про степь пою. Про табун пою. Девушку вспомнил...” “О девушке можно тосковать. О доме тоже. А степь... Чем она хуже, эта вот украинская степь?” “Не хуже. Только наша – совсем другая степь...”. Ibid., 16-17.

came to the Northern Kazakhstan during the campaign. It is worth mentioning that in the text while visiting different places in the region Brezhnev interacts first of all with Russians as local party leaders, heads of state farms or simple virgin landers. This situation shows the high degree of Russification of the Northern Kazakhstan at that time – the proportion of Russian and Kazakh names mentioned in the memoir attests to the fact that Kazakhs became minority in the region.

For Brezhnev the new social order is possible only within the new kind of space (the steppe). Spatiality (the production of space) underlies Brezhnev's text's imagery because his main topic is the upturn of the Virgin Lands. Brezhnev contrasts the steppe before and after ploughing. Before being cultivated, the steppe was space with different temporality and qualities. It was tough in terms of the upturn, and even there was something ugly and scaring in it, namely, sod that was upturned by ploughs: "The steppe turned out to be a tough nut to crack, tougher than it had seemed at first. First, the centuries-old turf with its tangle of wire-like roots was so firmly packed that it would scarcely yield to the plough".¹⁴⁰ On an imaginary level, this "centuries-old turf" is rather about some backward past, and now a new landscape with new temporality should be produced. It is interesting that for Brezhnev, the steppe while beautiful, hides something unpleasant (to remind it is the sod because of which it proved to be "a tough nut to crack"), and only when the steppe is ploughed it no longer has these negative aspects. The celebrated and symbolic moments of this change were the first furrows that were marked with special public meetings on the ground Brezhnev stresses the difference between "the centuries-old turf with its tangle of wire-like roots" and the ploughed steppe in the form 2 by 2 kilometre squares that are aesthetically attractive to him. Brezhnev praises the unusually big size of these squares (400 hectares each).

¹⁴⁰ "Степь оказалась крепким орешком, более крепким, чем представлялось сначала. Дело не только в том, что вековая дернина, пронизанная, словно проволокой, корневищами, была так плотна, что едва поддавалась плугу". Ibid., 21.

To conclude this brief analysis of *The Virgin Lands*, I would like to stress that in the memoir one can find some imagery and tropes of the steppe that are employed by Brezhnev to show that “the fate of the land that was to be ploughed”.¹⁴¹ This means that the very natural landscape of the steppe made it into the Virgin Lands, and the new social order, a utopia was destined to be built on this place. Brezhnev’s text is concentrated on the Soviet society’s ability to transform space and time. Probably this concentration means that the utopia of the Virgin Lands Campaign was closely connected with poetics and imagination of space and time transformation and production.

Building a New National Capital in Nursultan Nazarbayev’s *At the Heart of Eurasia*: From the Poetics of the City to the Poetics of Power

The predecessor of Astana Tselinograd was a city tightly connected with the rural areas of the region.¹⁴² As Bissenova shows, the city was the frontier (as opposed to Almaty which was considered as a proper European-like city, and can be rather called a fortress), and its life has always been associated with considerable level of migration.¹⁴³ The collapse of the USSR was especially painful for the Northern Kazakhstan (the Virgin Lands), because of the severe crisis of its economic and social system and Slavic population mass outmigration. In this situation, President Nazarbayev’s decision to transfer the capital from Almaty to Astana was a step to integrate closer the northern part of the country (the region that previously was dominated by the Russians) into new independent Kazakhstan. This decision was aimed at “a consolidation of a ‘national’ (as opposed to Soviet, or Russified) urban middle class”.¹⁴⁴ Mass migration to Astana from rural areas and small towns that started in late 1990s became at the

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 21.

¹⁴² Bissenova, “The Fortress and the Frontier,” 656.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

same time Kazakhification of the city.¹⁴⁵ In this section, I argue that although Kazakhstan does not have a real ideology in a strict sense (or at least it does not have a clearly formulated political ideology), it still has ideological poetics which is largely based on utopian images of Astana. As an image, Astana can serve a quasi-ideological role and impact national consolidation. The idea that a political leader and regime's legitimacy is based on their ability to transform and produce space and time had not disappeared with the collapse of the USSR. Some of the leaders of the new independent states – Saparmurat Niazov in Turkmenistan with his idea of the country's post-independent golden age embodied in new pompous architectural buildings in Ashgabat and Nursultan Nazarbayev with much soberer, but still somewhat voluntarist idea of bright Kazakhstani future in 2030 and after that in 2050 manifested in the country's new capital – proposed their versions of post-Soviet utopia.¹⁴⁶ However, while drawing on Soviet utopian poetics of building new society (“building socialism”), the post-Soviet leaders tried to find other non-Soviet sources of utopian inspiration. This is especially true about President Nazarbayev. On the one hand, his *At the Heart of Eurasia* can be compared to Brezhnev's memoirs because both texts draw on the poetics of the steppe and the Soviet modernization to justify the two utopian political projects (although Brezhnev was focused on agricultural lands and Nazarbayev on urban landscape, the literary devices they employ have common features). On the other hand, President Nazarbayev resorted to completely different – postmodernist and Metabolist concepts. The project of the new capital of Kazakhstan, Astana, that was initiated by President Nazarbayev is the embodiment of these concepts. This made Astana a symbiotic utopia as a kind of postmodern utopia.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Natalie Koch, “The Violence of Spectacle: Statist Schemes to Green the Desert and Constructing Astana and Ashgabat as Urban Oases,” *Social & Cultural Geography* 16, no. 6 (2015): 675–697, doi: 10.1080/14649365.2014.1001431

¹⁴⁷ Kulshat Medeuova, *Transformatsii utopicheskogo soznaniia v kontekste antropourbanisticheskikh proektov 20 veka*. Avtoreferat na soiskanie uchënoi stepeni doktora filosofskikh nauk, Almaty, 2007. 16.

Astana can be regarded as an attempt to overcome the painful and destructive collapse of the utopia of the Virgin Lands by creating a new utopia. Nursultan Nazarbayev's *At the Heart of Eurasia* is important to understand utopian underpinning of the project of Astana as a new capital. The metaphor "the heart of Eurasia" in the title of the book highlights that Astana is not a periphery, and the whole concept of the memoir relies on this imagination of centrality.¹⁴⁸ Nazarbayev starts the memoir with his childhood dreams to climb to the top of the nearest mountain. He was about five or seven years old when he started to dream about this, and eventually he climbed the top when he was fourteen. He considers this memory to be very important for him, because he first experienced the feeling of flying not when he boarded a plane for the first time, but when he "stood on top of the high mountain and was looking down on the plain, which seemed to [him] a huge geographical map".¹⁴⁹ He was seeing all things, that surrounded him in his everyday life, as small objects, and he could see them in a single glance. This reminds of Brezhnev's metaphor of the map. However, Nazarbayev states that even from this special position on the top of the mountain he was unable to "to understand the very vastness of the steppe".¹⁵⁰ In this poetic depiction of the childhood vision of the steppe two things are important. First, the vision of the steppe is associated with a kind of superhuman abilities, or, to put it another way, with the extension of human abilities, because the vision of the steppe presupposes the sense of flying and unusual seeing. Second, again we encounter here the motif of God-like view of the steppe as a map – similar view of the steppe one can find in Brezhnev's memoirs. The map here is a metaphor of the vision of the steppe, the image that unites space, vision, imagination and power: the vision of the steppe in a single glance becomes authoritative and empowering imagination. It makes one a leader,

¹⁴⁸ Natalie Koch, "The 'Heart' of Eurasia? Kazakhstan's Centrally Located Capital City," *Central Asian Survey* 32, no. 2 (2013): 134-147, [doi: 10.1080/02634937.2013.802487](https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2013.802487)

¹⁴⁹ "Я стоял на вершине этой высокой горы и смотрел вниз на равнину, которая казалась мне огромной географической картой". Nursultan Nazarbayev, *V serdtse Evrazii* (Almaty: Zhybek Zholy, 2010).

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

a designer of a new city. President Nazarbayev not only saw the steppe as a map, but later he actually changed the map of Kazakhstan, by relocating the capital.

In the book, the image of the steppe not only sets the tone, but it enables Nazarbayev to develop his ideas about the future of Kazakhstan and his power. Since he experienced the vision, the steppe started to puzzle him: “Ever since I realized my dream of the high mountain, I became possessed with a dream to learn the essence and nature of the steppe”.¹⁵¹ As Nazarbayev puts it, being on that mountain he realized that “the steppe with its unlimited scope and outlook gives true freedom and a sense of completeness of the space”.¹⁵² Later, when he got into “the true steppe of Great Saryarka”, he experienced “a great sense of space that the steppe gives”.¹⁵³ This sense of space provided by the steppe is inextricably linked to the sky. “Right here I have first seen the whole clear sky. Not the sky that is halve hidden by the mountains... Not even the sky one can see from the top of a mountain that in part hidden by other mountains... But right the whole sky that like a huge glass glittering cap covers the flat plain from horizon to horizon”.¹⁵⁴ Nazarbayev concludes that only the steppe can give one an opportunity to comprehend the sky. Later we will see that in the book this imaginary view of the steppe serves as a prelude to and justification of the relocation of the capital and development of Astana. Astana will be presented as an answer to Nazarbayev’s puzzle with the steppe and sky.

One could argue that later President Nazarbayev’s fascination with the sky will impact the architecture of the city. In Astana, a vivid example of how constructed forms can embody are various blue (and not only blue) domes of the city that convey sky symbolism.

¹⁵¹ “С тех пор, как я осуществил свою мечту о высокой горе, мною овладела мечта познать сущность и природу степи”. Ibid., 15.

¹⁵² Ibid., 15-16.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 16.

¹⁵⁴ “Именно здесь я впервые увидел чистое и полное небо. Не то небо, половину которого закрывают горы... И даже не то небо, которое предстает с вершины горы, тоже частично закрытое другими горами... А именно все небо, которое, словно огромный стеклянный и сверкающий колпак, накрывает плоскую равнину от горизонта до горизонта”. Ibid., 16.

Nazarbayev mentions that what was added to Kisho Kurokawa's vision of the city was dome-shaped form of many buildings.¹⁵⁵ He argues that the dome is linked to Kazakh national architectural heritage and particularly to Kazakh yurt that is a perfect portable housing structure associated with the World Tree of Life. According to Nazarbayev, the dome has special symbolic attachment to the steppe: "It would be surprising if we would not stick to dome and portal style in the architecture of the new capital of the Great Steppe".¹⁵⁶ I would argue that the domes are material metaphors of the sky.

There is the connection between the vision of the steppe sky and an iconic Astana building of Bayterek – a monument and observation tower 105-meter-high with a gold-mirrored 22-meter diameter ball on the top located in the centre of the new downtown of the city – which is a good example of dome and spherical architecture of Astana. When Nazarbayev describes his first experience with observing the steppe from the top of the mountain as a teenager, he reports that "it indeed seems visually that one as if looks out of a big porthole".¹⁵⁷ It is worth noting that something similar can be experienced in Baiterek. Its golden ball has huge windows which allows one to see not only the city, but even the steppe around it. Thus, Bayterek presents a sky view of the city. According to Laszczkowski, the almost omnipresent images and models of Bayterek attest to Astana's self-referential imagery.¹⁵⁸ In my view, this is in line with Natalie Koch's argument that in Astana not only the monumental, but also the miniature (the miniature here is different models and small size depictions of Astana) is important, because it is "depoliticizing Astana's built landscape".¹⁵⁹ In my view, the miniature plays an important role in the poetics of Astana and as if hides the

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 246.

¹⁵⁶ "Было бы удивительным, если бы мы не придерживались именно куполо-портального стиля в архитектурном строительстве новой столицы Великой Степи". Ibid., 247.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 14.

¹⁵⁸ Laszczkowski, Mateusz. "Seeing, Feeling, Dwelling – For a Panaesthetic Epistemology of the City." In: *The cultural text of Astana: Proceedings of the International Conference*. Astana, 2009, 94.

¹⁵⁹ Natalie Koch, "The Monumental and the Miniature: Imagining 'Modernity' in Astana," *Social & Cultural Geography* 11, no. 8 (2010): 769-787, 778, doi: 10.1080/14649365.2010.521854

poetics of power behind the aesthetic appearance of nice models and many artistic artefacts. This means that Bayterek Tower and its depiction in *At the Heart of Eurasia* is a vivid example of how the poetics of space, city and power can overlap. According to Nazarbayev, the building symbolizes the aspiration to the beautiful and sublime.¹⁶⁰ The form of a sphere is reminiscent not only of perfect geometrical shape and advanced technologies, but also of perfect social order and new perfectly organized space.

In *At the Heart of Eurasia* the images of the steppe and the sky is closely linked to architecture and construction. The whole concept of the memoir suggests that in order to unravel the puzzle of the steppe (that Nazarbayev experienced in his child vision) it was necessary for Nazarbayev to build the new capital as a utopian “city-garden” in the steppe and to embody his visions in constructed forms. The Soviet imagery can appear here, because being in the past a leader of a Soviet republic Nazarbayev was very much familiar with the Soviet discourse of construction. While taken as a metaphor construction is a highly imaginary process, because not just new buildings, but new reality and new society can be constructed. This can especially effectively work in the steppe if it is considered as empty space that needs to be filled with by the products of human activity. In addition to this, construction is the process of giving shape to space. Giving a shape to space means that people can create material and social environment they live in which means that they can create their environment. This can be construction of not only socialism, an independent country, but of life and the body as well. As Laszczkowski shows, the narrative and discourse of construction is highly important in official rhetoric about and everyday practices in Astana.¹⁶¹ In the memoir, Nazarbayev elaborates on social meaning of construction. He asserts that construction provides opportunities for “completely new labour culture, that is, for

¹⁶⁰ Nazarbayev, *V serdtse Evrazii*, 261.

¹⁶¹ Mateusz Laszczkowski, “Building the Future: Construction, Temporality, and Politics in Astana,” *Focaal—Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology* 60 (2011): 77–92, 82, doi:10.3167/fcl.2011.600107

what we call civilised approach to labour”.¹⁶² The idea of such an approach shows that Nazarbayev still regards construction within utopian modernization discourse where construction is supposed to transform people.

I argue that the poetics of *At the Heart of Eurasia* is created by a utopian marriage of discourse of construction (with its technological connotations) and organic images. The third section of the book that is devoted to the process of the development of Astana starts with intricate imaginary picture of stones growing in the steppe. Nazarbayev understands growth of stones both literary – “stones cannot do what plants and animals can, that is, to live and feel, but they can grow” – and metaphorically – when he is writing about the growth of Astana in organic metaphors: “cities... can grow... Years and decades are needed for a brick and concrete ugly duck to become a beautiful swan of modern architectural grace”.¹⁶³ In my view, the concept of growth is used to show Astana as a body that is developing and expanding. Growth here is more than just size increase. It is highly poetic and ontological, and connected with life: “Everything can grow. Metaphorically speaking, even time grows while expanding space”.¹⁶⁴ The organic image of growing stones adds a somewhat fantastic meaning to Astana’s image.

Kurokawa interpreted the concept of growth in a special way. His thinking was utopian in the sense of Bloch’s idea of utopia as *Utopische*, presupposing that the world is unfinished, and it is work in progress.¹⁶⁵ It is utopia in the broader sense that buildings can change, grow and acquire new parts instead of outdated ones. The fate of his famous building the Nakagin Capsule Tower (located in Tokyo) – the building that is composed of two interconnected concrete towers, of eleven and thirteen floors respectively, which

¹⁶² Nazarbayev, *V serdtse Evrazii*, 189.

¹⁶³ “И нужны годы и десятилетия, чтобы кирпично-бетонный “гадкий утенок” превратился в “прекрасного лебедя” современной архитектурной грации ...” Ibid., 188.

¹⁶⁴ “Расти может все - даже время, образно говоря, “растет”, расширяя пространство. Ibid., 188.

¹⁶⁵ Bloch, Ernst. *Tiubingenskoe vvedenie v filosofiuu*. Yekaterinburg: 1997.

accommodate 140 self-contained prefabricated capsules – that is now considered for demolition, shows somewhat utopian character of the architect’s ideas. Opposing modernist industrialism and combining organic imagery with new technologies, the metabolist utopia was a postmodern one.¹⁶⁶ One of the utopian meanings of Astana is synthesis of constructional advancement and organic principles and forms (the building of Khan Shatyr, a big biotic structure, is a good example of the synthesis). This utopian synthetic poetics can be found in Nazarbayev’s memoir. While comparing the poetics of Astana’s urban landscape and the poetics of Nazarbayev’s text about it (*At the heart of Eurasia*), one can find similar tropes in them. To illustrate this, Nazarbayev draws on metabolist architectural discourse. The very titles of the chapters *Stones Grow* and *Stone Garden* exemplify this influence. This means that Kurokawa’s organic metabolist imagery turned out to be fruitful for the memoir and utopian poetics of Astana in general.

Nazarbayev depicts the growth of Astana as growth of a garden unusual for the steppe. In the end of the book, mainly in the chapter devoted to the planting of greenery in Astana, Nazarbayev uses some traditional floral metaphors for urban utopia such as oasis and garden: “The territory of Astana should become one more green oasis on the central Kazakhstan steppes”.¹⁶⁷ He claims that “gardens can be animate and inanimate. Gardens can consist of plants or of stones”.¹⁶⁸ Here he again refers to Japanese stone gardens and love of greenery. According to Nazarbayev, the lack of greenery causes “the sadness of new cities” that emerged in hyper urbanised cities because of the lack of contact with nature. Later he repeatedly mentions the sadness of cities and asserts that a city-garden can escape this feeling. “The souls of city dwellers” gradually die “in concrete jungles”,¹⁶⁹ and “a city

¹⁶⁶ Florian Urban, “Japanese ‘Occidentalism’ and the Emergence of Postmodern Architecture,” *Journal of Architectural Education* 65, no. 2 (2012): 89-102, doi: 10.1111/j.1531-314X.2011.01195.x

¹⁶⁷ “Чтобы территория Астаны... стала еще одним зеленым оазисом на степных просторах Центрального Казахстана”. Nazarbayev, *V serdtse Evrazii*, 283.

¹⁶⁸ “Сады бывают живыми и неживыми. Сады могут состоять из растений и просто из камня”. *Ibid.*, 283.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 283.

without flora is just like a desert”.¹⁷⁰ Nazarbayev contrasts this situation to Astana: “Astana is the opposite. While being open to all the steppe winds, the atmosphere of the city is clean and full of the life-giving fluids that are generated by invigorating energy of the steppes”.¹⁷¹ The metaphors of garden and oasis are associated by Nazarbayev with Astana’s development. In general, this floral or greenery account of the city brings the reader to the conclusion that Astana is a garden in the steppe, and this refers to the well-known Socialist metaphor of the city-garden embedded in Mayakovsky’s famous line “There will be a garden city here”. Astana is not just a garden. It is a garden grown in the steppe. Nazarbayev highlights that the concept of garden city was included in Kurokawa’s general plan as well. Thus, here we see a rather traditional garden (and garden city) as a paradise.

To conclude the analysis of the poetics of space in Nazarbayev’s *At the Heart of Eurasia* and Brezhnev’s *The Virgin Lands*, the steppe fits utopia well, because it promises much of space – real and imaginary. Twice during last 60 years the steppes in Northern Kazakhstan provoked mass production of space. In both the Virgin Lands Campaign and the relocation of the capital to Astana utopia meant the construction of spaces. I argue that actually these two utopias can be viewed as (mass) production of space. The construction makes possible to produce not just new spaces, but new social reality and subjectivities.

The utopia of Astana is based on not just poetics of space, but poetics of space production. The whole city of Astana is a text or even a work of art, that is, an aesthetic and representational project. The very book *At the Heart of Eurasia* is just one more expression and authoritative endorsement of this text. The continuing construction of the city is expected to be seen as a text about the future. In the book the city is seen as the representation of the regime and the nation. Astana is an aesthetical and discursive project (because it allowed to

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 285.

¹⁷¹ “Другое дело - Астана. Открытая всем ветрам степи, атмосфера города чиста и полна жизненными флюидами, навеваемая жизненными соками степных просторов”. Ibid., 285.

generate a strong official discourse of national consolidation) used to legitimize the regime through the production of aesthetic and imaginary language by which the regime could describe itself. The intriguing question regarding the status of Russian and writing in Russian in Kazakhstan is in which language (Kazakh or Russian) the regime tends to describe itself and in which language the ideological poetics of Astana and the official discourse of national consolidation are formulated. It should be noted in this regard that President Nazarbayev still delivers most of his public speeches in Russian.¹⁷² While taking this into account, I would like to stress that the serious demographic shift in the ethnic landscape of the northern Kazakhstan and the whole country connected with outmigration of Slavic population has not led to significant decline of the presence of the Russian language. Even allowing for the fact that Astana is one of most Kazakh cities in the country, Russian is still dominant in the public sector and on the streets of the city. The continuing importance and a special status of Russian in Kazakhstan can be seen in the fact that, although *At the Heart of Eurasia* is devoted to the national consolidation through construction of the proper Kazakh capital,¹⁷³ the book was written in Russian.¹⁷⁴ This means that Russian is still probably the most appropriate language to convey the message about the promotion of Kazakhstani identity. This situation makes Russian in Kazakhstan de facto a national language, or a super-language that belongs to the Kazakhs as much as it belongs to the Russians. Moreover, President Nazarbayev himself can be called a Russophone writer who contributes to the strengthening of the status of writing in Russian and making it into Russophone super-literature. *At the Heart of Eurasia* and other

¹⁷² “Prezident RK ob”iasnil, pochemu vystupaet na dvukh iazykakh,” *kapital.kz*, February 16, 2016, <https://kapital.kz/gosudarstvo/47925/prezident-rk-obyasnil-pochemu-vystupaet-na-dvuh-yazykah.html>

¹⁷³ Bissenova, “The Fortress and the Frontier”.

¹⁷⁴ To the best of my knowledge, this fact has never been mentioned officially for understandable reasons, but the text leaves no doubts that it is written in Russian and is not translated. For example, one of the chapters of the book is actually a well-known line from the poem “Vasilii Tërkin” by a famous Soviet poet Aleksandr Tvardovskii - *Bereg levyi, bereg pravyyi*. This means that the reader of *At the Heart of Eurasia* is supposed to be familiar with Russian poetry in original language.

President Nazarbayev's books increase the capital of the Russian language and writing in Russian in Kazakhstan.

Chapter 2. Making Russophone Kazakh-ness and “Other” Russian-ness in Contemporary Kazakhstani Literature

President Nazarbayev’s *At The Heart of Eurasia* demonstrated a radical political and cultural change in the region of Northern Kazakhstan caused by the creation of the new capital. Astana fulfilled the task of the reinvigoration of the area of Northern Kazakhstan which was important after the traumatic consequences of the dissolution of the USSR. At the same time, Almaty remained the cultural and literary capital of the country. Still almost all leading Russophone writers live in Almaty. The growth of Kazakh-speaking segment of the society only exacerbated the problem of Kazakh and Russian languages existing as if in parallel worlds.¹⁷⁵ The new generation of Kazakhstani Russophone writers addresses this gap between Russian and Kazakh cultural and linguistic realms. The fact that their personal and creative formation took place within the social and cultural environment of independent Kazakhstan decisively impacted the writers’ way of dealing with this gap – they embraced their Kazakhstani identity and tried to bring together Russian-ness and Kazakh-ness in their texts. These creative efforts resulted in an important tendency to the transformation of Russian literature in Kazakhstan into Russophone super-literature that can accommodate Kazakh-ness as well as Russian-ness.

In this chapter, I analyze two main streams within Russophone literature. I consider, on the one hand, the ways the writers of Russian ethnic origin perform other Russian-ness in their literary works and, on the other hand, I examine the intellectual and creative strategies the writers of Kazakh ethnic background employ to adapt the Russian language to the expression of Kazakh-ness. I argue that in both cases the writers do so by developing super-ethnic Kazakhstani stories and identities. This chapter shows that for the younger generation

¹⁷⁵ “Astana-Sankt-Peterburg. Dialogi kul’tur”, 166.

of Kazakhstani Russophone authors their writing becomes a way of their identification with the political, cultural and multiethnic environment they live in. To theoretically account for this strategy of writing as identification, I rely on Paul Ricoeur's concept of narrative identity. Following the idea, one can say that telling a story is producing identity, because, using Niall Williams words "we are our stories". Ricoeur argued:

The notion of narrative identity indicates its fruitfulness in that it can be applied to a community as well as to an individual. We can speak of the self-constancy of a community, just as we spoke of it as applied to an individual subject. Individual and community are constituted in their identity by taking up narratives that become for them their actual history.¹⁷⁶

Ricoeur points out that narrative identity has a circular character – it both expresses and shapes a character. He illustrates this idea by saying that "the historical community called the Jewish people has drawn its identity from the reception of those texts that it had produced."¹⁷⁷ In terms of textual analysis of fiction, this implies that the stories narrated by the writers can tell us about what the writers' identities are. I argue that the younger writers whose works are analysed in this chapter (Odegov, Serebrianskii, Duisenbinov) also draw their identity from their own texts. What is particular about the Kazakhstani Russophone writers is that they start a new tradition, and stories narrated by them can become the foundation for group identity (first of all for their readers).

After Utopia: Traumatic Temporality and Landscapes in Nikolai Verëvochkin's *Man Without a Name* and *Mammoth Tooth: Chronicles of a Dead City*

There was a dramatic break of identity between the projects of the Virgin Lands Campaign and Astana. The characters that dominated Russian literature in Kazakhstan before the 90s and that represented the Soviet society – the virgin landers, exemplary production worker or

¹⁷⁶ Paul Ricoeur, *Time And Narrative*. Volume 3 (The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 247.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 248.

simple people doing their everyday work – became outdated with the radical change of social and economic structure of the new independent country. This situation caused a strong sense of the absence that impacted the post-traumatic imagination of the 1900s. It was a real challenge for the writers to make sense of what happened in their literary works. Against the background of this silence of 90s and early 2000s Nikolai Verëvchkin's novels *Man Without a Name* (published in 2006) and *Mammoth Tooth: Chronicles of a Dead City* (published in 2003) became major literary narratives of ruptured identity in Kazakhstani Russophone literature.¹⁷⁸ *Man Without a Name*¹⁷⁹ is a novel that was awarded Russian Prize in 2005, and it was extremely highly evaluated by Chingiz Aitmatov.¹⁸⁰ The short novel is about a bum living in a park near a cathedral. The events take place after the collapse of “the big country”. This is time of trauma and break. The idea of a traumatic state when previous identity is destroyed and a new one is not there is expressed in the name of the city where the plot unfolds. It is called *Nenuzhensk* which literary means a “city that is not needed” (one can assume due to some hints that this city is Almaty). The name suggests that not only the homeless man, but everyone who lives in the city is a stranger who is detached from the surrounding environment.

Verëvchkin connects the state of being “not needed” with the city inhabitants’ indifference to the past. The alienation is so pervasive that even bronze soldiers standing at the memorial dedicated to WWII feel it. The memorial is located in the park where the bum lives. In the nights, the homeless prepares here, on the eternal flame, his simple meal – pigeons which he catches near the cathedral. For him the eternal flame is no more than a “regular gas stove”, and sometimes it was turned off for non-payment. The idea of traumatic

¹⁷⁸ Nikolai Verëvchkin, “Chelovek bez imeni,” *Druzhba Narodov* 11 (2006), <http://magazines.russ.ru/druzhba/2006/11/ve2.html>; Nikolai Verëvchkin, *Zub Mamonta. Letopis' mērtvogo goroda* (Almaty, 2003).

¹⁷⁹ Leonid Terakopian, “Tektonika razloma. Nikolai Verëvchkin i ego geroi,” *Druzhba Narodov* 6 (2009), <http://magazines.russ.ru/druzhba/2009/6/te14.html>

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

temporality and identity gap here is embodied in the fate of the neglected memorial and how the bronze soldiers look at the cooking: “From the height of the pedestal they were looking at their descendant with some surprise and a grimace of disappointment. They were mistaken while thinking that they were dying for a bright future. The future has come. And it was not bright... The bronze soldiers were killed posthumously. The heart attack ripped their bronze hearts”.¹⁸¹ In this image of the torn hearts of the bronze soldiers Verëvochkin artfully connects all the main ideas of the short novel including amnesia which is the central motif of work – the bum lives his miserable life and has no name because he lost his memory, personal and collective identity. The homeless desperately tries to remember his past, but cannot do so, because every time he encounters barrier, some guilt that prevents him from reunion with his past and lost identity. Instead of remembering his past he experiences eerie hallucinations, nightmares, for example, he sees himself as a living dead lying on the bottom of the lake and seeing everything that is happening around. At some point, the bum cannot separate his life from the nightmares, and all what surrounds him becomes surrealistic. Here we face the problem of “blank spaces” of the past in post-Soviet Russian literature that was examined by Boris Noordenbos in his analysis of Pelevin’s *Chapaev i Pustota*.¹⁸² Noordenbos cites a passage from Michail Kuraev’s novella *Captain Dikshstein* which implies that the uncanny (the fantastic) comes from the “black holes of history”, that is, from the void.¹⁸³ The bum is one who was absorbed by such “black hole”. Overall, in the short novel, this shattered state of the bum’s mind, his amnesia are seen as what is experienced by the whole society, and Verëvochkin suggests that the present can disintegrate if the past is cut off from it.

¹⁸¹ “С некоторым удивлением и гримасой разочарования глядели они с высоты пьедестала на своего потомка. Они заблуждались, думая, что умирают за светлое будущее. Будущее наступило. И оно не было светлым”. Verëvochkin, “Chelovek bez imeni”.

¹⁸² Boris Noordenbos, “Shocking Histories And Missing Memories: Trauma In Viktor Pelevin's *Čapaev i Pustota*,” *Russian Literature* 85 (2016): 43-68, 44, doi:10.1016/j.ruslit.2016.09.003.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 44.

Man Without a Name is chronologically and thematically close to Verëvchkin's novel *Mammoth Tooth: Chronicles of a Dead City* (*Zub Mamonta: Letopis' mērtvogo goroda*), although the former is more explicitly focused on the Kazakhstani context. The main idea of *Mammoth Tooth* can be summarized by two sentences from *Man Without a Name* "The common country was split like a plate in a domestic quarrel. The homeless man was only one of the millions of tiny fragments that no one cared about".¹⁸⁴ The novel was published by Fund Soros-Kazakhstan in 2003 in the series Contemporary Kazakhstani Novel (novels published in the series were awarded the prize with the same name). The main character of the novel, a civil engineer Pavel Kozlov, is homeless in his own city that he built with his own hands. The plot takes place in an imaginary city of Stepnomorsk that was built during the Virgin Lands Campaign. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union it became a dead city with abandoned and decaying many-storey buildings and the omnipresent sense of trauma. During the campaign in order to build the reservoir, that is located near the city, a village Il'inka was flooded. Kozlov remembers his native village of Il'inka nostalgically especially as he sees in the 90s that the utopian project of the reservoir and the city failed. Because of the lack of proper control from the state and dangerous activities close to the dam performed by a local entrepreneur, the dam started to crack, and eventually it is destroyed, but Il'inka cannot be there again. In the short foreword the writer states that the protagonist of the novel "is not the dam. It is the crack in the dam".¹⁸⁵ I argue that the crack here is one of the symbols of emptiness, absence and trauma. It symbolizes the fate of the Virgin Lands utopia and rupture with the utopian past. The whole city and all its inhabitants experience this crack. It disintegrates their identity, social connections, mind and even bodies. The crack is a kind of image that was impossible in the Soviet utopian poetics of the Virgin Lands. Brezhnev does

¹⁸⁴ "Общая страна была расколота, как тарелка в домашней ссоре. Бездомный человек был лишь одним из миллионов крошечных осколков, до которых никому не было дела". Verëvchkin, "Chelovek bez imeni".

¹⁸⁵ Verëvchkin, *Zub Mamonta*, 5.

not describe any particular reservoir, but he stresses the campaign brought infrastructure and modern agriculture to the Northern Kazakhstan.

To analyse this traumatic imagery, theoretically I rely on the concept of the flesh of the world introduced by a French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty who argued that our lived phenomenal body, that belongs not only to us, but to the world as well.¹⁸⁶ The body opens up the world for us by its direct touch with what we can call phenomenal space or the flesh of the world.¹⁸⁷ Based on phenomenological reading of the novel, I argue that Kozlov and other Verëvochkin characters' phenomenal bodies can feel time as much as space.

Through the image of disintegrating and decaying space of the dead city Verëvochkin gives his reader a sense of disintegrating and decaying time. This means that the crack is in the body of time as well. The crack is dismemberment and disintegration of time. In the novel, severe traumatic experience allows Kozlov to feel the flesh of time, that can be felt not when time is normal, but when it is traumatic, disintegrating. I argue that in the novel Kozlov is one who feels the flesh of time, and this makes him a philosopher (he reads philosophical books) who has another sense of time and no illusions about time. Because of his special experience of time he becomes a grave digger which is his occupation in dying Steptomorsk.

I also argue that in the novel's universe this intense feeling of disintegrating time transforms into the vision of time. In my view, *Mammoth Tooth's* main idea is the vision of the end of time, more concretely, of the end of Soviet future-oriented accelerated temporality which, as it is suggested in the novel, probably was artificial and now it dissolves into the natural temporality of the steppe, that is, it comes back to the slow natural pace of the steppe. The writer proposes an interesting view of utopian/post-utopian time. The temporality of Steptomosks (that radically changed with the collapse of the Soviet Union) is deeply rooted

¹⁸⁶ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge, 2002).

¹⁸⁷ Ibid. Merleau-Ponty introduced the concept of the flesh in his book *The Visible and the Invisible*. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968).

in local spatiality. One could argue that Verëvochkin depicts a chronotope of a Soviet utopian city. It has depth and flesh. The text suggests that bright utopian Soviet Steptomorsk was just a small spot, an exception within the natural landscape of the steppe. There is an interesting passage in the novel that portrays the life of the city by combining in one paragraph typical activities of the dwellers in the evening. In the night sky the sound of a jet piloting by “a local Antoine de Saint-Exupery” is heard. From high Steptomorsk looks like “a light spot and a small galaxy in pitch darkness”.¹⁸⁸ There are endlessly kissing couples in love on the reservoir flooded with light. In the gym, basketball players are excited about their game. Young people rush to the summer dance floor. “The guitars are screaming like March cats”.¹⁸⁹ A vocal and instrumental ensemble (a typical name for music groups in the USSR in 60-80s) rattles and groans.¹⁹⁰ However, all this bright world of utopia that became reality is limited to the city, reservoir, and limited space around the city. The natural world around Steptomorsk lives in a different pace. “Yet, once one took a few steps into the darkness out of this cozy light cloud, one is immersed in another millennium.”¹⁹¹ To stress the discrepancy between these different temporalities and to emphasize the old age of the Virgin Lands the mythic image of mammoths is used: “There the ancient winds blew... and against the background of the new moon dark mammoths’ silhouettes looking like ricks of fresh hay were seen”.¹⁹² However, the novel is devoted to the post-Soviet history of Steptomorsk, and only the beginning is dedicated to the memories of the Soviet period. Steptomorsk was choked by the collapse of the big country, because the unimaginable came true – jobs disappeared. The enterprises were shutting down and people were leaving the city. It was like a stampede. “People who just

¹⁸⁸ Verëvochkin, *Zub Mamonta*, 23.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁹¹ “Но стоило сделать несколько шагов в темноту из этого уютного светового облака, и ты погружался в другое тысячелетие”. *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁹² “Там дули древние ветры... и стогами свежего сена на фоне молодой луны темнели силуэты мамонтов”. *Ibid.*, 24.

yesterday cried: “Time Forward!” now with the same enthusiasm ordered: “Time stop! Around! Forward march!”... The young settlement, that did not have time to become a city, overnight was pushed back to the 19th century, and it rapidly degraded in a village. Time stalled in vain, went in the opposite direction”.¹⁹³ Schools closed due to lack of students. Asphalt cracked along the alleys. “Through the rotten, warped flooring of summer dance pavilion thick sagebrush appeared”.¹⁹⁴ The crack emerged in the dam. So, in these passages time is metaphorical, materialized and visualized (in winds, mammoths). It can even be touched, because one can “immerse” in “another millennium”. It is produced by humans, who can direct and give shape to it by saying “Forward!” or “Stop”. What is also highlighted here, different places (the city and its vicinities) have different paces, temporalities. This means that, for Veryovochkin, temporality is not objective universal time, but a variety of temporalities that cannot be detached from places, things, and human activities.

I argue that in the novel the image of mammoths is connected with time, more precisely with the reverse of time that happened in the dead city. The image of the mammoth’s tooth first appears in the novel’s exposition devoted to how Stepnomorsk was built and how it looked like before it became a dead city. Kozlov came to a place where a new bridge across a steppe river should be built. Here he intentionally destroyed a mammoth’s bones by an excavator, and he justified his did by saying: “To hell with the mammoth! We all walk on the bones. It does not matter... The whole globe crunches. Does this mean that we should creep about on tiptoe like a ballerina?”.¹⁹⁵ Suddenly Kozlov felt acute toothache, and was forced to return to the city immediately. What we see in Kozlov’s speech is quite typical

¹⁹³ “Люди, еще вчера кричавшие: время, вперед! – с тем же энтузиазмом скомандовали: «Время, стой! Кругом! Шагом марш!”... Молодое поселение, так и не успев стать городом, как-то сразу, в одночасье было выброшено в девятнадцатый век, стремительно деградировало в деревню. Время, побуксовав вхолостую, покатило в обратную сторону”. Ibid., 151.

¹⁹⁴ “Сквозь прогнивший, покоровившийся настил летней танцплощадки густо повывлезла польнь”. Ibid., 152.

¹⁹⁵ “Черт с ним, с мамонтом! Все мы по костям ходим. Так что с того?.. Весь шарик похрустывает. Что же теперь на цыпочках, как балерина, ходить?”. Ibid., 10.

Soviet discourse of future-centrism with the idea that the past can be sacrificed to the “bright future”. Remains that hinder development can be destroyed to construct utopia, and memory is less important than the future and technology. This is first scene in the novel in the beginning of the fantastic storyline of the book. It introduces the topic of pain and suffering. From this moment when he destroyed the mammoth’s remains Kozlov turned out to be mystically connected with mammoths. As it will be clear later, their fate became his fate. I argue that this connection is what Alexander Etkind calls “the post-Soviet uncanny” that is largely connected with the past and memory.¹⁹⁶ It is produced by the return of the problematic past and defamiliarization which gives to this return new forms.

To understand the myth, its uncanny imagery, one needs to see how the mammoth’s rise from the past is imagined in the beginning of the second chapter. It is like an explosion of something uncanny that was hiding underground or in the past:

White steppe shuddered from an underground explosion and a grove was shattered. Birches and aspens dropped their frost and crumbled like a fan. Breaking the tree roots a shaggy beast rose from the dark bowels in a cloud of steam. Shaking of himself clods of frozen soil, snow and broken trunks like a dog, he raised his trunk toward the dim cold sky and trumpeted hoarsely hour of retribution¹⁹⁷

Here the very way how the mammoth’s rise is imagined is important. It manifests the fate and the necessity of punishment. The mammoth’s trumpeting means that fate is here; it started its work; it haunts. The whole topic of mammoths’ rise implies that when the present is destroyed (it was destroyed by the death of the city caused by the collapse of the USSR), some dark prehistoric past can enter the present in the form of a haunting fateful imagery. Within the whole novel’s idea this means that terrible fate erupts from past to present, if

¹⁹⁶ Alexander Etkind, “Stories Of The Undead In The Land Of The Unburied: Magical Historicism In Contemporary Russian Fiction”, *Slavic Review* 68, no. 03 (2009): 631-658, 644.

¹⁹⁷ “Белая степь содрогнулась от подземного взрыва, и одинокий колокол разверзся. Березы вперемешку с осинами, сбросив с ветвей туман инея, рассыпались веером. Разрывая древесные корни, из темных недр в облаке пара восстал лохматый зверь. Стряхнув с себя по-собачьи комья мерзлой почвы, снег, изломанные стволы, он поднял к тусклому холодному небу хобот и хрипло протрубил час возмездия”. *Ibid.*, 29.

people do not make an effort to maintain the present and properly remember and mourn the past.

The traumatic rupture in the tissue of time made mammoths alive. This rupture reveals some flesh, but not the positive flesh of the world that people can experience in their everyday life being immersed in the world by their lived body, that is, being embodied and emplaced. The usual flesh of the world is connected with progressive temporality oriented toward the future. However, in the novel the dead city also has flesh, but this is the flesh of trauma, decay, suffering and desperation. Here temporality loses its progressive character and the very passage of time becomes traumatic. It does not lead to the future any longer, but to some desperate timelessness. Kozlov sees this flesh of trauma as mammoth images:

Gray mammoths plodded along blizzard streets. They were walking one after another as an endless file. Not turning their muzzle away from prickly snow. They pushed those of them who were lingering by their tusks. They were silent as soldiers in the ranks... Kozlov was pinched by the shaggy, cold bodies in the middle of the herd heading to nowhere. He also pushed those before him by his tusks, and he was pushed... It was impossible to tear himself away from them. The avalanche of bodies took him far and far to the night.¹⁹⁸

Having become a mammoth in the nightmare, Kozlov is immersed in the senseless passage of time, because here the file or rank of silent mammoths symbolizes the passage of time as hopelessness and meaninglessness. The “avalanche of bodies” means empty and meaningless corporeality as this avalanche has no direction and purpose. Based on this, I argue that in the novel the desperation, fate and meaningless temporality acquire the flesh of mammoths. It is important that in the novel mammoths are described with physical details. They are depicted as real living beings breathing, making noise and pissing. But still one can ask why Veryovochkin chose mammoths, not other creatures. Most probably, mammoths became so important symbol in the novel because one can imagine that they lived in the age

¹⁹⁸ “По метельным улицам брели седые мамонты. Они шли друг за другом нескончаемой вереницей. Не отворачивая морды от колючего снега. Подталкивая бивнями замешкавшихся на перекрестках. Безмолвные, как солдаты в строю... Козлов был зажат косматыми, холодными телами в центре бредущего в неизвестность стада. Он тоже подталкивал бивнями идущих впереди, и его подталкивали... Но вырваться было невозможно. Лавина тел уносила его все дальше в ночь”. Ibid., 94.

associated with cold, loneliness and extinction. Veryovochkin's idea behind the image of mammoths is that a return to cold wilderness can happen anytime. Although the writer is preoccupied with the specific region of the Northern Kazakhstan, mammoths symbolizes the prehistoric common past which means that the retreat into the cold and extinction can happen with anybody anywhere in the world. The mammoths' temporality is the temporality of fateful repetition. It haunts, because the situation of extinction can repeat in the world (and as a metaphor in the human world) again and again.

The image and story of Stepnomorsk starts and ends with the image of mammoths, making their history circular. In the beginning the destruction of the mammoth's remains meant that the past was disregarded by Stepnomorsk builders, and in the end the appearance of mammoths indicates that Stepnomorsk's dwellers failed to achieve the utopian future they were aimed at. The last episode taking place in the city has a very important symbolic meaning. It shows the end of time or a deadlock of time, which caused the death of the city as well as madness of some of its last dwellers. When Kozlov dies, his friend and classmate nicknamed Grach, one of the very few remaining inhabitants, remains alone. Once he remembers that many years ago when the city was very young he and his classmates buried a bottle of champagne near their school after their prom. They swore to dig it up together in the far future. But now only Grach was in the city, so "everyone is here". When he digs it up, the bottle turned out to be filled with withered leaves and dollars rolled into tubes. This is how their classmate Shumnyi tried to give money to Grach and mainly to Kozlov. Shumnyi wanted Kozlov to spend the money on his alleged son Ruslan's education. Grach makes some minor efforts to find out where Ruslan has gone after the death of his alleged father. Occasionally Grach comes to Kozlov's grave and while clinking his glass with the headstone promises to go to find Ruslan. He promises that "right tomorrow he will buy a decent suit and will go". After that the narrator's remark follows: "However, as it is well known, tomorrow

never comes”.¹⁹⁹ Because he was drinking heavily, Grach proves to be in timelessness where there is no tomorrow or the future. There is only the same drunken present. “Probably days, months or years has passed. Once he finds himself in the weeds with a broken head. The only on the whole planet. In the dark abyss the full moon hangs that he cannot recognize.”²⁰⁰ He tries to find something in his pockets, but there is nothing apart from a burnt matchstick. “He drunk away the last thing he had. His soul. His empty body was filling with the great void of universal grief. While throwing his head back, he howled”.²⁰¹ I stress that the universal grief is depicted here as that emptiness or absence that underlies life. This is in accordance with the whole post-traumatic mood of post-Soviet literature in the 1990s, because, according to Hans Gunther, within the “post-Soviet emptiness” the various imaginary of the void became a trope and concept.²⁰² In *Mammoth Tooth* the grief and void can almost be touched, so they as if have their own flesh. The flesh of the void affects Grach, and this affect makes him howl. So the effect of social and existential trauma is depicted here in an embodied way, because void, grief fill Grach’s body. The crucial symbolic and tragic meaning of this last scene in Steptomorsk is again emphasized by the image of mammoths: “Looking like seven red mops mammoths were staying in silence around the howling man”.²⁰³ It is worth noting that the mammoths here do not do anything as if everything has already been done, and they just see the result of the fate and retribution they symbolize.

In *Mammoth Tooth*, Verëvochkin expresses the idea of trauma not only through mammoths’ imagery but also gives a very physical, palpable sense of trauma by linking trauma to cold. The traumatic mood of the dead city is expressed in some passages that give

¹⁹⁹ “Но, как известно, завтра никогда не наступает”. Ibid., 316.

²⁰⁰ “Дни ли прошли, месяцы, годы? Однажды он очнулся в бурьяне с разбитой головой. Один на планете. В черной бездне висела полная Луна, которую он не узнал”. Ibid., 316.

²⁰¹ “Он пропил последнее, что у него было. Душу. Порожнее тело заполняла великая пустота вселенской скорби. Запрокинув голову, он завыл”. Ibid., 316.

²⁰² Hans Günther, “Post-Soviet Emptiness (Vladimir Makanin And Viktor Pelevin)”, *Journal Of Eurasian Studies* 4, no. 1 (2013): 100-106, doi:10.1016/j.euras.2012.10.001.

²⁰³ “Семью рыжими копнами вокруг воющего человека молча стояли мамонты”. Ibid., 316.

phenomenological impression of freezing and decaying. It is very cold inside the flats, including the one Kozlov lives in, because there is no central heating in the city. In the novel winter and cold (their moods) is one of the major sensual images referring to the flesh of trauma and desperation. Cold highlights the void:

He went to the window and scraped out with a knife a hole in a thick layer of ice. He warmed it with his breath and rubbed with his hand. The neighboring house stared at him grimly with empty eye sockets of dozens of window openings. There is no something blacker, more saturated and hopeless than those gaps in the concrete skulls. As though eternity itself is hidden in a looted and doomed building. Apart from this blackness and concrete, nothing left in the building.²⁰⁴

The roof of the apartment block was also destroyed. The looters took roofing iron from it, and “the exposed roof timbers stuck out like the ribs of a prehistoric animal”.²⁰⁵ The metaphor of the apartment block’s skull suggests that the building, formerly alive, is now dead and lost its flesh. The building is deprived of the flesh that human dwelling gave to it. A void’s look is also a vital metaphor, because the void is looking from what previously was the flesh of human housing and dwelling. Actually here the reader sees a dead body of an apartment block. It is as if suggested in the passage that experience of looking at the destroyed building can be compared with unpleasant experience of looking at a skeleton. The metaphor “The exposed roof timbers stuck out like the ribs of a prehistoric animal” suggests that the destroyed building is suddenly thrown from modernity to the ancient and scary past (of mammoths), and the skeleton turns into a mammoth’s remains. “Empty eye sockets of dozens of window openings” and “gaps in the concrete skulls” mean that the building is a hole in the space-time. Black colour is a symbol of void and eternity of death. Thus, being taken together with dozens or probably hundreds of other decaying buildings the apartment

²⁰⁴ “Он подошел к окну и выскреб ножом в толстом слое льда прорубь. Отдышал ее, потер ладонью. Соседний дом угрюмо уставился на него пустыми глазницами десятков оконных проемов. Нет цвета чернее, насыщеннее и безнадежнее, чем эти провалы в бетонных черепах. Словно сама вечность прячется в разграбленном и обреченном здании. Кроме этой черноты и бетона от здания ничего не осталось”. Ibid., 31.

²⁰⁵ “Обнажившиеся стропила торчали ребрами доисторического животного”. Ibid., 32.

block can be seen as (anti-)flesh of decaying or emptiness. In this whole situation of the dead city, the image of eternity is not positive, but rather negative referring to eternity not to as fullness of existence, but as timelessness. This image is reminiscent of the circular repetitive temporality of mammoths. To sum up, in the passage the destroyed body of the buildings and the city as a whole affects Kozlov visually and through the pervasive sense of cold. The body/flesh of the apartment block he lives in is destroyed. This means that the extended flesh of Kozlov himself (his house and city) is injured.

To finish the analysis of *Mammoth Tooth*, I would like to stress that in the above-mentioned passage and in the whole imagery of mammoths as nightmares one can see that Verëvochkin's uncanny largely consists of phantoms. I argue that in the novel they embody the absence as an ontological characteristic of a posttraumatic condition. "Phenomena may have a powerful presence in people's lives precisely because of their absence".²⁰⁶ In *Mammoth Tooth* former identity, solidarity, utopia of the Virgin Lands (in the novel, Steptomorsk is not just an isolated city; it is an intrinsic part of the Virgin Lands project) is what is absent, and this absence interferes with people's life. There is the paradox of "the presence of absence".²⁰⁷ The experience of phantom pains shows that the presence and absence can be interconnected in a rather obscure way.²⁰⁸ Merleau-Ponty introduced the concept of equivocal or ambiguous presence which is actually half presence and half absence.²⁰⁹ He illustrates this idea by analysing phantom limbs and pain.²¹⁰ I argue that these theoretical ideas can allow us to understand better the phenomenological depth of *Mammoth Tooth*. Due to this depth, this novel contributes to our understanding of the experience of post-Soviet trauma by depicting the flesh of time and trauma. These "embodied" aspects of

²⁰⁶ Mikkel Bille, Frida Hastrup and Tim Flohr Sørensen, *An Anthropology of Absence: Materializations of Transcendence and Loss* (New York: Springer, 2010), 4.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁰⁸ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 93.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 93.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 93-94.

Verëvochkin's novel are highly important (one could argue that the novel reveals something important about post-Soviet trauma not only on the level of explicit message, plot, but also on the level of the reader's bodily sensation during reading. These sensations are caused by the flesh of the novel's text) in the context of body symbolism and the body as metaphor of synthesis and unity in Nakipov's *The Circle of Ashes* that will be analyzed in the third chapter of the thesis. There we will see that the image of the flesh/body is vital again to understanding identity – in Nakipov not of the break, but of consolidation of identity.

To conclude this section, I would like to place the novel in the context of the formation of Kazakhstani identity. In my view, the novel was written in the period of identity uncertainty in Kazakhstani Russian writers when identity was more negative (focused on the loss, absence) than positive (focused on the new national consolidation). The novel is the apocalypse of the Soviet epoch, and for this reason the present is seen in the context of the past. I argue that by this novel the writer as if drew a line under the past which made this novel symbolically important for the history of Russian literature in Kazakhstan. Here the writer did the most of what Russian literature in Kazakhstan (not yet Kazakhstani Russophone literature) could do – he described the end of big Soviet / Russian identity. In other words, Verëvochkin truthfully depicted the end of Russian domination in the region. A Kazakhstani critic Zira Naurzbaeva sees in *Mammoth Tooth* “the myth about the fate of culture, about Russian intelligentsia culture in Kazakhstan”.²¹¹ She points out to the lack of Kazakh characters in the novel, although, as she adds, this could reflect the real situation in a Virgin Lands city. My assumption that the reason of this lack was the still strong sense of absence of the previous identity, the necessity to get rid of the previous understanding of Russian-ness. Against this background of pain and absence only a new generation of writers with new identity and type of subjectivity could say something really new.

²¹¹ Zira Naurzbaeva, “Adzhigerei, Ruslan i M.: Tri sud'by kazakhstanskoi kul'tury. Nemifologicheskie zametki o sovremennom kazakhstanskom romane,” *otuken.kz*, July 11, 2010, <http://otuken.kz>

Other Russianness and Russophone Kazakhstani Subjectivity in Il'ia Odegov and Iurii Serebrianskii's Prose

The fate of Russian intelligentsia in Kazakhstan that was portrayed by Verëvchkin in *Mammoth Tooth* posed an important question of what it means to be a Russian or Russophone writer in the country experiencing radical political and social transformation and pursuing nation-building project. It was very difficult for the writers with Russian ethnic background from the older generation to rethink their Russian-ness, most probably because it meant to abandon their identity of a Russian (Soviet Russian) writer that was highly praised within the Soviet literary hierarchy where Russian literature was seen at once as mediating between and superior to national literatures of the Soviet peoples. I argue that in this situation the new generation of writers that was largely formed in post-independent Kazakhstan was free of this hierarchical understanding of writing in Russian and naturally accepted the fact that previous understanding of Russian-ness no longer reflects the real political and cultural situation, and therefore new ways to approach Russian-ness should be developed. Among the younger generation of writers Il'ia Odegov and Iurii Serebrianskii are especially sensitive to this shift, and in their literary works they propose a wide range of new Kazakhstani Russian subjectivities and narrative identities. To conceptualize their and some other writers' approach, I will refer to it as other Russian-ness while meaning by that a type of Russian-ness as it can now be performed in independent Kazakhstan and that is different from how Russian ethnic identity can be understood and implemented in Russia. Other Russian-ness also means a type of Russian-ness that incorporated what was traditionally perceived as the other of the Russians. One cannot find explicit other Russian-ness in Verevchkin or other ethnically Russian writers from the older generation. This is connected with the fact that whereas Verevchkin demonstrated the disintegration of Soviet identity, space and time, Odegov and

Serebrianskii aim at integration within Kazakhstani identity. They develop positive identity which is not based on trauma of the collapse of USSR and nostalgia for the Soviet past, although in Serebrianskii's works (who was born in 1975, making him older and more experienced than Odegov) some post-traumatic feelings can still be found, but not as much as in Verëvochkin's novels.

Based on my reading of Odegov and Serebrianskii's texts I argue that their Russophone literary works have specific features that provide opportunities for the construction and expression of other Russian-ness. A Russophone text can have additional dimension of meaning that is absent in a Russian text written within mono-cultural Russian context. This dimension is produced by the gap between an ethnically Russian writer and his or her own Russian-ness (this means that a Russophone writer can as if suspend his or her Russian-ness for some time). Where a Russian writer stops by taking for granted his or her Russian identity as what ultimately defines his or her self-understanding, at this point for a Russophone writer his or her thinking of his or her identity can only start. I argue that for Odegov and Serebrianskii Russian-ness is not an all-sufficient characteristic. For them, it is defined in its correlation with otherness, mainly Kazakh-ness. They incorporate this otherness and transform it into Kazakhstani-ness. To illustrate this theoretical point, Odegov's short story "Purusha" can be considered.²¹² I argue that in the work Odegov experiments with (his own) Russian-ness by estranging it, to use Victor Shklovskii's term. A young boy living in a small village in the Himalayas meets a stranger whose appearance is different from how people from the boy's country look. The mysterious stranger is lying among the stones, and his eyes are closed (he is supposedly a Russian climber with brain injury caused by a landslide, but the boy does not know this). Kamal thinks that he is sleeping Purusha, a gigantic first man in Hinduist mythology. In the myth that was told to the boy by his father,

²¹² Il'ia Odegov, "Purusha", *Druzhba Narodov* 3 (2012), <http://magazines.russ.ru/druzhba/2012/3/o7.html>

Purusha realized that he is alone, since there is nothing at all around him, and he starts to imagine the world. After that Purusha fell asleep to protect the world from the dissolution that might be caused by his awakening. In the short story, the boy takes the injured stranger to the village on his horse. While the stranger intermittently regains consciousness, Kamal asks him “Purusha?” and repeatedly receives the answer “Yes, from Russia”. But Kamal takes this as the confirmation that he is facing real Purusha, since the boy most likely does not have any idea of Russia.²¹³ To interpret this, in “Purusha” the writer looks at a Russian man (and therefore at Russian-ness more generally) through the eyes of a non-Russian boy who has never seen Russians. By this in line with estrangement Odegov makes familiar (Russian-ness is very much familiar to him and his audience reading the short story in Russian) unfamiliar. This gives Odegov (and his reader) a unique chance to look at Russian-ness as if from outside. The situation of non-overlap of a Russian / Russophone writer with his or her Russian-ness can give an interesting creative and intellectual opportunity. I argue that, in this short story, Odegov demonstrates other Russian imagination of Russian-ness that is more difficult to achieve for a Russian writer who cannot (or at least this is more difficult for him or her) suspend his or her Russian-ness and cannot look at it as if from outside. Later we will see that this kind of one’s non-overlap with one’s own self and identity is very much typical for Kazakhstani Russophone writing, and, particularly, it is the defining feature of Serebrianskii’s short novel *Destination. Road pastoral*, which will be analysed further in this section.²¹⁴

While turning to the analysis of other Odegov’s works I argue that his literary career as a whole shows that for a Russophone writer the process of identification or looking for his or her identity can be never ending. It is a work in progress that is embedded in the process of writing and it impacts imagined identity landscape produced by the writer. Odegov (born in

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Iurii Serebrianskii, *Schastlivaia zhizn’ zarubezhnogo cheloveka: Povesti i rasskazy* (Izdatel’skie resheniia, 2017), 5-76.

1981) is a writer who performs other Russian-ness both in his literary works and his way of life. He is a Sufi Muslim, and he is married to the Russophone Kazakh poet Aigerim Tazhi. Trained in foreign languages, he travelled much, and this experience impacts his self-consciousness. The evidence of this impact on Odegov's personality is his complex religious beliefs that apart from Sufism include different religious ideas and esoteric outlook.²¹⁵ For example, he studied with and was ordained by some religious teachers in Tibet.²¹⁶ As it was already cited, in one of his interviews Odegov said "Kazakhs are closer and more dear to me than Russians from Russia".²¹⁷ All these different influences and attachments make Odegov a cosmopolitan personality with potentially many identities, although his Kazakhstani identity is conspicuously present in his prose.

Odegov's cosmopolitan way of thinking can be seen in that there is a variety of characters and subjective worlds belonging to different ethnicities, cultures, social classes, religions and ages in his works. I argue that for Odegov his Russophone literary text is the realm where he can creatively manifest his good knowledge of different cultures and literatures. His empathic understanding of Kazakh subjectivity is vivid in his short story "Sheep" where the narrator's perspective often coincides with the perspective of the protagonist, a Kazakh woman Rafiza (about her 50) who lives in aul (rural area).²¹⁸ In the short story, her everyday life and feelings are described in detail. The reader can see Odegov's interest in Islam in his short story "Namaz" where a boy incidentally sees how an adult man, his uncle whom he has never seen before, performs the Islamic prayer.²¹⁹ The boy is fascinated with his uncle's movements, and his rhythmic bows remind him of sea waves.²²⁰

²¹⁵ "Kazakhi mne blizhe i rodnee, chem rossiiskie russkie: Interv'iu s Il'ei Odegovym," Sandzhar Ianyshev, *fergananews.com*, November 20, 2016, <http://www.fergananews.com/article.php?id=9167>

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Il'ia Odegov, "Ovtsa", *Druzhba Narodov* 10 (2013), <http://magazines.russ.ru/druzhba/2013/10/3o.html>

²¹⁹ Il'ia Odegov, "Namaz", *Novyi Mir* 1 (2014), http://magazines.russ.ru/novyi_mi/2014/1/6o.html

²²⁰ Ibid.

By means of this small detail Odegov introduces the reader both to a child's imagination and depicts an aesthetic charm of the Islamic ritual. In "Purusha" the writer shows fascination a young boy living in a small village in the Himalayas experience while he listens to Hinduist myth of a cosmic man Purusha.²²¹ These examples demonstrate that in his writing Odegov tends to develop images and characters that are traditionally associated with Russophone literature written by non-Russian authors rather than with Russian literature written by ethnically Russian authors (for example, Odegov explores topics marginal for Russian literature such as life of Muslims; he tries to describe the internal world of characters who grown up in completely non-Russian environment, etc.).

I argue that this way of thinking is linked to Odegov's "other" Russian-ness, and it is particularly strongly present in how he interprets the iconic Russian female name Tat'iana in his short novel *Liubaia Liubov'*.²²² The writer defines his short novel as a "concert in seven parts" with each part being supposed to remind one of a particular music genre. The seven parts are very loosely connected with one another on the level of the plot, but they are connected by music themes. The only characters who are present in several parts is the couple Tat'iana and Egor, whose love story is told in the first part of the short novel titled *In One Boat*.²²³ When Egor first meets Tat'iana and learns her name, he "wisecracks" that "in the name Europe and Asia converge, that is, the Slavic "tat" and the Turkic "dzhan", and the result is "the soul of a villain".²²⁴ The obsolete Russian word "tat" means thief, and it is of proto-Slavic origin (this word can be found in other Slavic languages as well).²²⁵ The Turkic word *dzhan*, or *zhan* in Kazakh spelling and pronunciation, means soul, and is one of the

²²¹ Odegov, "Purusha".

²²² П'я Odegov, *Liubaia Liubov': Povesti i rasskazy* (Moscow: Fond SEIP, 2013), 183-246.

²²³ Ibid., 183-191.

²²⁴ "В имени этом сходятся Европа с Азией, славянский "тать" и тюркская "джан", и получается этакая "душа злодея". Ibid., 184.

²²⁵ See <http://vasmer.slovaronline.com/%D0%A2/%D0%A2%D0%90/13340-TAT>

basic concept in the Turkic languages.²²⁶ The word is a part of many Turkic names. Kazakhs also use it as an endearment to stress the sense of proximity and benevolence (in Kazakh, the address *zhanym* literary means “my soul”). Within the context of the short novel this interpretation of the name Tat’iana is important, because Tat’iana is the only character who appears in all/most parts of the text (her husband Egor is only mentioned later), and she symbolizes femininity and love.

I argue that this understanding of the name is an example of how Odegov’s “other” Russian-ness works creatively – in this case, it saturates and expands a Russian word and ultimately a Russophone literary work through the incorporation of additional meanings, new linguistic associations and images. In particular, this effect is achieved by Odegov’s suggestion that the name Tat’iana includes the suffix *dzhan*. If this is so, then the name sounds and can be felt as very much Kazakh or more generally as Turkic. Here Odegov introduces associations and imagines connections that are not present in traditional usage of the Russian name, and by that the Russian word absorbs non-Russian meanings. This speaks to the fact that here Odegov looks at Russian-ness from a specific angle – a Kazakh, or more generally Turkic, one. For him Turkic linguistic and cultural background is the context within which he makes sense of Russian-ness.

What is especially important here is the fact that this interpretation of the name is not only about a particular word; it is about the re-consideration of the whole Russian cultural and literary myth concerning the name Tat’iana. Tat’iana is an iconic female name of Russian Literature, because Tatiana Larina is the main female character of Alexander Pushkin’s *Evgenii Onegin*. In the imagination of the Russian reader the character and consequently the name is associated with the classic ideal of the Russian woman who is ardent, dreamy and

²²⁶ One could remember that the word *dzhan* is the title of Andrei Platonov’s short novel *Dzhan* devoted to an imagined people of the same name living in “the middle of the Asian desert”. See Nariman Skakov, “Prostranstva ‘Dzhana’ Andreia Platonova”, *Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie* 107 (2013), <http://www.nlobooks.ru/node/2787>

faithful. It is stressed in *Evgenii Onegin* that Tat'iana is “Russian in her soul”, or Russian by her nature. In terms of her identity Tat'iana Larina belongs to Russian aristocracy, and there is nothing Oriental or Turkic in her life style and character. Usually the name Tat'iana is either not translated at all or translated (from Ancient Greek) as “foundress” or “she who arranges” (which is rather the opposite to Odegov's “the soul of a villain”).²²⁷

However, despite all the differences in interpretation of the name in Odegov and Russian Literature, in fact Tat'iana from *Liubaia Liubov'* and Pushkin's Tatiana Larina have much in common, especially in the third part of the novel titled *Monster*. For the main character here, a Kazakh young man Erken, Tat'iana is the muse as much as Tat'iana Larina is for Evgenii Onegin. The story tells how Erken, a shepherd who grazes a sheep flock in the steppe, meets Tat'iana in the house of the local huntsman where she waits for her husband and son's return from fishing. Having seen Tat'iana combing her hair in her room, Erken wants to catch her attention and lies to her that he had just seen the corpse of her husband and son who died in a car accident. In desperation, Tatiana hugs Erken, and he feels as if he experiences again the smell and tenderness of his mother. Then the fishermen come back, and Tatiana realizes the whopping lie. In this moment a huge dog living in the cage escapes it, and he is about to pounce on Tat'iana. Erken blocks his path and dies. This story has a clear psychoanalytic idea of a traumatized and not completely emotionally adult man seeking for a maternal figure and unconsciously employing neurotic mechanism of lying to escape his painful memories of his mother having died of cancer when he was a young child. Finally, Erken saves the “beautiful girl-mother”²²⁸ whom he saved many times before, in his child imagination. The similarity of the two Tat'ianas enriches and complicates Odegov's interpretation of the name – now the archetypical and maternal character of Tat'iana is

²²⁷ <http://www.pravmir.ru/tatyanin-den-25-yanvaryaya-sila-very-i-voli/>
<http://www.krestilnoe.ru/imena-zhenskie/tatyana/>

²²⁸ Odegov, *Liubaia Liubov'*, 211.

associated with the idea of the Turkic roots. The name Tat'iana also includes the idea of mediation, because the name brings together Europe and Asia. In *Monster*, the Kazakhization of the name Tat'iana is complemented by Russification of the Kazakh name Erken. Erken's mother called him Kesha (which is a diminutive form of Russian name Innokentii). For him the memories about his childhood when he hid in the closet and enjoyed the smell of his mother's clothes are still vital. These memories are deep in his mind, and for this reason Kesha is a true name of his deep subjectivity. Thus, we see that in *Liubaia Liubov'* the Russian name Tat'iana acquires Kazakh-ness, and, on the other hand, the Kazakh name Erken receives a Russified form. This can be interpreted in such a way that for Odegov Russian-ness includes essential Kazakh-ness and vice versa a Kazakh character can have Russian-ness as a part of his or her subjectivity.

While many Odegov's characters are rather certain about identity or mixture of identities, Serebrianskii's protagonists are more in search for their self which causes their melancholy. Serebrianskii is one of the most successful contemporary Russophone Kazakhstani writers. His short novels *Destination: Road Pastoral* (published in 2010) and *Prazhaki* (published in 2014) were awarded the Russian Prize in 2010 and 2014 respectively. *Destination* is a literary work decidedly focused on the search for identity. It is most probable that the main character of the short novel is autobiographical.²²⁹ The protagonist travels much. For some time, he works as a guide in Thailand (this is a fact from Serebrianskii's real biography). In every place abroad, he feels that his is different from people around him, and sometimes he feels alienated. He experiences this feeling in a big city in Russia as well (probably Moscow which speaks to the protagonist's other Russian-ness). Only mountains close to Almaty are depicted as a place where he feels comfortable. The short novel starts with the description of boarding a ferry in Istanbul in a chapter titled *The Ferry Goes to*

²²⁹ Serebrianskii, *Schastlivaia zhizn'*.

Kabatach.²³⁰ For the protagonist (the first-person narration is employed in the work) this is a chance to see many different people whose behavior and especially cultural characteristics he watches carefully. By noticing how these people act he understands himself, and he looks at the ferry deck as if at a theater stage where different types of human beings are displayed. For example, he describes how a Turkish man reacts to the fact that dirty water was poured over his wife and children: “The insulted father began a showdown with the administration of the ferry in the person of the barman”.²³¹ But later he calms down. What the reader can see from the protagonist’s observations of this kind is the fact of his constant melancholic reflexivity and his vague underlying feeling that he is not like those people he sees around.

I argue that here the narrator’s self-understanding works as if in the reversed order – his sense of himself results from his observation of others. The situation of the road, the journey gives him many opportunities for the comparison of different cultures, subjectivities. The protagonist notices other people including Americans, Europeans. Afterwards he reflects again on Turks, their appearance and a way of dressing. He also notices that an American family acts aloof and a little arrogant. What is important here is that this preoccupation with people who surround him is caused not by the protagonist’s attachment to them, but rather vice versa by some alienation from the scene. The reader can even imagine that the protagonist is forced to travel by some circumstances. There is the distance between him and all these people, and this distance transforms his observations into melancholic reflection on his own identity and subjectivity. This reflection becomes evident when he sees how two lovers from Europe clink their glasses. The protagonist thoughts: “They have taken this from us. Previously they did not clink glasses. We, the Soviets, made them crazy. However, maybe

²³⁰ Ibid., 8-14.

²³¹ “Оскорбленный отец начал напоказ выяснять отношения с администрацией парома в лице бармена”. Ibid., 9.

I am confusing something”.²³² There is a wordplay here – in Russian the verb *choknut'sia* (to clink glasses) is the same as the verb for to “go mad”. This is the moment when the Soviet identity that is deeply ingrained in the main character expresses itself. However, this is not just Soviet nostalgia, because in general the protagonist is not so much nostalgic – he is rather looking for more clear understanding of his current identity. At this point, it becomes clear who the protagonist is – he is one who can be vaguely described as a (former) Soviet man, although this identity is rather diffuse and not clearly articulated in the text. It seems that the protagonist does not know clearly who he is, and he seeks to understand this by looking at all these foreigners who are around him. The next time the main character’s identity reveals itself is the moment when he recognizes a Russian girl on the ferry. He identified her as a Russian when she was talking on her mobile phone. Having described this, the narrator reflects on the language he himself employed to portray this episode: “I write “mobile”, because if you are not one from us, not from Kazakhstan, you probably will not understand the word “*sotka*”. But we talk on “*sotka's*”, and this is good with us”.²³³ The Russian word “*sotka*” is a vernacular shortened form for a “cell phone” which is different from more frequently used expression “mobile phone” (the word “*sotka*” is rather a Kazakhstani regionalism) . Again the protagonist expresses his identity through reflecting on concepts culturally specific for some “we”, “us”, but now he refers clearly to his Kazakhstani identity. In the chapter, the protagonist continues his reflections on his own identity: “I could live in Istanbul too. I am a man from the East. Hijabs do not scare me”.²³⁴ He acknowledges that his Kazakh is not good, and he regrets that he does not speak either Kazakh or Turkish. In general, this chapter sets the tone and features main topics of the short novel.

²³² “У нас переняли. Раньше они ведь не чокались. Это мы, советские люди, чокнули их. Хотя, может быть, я что-то и путаю”. Ibid., 10.

²³³ “Пишу “мобильному”, ведь если вы не наш, не из Казахстана, слова “сотка” вы скорее всего не поймете. А мы разговариваем по “соткам”. И ничего”. Ibid., 12.

²³⁴ “Я бы тоже смог жить в Стамбуле. Я — восточный мужчина. Хиджабы меня не пугают”. Ibid., 13.

Later in the short novel, the protagonist describes his life and work in Thailand as questioning the accepted view of this country as a place of joy and brightness. He hates the place where he lives in Thailand. At the same time, he also hates other resort places. In one of the chapters, in Karlovy Vary he thinks that Karlovy Vary is “hell. Here there are all the evils of mankind. Excitement, fornication, greed, luxury, old age. There is hydrogen sulphide here”.²³⁵ Later in a “northern city’s” (most probably Moscow) metro, on the one hand, he is pleased to recognize “I am like all these people”,²³⁶ but, on the other hand, he admits: “This is a northern nation. It is unsunned here. It is lighter here under the ground than outside”.²³⁷ As it was already mentioned, the protagonist is “a man from the East”. For this reason, although in the “northern city” they speak Russian, the protagonist perceives the city as strange to him. He feels stressed: “You cannot relax in strange northern cities”.²³⁸ This means that his Russian-ness does not define completely his identity, and it is different from Russian-ness he sees in the city. The protagonist relaxes only in the penultimate chapter *Kazbek*, where he reflects on what the mountains mean for his native city’s inhabitants. Although the city is not named, a local toponym (urban area of Gornyi gigant) testifies that it is Almaty. In the moment when the protagonist returns to the city from hiking in the mountains, he is free from his constant strain. He just enjoys a calm August in his native landscape.

I argue that the short novel’s title (*Destination*) and its definition of the genre (*pastoral*) are the key to the text. The protagonist can arrive at his destination (the place of pastoral) only through experiencing and accepting otherness, traveling, being in between places and identities. I assume that Serebrianskii draws on European literary tradition of

²³⁵ “Карловы Вары и есть ад. Здесь есть все пороки человечества. Азарт, блуд, алчность, роскошь, старость. Есть сероводород”. Ibid., 50.

²³⁶ “Я — свой”. Ibid., 63.

²³⁷ “Северный народ. Не согретый солнцем. Под землей у них светлее, чем снаружи”. Ibid., 63.

²³⁸ “Нельзя расслабляться в чужих северных городах». Ibid., 64.

pastoral and how it is transformed through time.²³⁹ In his short novel, pastoral and melancholia meets again as it was in the European literature of the Enlightenment.²⁴⁰ In *Serebrianskii* the genre of pastoral is reconsidered. It is not a story about the peaceful and harmonious life of shepherds. It is thoughts about the road. It is a melancholic journey which presupposes that wherever one is and whatever one sees, one always returns to the same questions of who one is and where one's place is and what is one's destination. I argue that one should understand the word "destination" in the context of the genre – the protagonist looks for what he could see as pastoral, but it is difficult to find this destination. In this regard, it is vital that in the original Russian title the English word "destination" is used.

"Destination" is a word that is associated with traveling and tourist industry (and the main character works in this industry). Whereas Thailand is one of the most popular tourist destinations, this is not the protagonist's true destination. Although his destination seems to be his home city of Almaty, it is difficult to reach.

Russophone Kazakh-ness in Anuar Duisenbinov, Auezkhan Kodar and Zira

Naurzbaeva

In the two previous sections of the chapter the transformation of Russian-ness in post-independent Kazakhstani Russophone literature was analysed. We have seen that Russian-ness has evolved from Soviet Russian-ness linked to colonial history in *Verëvochkin* to Kazakhstani Russophone narrative identities and subjectivities in *Odegov* and *Serebrianskii*. The main argument was that other Russian-ness demonstrated by the two latter writers is considerably based on their looking as if from the outside at their own Russian-ness. In this

²³⁹ N.T. Pakhsar'ian, "'Svet' i 'Teni' pastoral' v Novoe Vremia: Pastoral' i melancholiia," *ec-dejavu.ru*, accessed May 17, 2017, <http://ec-dejavu.ru/p/Pastoral.html>

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

section, the other crucial segment of Russophone Kazakhstani literature – the works that represent what can be called other Kazakh-ness – is examined. I argue that the Russophone Kazakhstani writers with Kazakh ethnic background show a specific type of Kazakh-ness that can be regarded as other or Russophone Kazakh-ness. It is different from Kazakh Kazakh-ness in the sense that it is expressed and understood in the Russian language. To explain the contemporary intellectual context of reflection on Kazakh Russophone subjectivity and on the possibility to express Kazakh-ness within a Russian-language literary text, essays and literary works by such as contemporary Kazakhstani authors as Auezkhan Kodar and Zira Naurzbaeva can be considered.²⁴¹ What makes these two figures close to each other and brings them to the framework of this chapter is the fact that both are contemporary Kazakh Russophone (mainly Russophone, but not exclusively²⁴²) scholars, intellectuals who reflect much on Russian-Kazakh bilingualism and on the way it influenced Kazakh identity. Their reflections became important for and popular among some part of the Kazakhstani public, and both Kodar (who died in 2016) and Naurzbaeva started to regularly appear in the media and reach wider audience by launching their own journals and web sites.²⁴³

Kodar argues that the main contradiction that divides contemporary Kazakhs is the rivalry between what he calls ethnic and humanitarian discourses.²⁴⁴ The former is concentrated on the past, and the second is preoccupied with modernity. Based on this distinction Kodar introduces the difference between Kazakhs “empirics” (they are Kazakh-speaking and concentrated on national pride and interests; they look at the world in dualistic opposition “ours” – “theirs”) who represent ethnic discourse and Kazakhs *marginally* (they are

²⁴¹ All major Kodars works were published in the journal he established and edited for long time *Tamyr* – <https://tamyr.org/>. All Naurzbaeva works are published on her “Site about Kazakh culture and mythology” *Otuken.kz*.

²⁴² Both of them started their intellectual career in Russian, but later they began to write in Kazakh as well

²⁴³ As an illustration of this, Naurzbaeva has 4950 friends and 4227 subscriber in Facebook (checked on July 15, 2017)

²⁴⁴ Auezkhan Kodar, “Istoki Stepnogo Znaniia (opyt filosofii kazakhskoi istorii),” *tamyr.org*, January 10, 2015, <https://tamyr.org/?p=169>

Russophone Kazakhs who are in a liminal and mediating state, and often they are considered as not fully Kazakhs) who employ humanitarian discourse.²⁴⁵ However, Kodar does not oppose these two positions completely, while referring to Abay (Abay (1845-1904) is widely considered to be the founder of contemporary Kazakh culture) who criticized ethnic discourse.²⁴⁶ Kodar asserts that “in Kazakhs-*marginaly* we have a rare opportunity to be open to the world and to conduct a dialogue with it on equal terms”.²⁴⁷ These words can be interpreted in such a way that while being on margins or in between, Kazakhs-marginals are more sensitive and flexible than the empirics. Kodar associates this marginality with speaking Russian, and argues that bilingual Kazakhs “enhance the creative tone of the nation”.²⁴⁸ Kodar argues that Russian helps in the development of Kazakh, and he refers to his own experience as a translator of philosophical texts into Kazakh – for him Russian terms and the way they were built was useful in his translation of some philosophical concepts into Kazakh.²⁴⁹ While talking about contemporary Kazakhs, Kodar argues that in the terms of their language they are “a two-component nation with one part being dominated by the Kazakh language, and the other part being dominated by Russian”.²⁵⁰ Moreover, according to Kodar, “bilingualism does not divide, but unites Kazakhs”.²⁵¹ It is crucial that Kodar’s ideas are not mere declarations, but reflect his own experience as a bilingual writer. In one of his interviews he stresses the “freedom that bilingualism gives”.²⁵² He explains “When they do not understand me in Kazakh, I can write in Russian, and when I am overwhelmed with

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ “Kazhdoe pokolenie dolzhno govorit’ svoim iazykom, nakhodit’ svoi temy, i ostavit’ svoi sobstvennyi sled: Interv’iu s Auezkhanom Kodarom,” Nailia Galeeva, *adebiportal.kz*, October 7, 2014, <http://old.adebiportal.kz/aezkhankodar-kazhdoe-pokolenie-dolzhno-govorit-svoim-azykom-nakhodit-svoitemy-i-ostavit-svoy-sob.page?lang=ru>

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Kodar, “Istoki Stepnogo Znaniia”.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² “Kazhdoe pokolenie dolzhno govorit’... Interv’iu s Auezkhanom Kodarom”

longing for my native land, I write in Kazakh”.²⁵³ Kodar pays much attention to his subjective feelings as a bilingual writer, and while mentioning the somewhat painful character of these feelings²⁵⁴ he claims that they can give a new type of identity and make a bilingual subject a “trans-subject”.²⁵⁵ While drawing on Kodar’s argumentation, I maintain that for Russophone intellectuals and writers with Kazakh ethnic background staying only in Kazakh can seem too “empirical”, unproblematic (these intellectuals may be afraid of being confined by cultural tradition as actually Kodar’s writings show). At the same time, their situation of writing about Kazakh culture and language in Russian is the situation of estrangement that we have seen in how Odegov and Serebrianskii perform their other Russian-ness.

I argue that this estrangement produces some gap between a Kazakh writer and his or her Kazakh-ness and allows him or her to approach his or her Kazakh-ness as if from outside. This generates additional opportunities for self-reflexivity. I also argue that Kodar’s preoccupation with experiences of living in both metropolitan and native culture makes him a post-colonial intellectual who asked questions about Kazakh post-colonial subjectivity and reflexivity. The same is true about Naurzbaeva, who also pays special attention to the issue of bilingualism and Russophone Kazakh-ness. In one of her papers she asks a question “Why do Kazakhs speak Russian without accent?”, and answers by arguing that the first reason is Kazakhs’ “openness toward everything that is new, imitateness of Kazakhs-nomads”, and the second reason was Kazakhs’ “passionate desire” to integrate into the Soviet culture.²⁵⁶ She cites an Uzbek proverb that says “If you want to be a Russian, first become a Kazakh” (however, she takes this proverb as a rather controversial one, that is, she does not agree with

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ In his poem *Bilingualism*, Kodar asks a rhetorical question: “Why should I have this terrible gift of fate – / To live in two worlds, swaying, as on the verge”. “Зачем мне этот жуткий дар судьбы - / Жить в двух мирах, качаясь, как на грани”

²⁵⁵ “Kazhdoe pokolenie dolzhno govorit’... Interv’iu s Auezkhanom Kodarom”

²⁵⁶ Zira Naurzbaeva, “Pochemu kazakhi govoriat po-russki bez aktsenta?” *otuken.kz*, October 10, 2012, <https://otuken.kz>

it). Naurzbaeva refers to “many complements to excellent Russian in Kazakhstan” which differs Kazakhs from some other Soviet peoples that spoke Russian mainly with accent (like Georgians).²⁵⁷ For Naurzbaeva it is important to understand how this deep immersion into Russian impacted the self-consciousness of Kazakhs. In her essay *In What Language Does Your Soul Sing?* she maintains that Kazakh is still the language that can express Kazakh subjectivity in the best way, because it is deeply ingrained in the Kazakhs.²⁵⁸ In another publication, Naurzbaeva argues for “subjective perspective” on Kazakh culture that means that every Kazakh can have his or her own perception of Kazakh-ness. In my view, in this important point she is rather close to Kodar, who also claimed one’s right to approach tradition in one’s own way and stressed that the way of approaching can change over time.

To sum up the analysis of Kodar and Naurzbaeva’s ideas, it should be stressed that they both develop and express their “subjective perspective” on Kazakh culture in Russian. Allowing for this fact, I argue that for these Kazakh intellectuals writing in Russian became a way and intellectual / creative space to understand Kazakh subjectivity and identity. It is very probable that their strong interest in and acute sense of contemporary Kazakh subjectivity is enhanced by the fact that they write in Russian and mainly for the Russophone Kazakh audience. Both Kodar and Naurzbaeva tend to regard bilingualism as natural for Kazakhs and they do not call for abandoning Russian. Importantly, this perception of Russian-Kazakh bilingualism is in line with what I learnt from my interviews with Russophone Kazakhstani poets Anuar Duisenbinov, Kanat Omar and Zhanar Sekerbaeva. They do not consider themselves as colonial/postcolonial subjects. One of the main reasons for this is that they do not perceive Russian as colonial language, but rather as their own language. During my interviews some writers said that they would not like to be called a *russkoiazychnyi* (literally Russian-speaking) writer or poet. For instance, Kanat Omar considers himself as a Russian

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Zira Naurzbaeva, “Na kakom iazyke poet tvoia dusha?” *otuken.kz*, September 24, 2013, <https://otuken.kz>

(not Russian-language or Russophone) poet, because he thinks that, in poetry, language determines a poet's tradition and identity.²⁵⁹ At the same time, almost all of my interviewees willingly embraced the qualification Kazakhstani which means that they strongly associate themselves with the country. I experienced the problematic character of the term *russkoiazychnyi* many more times in my discussions with Central Asian writers and intellectuals. One of them, a critic from Uzbekistan, said that “our traditional definition of “Russian-speaking” and “non-Russian-speaking” is as though from the 19th century, and it does not take into account the spectrum of language competencies.”²⁶⁰ I argue that this negative perception of the term *russkoiazychnyi* can be traced back to the Soviet period when this word could mean “inferior to Russian”, or “secondary”, “backward”. Russian-ness was on the top of the Soviet cultural and linguistic hierarchy, and consequently a term conveying the sense of non-Russian-ness or “incomplete” Russian-ness could have negative connotations.

Based on my analysis of Kodar, Naurzbaeva's ideas and the following analysis of Duisenbinov and Nakipov's concepts of *tilech* (тілечь, an abbreviation of Kazakh *min* language and Russian *rech* that means speech; the word was coined by Duisenbinov) and Eurasian literature, I argue that in Kazakhstani Russophone literature the former big utopia of super-ethnic and super-linguistic identity has transformed into a linguistic utopia of interpenetration and complementarity of Russian and Kazakh. This is especially typical of Duisenbinov and Nakipov, who try to find a way to combine two or even more languages in their creative works. They see this dialog of languages as a literary device, a strategy of imagination and even spiritual experiment. There is an attempt to produce combined super-language by the incorporation of Kazakh into Russian literary texts, for instance, in Duisenbinov's poetry. In one of his poems, he called this combined language *tilech*.

²⁵⁹ Interview with Kanat Omar, Astana, July 2016.

²⁶⁰ From correspondence with Aleksandr Ulin (the name is changed), April 26, 2017.

The poem is a *vers libre*, and it has a narrative structure. It is a short life story of a Kazakh boy who is told by adults to speak Kazakh, although the adults themselves speak Russian. When the boy grows up, he finds himself combining Kazakh and Russian in a rather strange way (from the narrator's point of view) by adding Kazakh morphemes to Russian words. He experiences difficulty with communicating his ideas, because of the linguistic confusions. While having told the story, Duisenbinov switches to explicit first-person narration and denounces this chaotic *tilech*: "I just hear how *tilech* in line with its strange sound / plops, grunts, darts from everywhere".²⁶¹ However, Duisenbinov finishes the poem by praising *tilech* and suggesting that it should be further developed:

On the other hand, don't you think that in *tilech*
 wrapped in a layered shell of two languages and many cultures
 may lie a pearl of a future true tolerance –
 and not just of a political slogan
 probably *tilech* is designed to be a catalyst for real
 mutual reaction of cultures and worldviews
 it could attract hidden human resources
 of the country suffering from the postcolonial complex²⁶²

It is worth noting that an adjective postcolonial appears here, and *tilech* is seen as what can counter the "postcolonial complex" of Kazakhstan. From his point of view, the complex is about people's mindset, not about languages themselves. Duisenbinov presents *tilech* as something precious, a "pearl", that has been developing for a long time "in a layered shell of two languages and many cultures", that is, in the long history of interactions between Kazakhs and Russians. The poet suggests that it depends on contemporary Kazakhstanis whether *tilech* will be what "plops, grunts, darts" or it will be a treasury of a "a future true tolerance".

²⁶¹ "Я только слышу как *тілечь* в соответствии со своим странным звучанием / шлепает хрюкает шмыгает отовсюду",

²⁶² "с другой стороны не кажется ли вам что в *тілечи* / обернутая в слоистую раковинку двух языков и множества культур / может лежать жемчужина будущей действительной толерантности / а не просто политического слогана / может *тілечь* призвана стать катализатором действительной / взаимовыгодной реакции культур и мировоззрений / способной привлечь глубинные человеческие ресурсы / страдающей постколониальным комплексом страны",

However, I think that the poem deals not only with how Russian is used in Kazakhstan, but with how the Russian language can be developed into a super-language by incorporating Kazakh words and morphemes. I propose here the term super-language to stress that this new language consists of more than one language. My point is that Duisenbinov takes Russian not as a preexisting canonical form, but rather as a possibility for experiment. While every big poet transforms and even renews language to some extent, a poet who draws simultaneously on two languages (in the case of Duisenbinov) can transform them much more radically than a poet writing within a single linguistic and literary tradition. In his other poems Duisenbinov shows some additional and even unexpected meanings of Russian words illuminated by the intuitive meanings of mixed Russian-Kazakh phrases (see chapter 3 section 3). By doing so Duisenbinov reconsiders the semantics of some words and sometimes to make Russian words new and unfamiliar to his readers. If on Kodar we saw how the Russian language can positively impact Kazakh, here the situation is reversed – the Kazakh language can enrich Russian.

The utopia of combined Russian-Kazakh language can be a basis for a broader cultural and literary utopia of cultural fusion leading to some kind of combined super-language and super-literature. These attempts to create a new society on the basis of existing ethnic traditions, first of all, Slavic and Turkic is one of tenets of Eurasianist discourse that in Kazakhstan was largely introduced by President Nazarbayev's initiatives of Eurasian integration. These political ideas resonated with some developments in Soviet and post-Soviet Central Asian Russophone literature. Writings by Chingiz Aitmatov, Bakhytzhhan Kanap'ianov, Timiur Pulatov, Olzhas Suleimenov, Anatoly Kim, and Timur Zulfikarov are sometimes considered as manifestations of Eurasian identity. Among these figures, the one of Olzhas Suleimenov is especially important, as it was stated in the introduction. In *AZ i IA* Suleimenov proposed paradigmatic reconsideration of Slavic-Turkic mutual influences, and

he suggested that Russian language and literature was strongly impacted by Turkic languages and cultures.²⁶³ Following this elevation of Slavic and Turkic cultural integration Nakipov proposed a concept of Eurasian literature that implies not only linguistic, but also cultural, historic and ethnic influences and similarities. I interpret this concept as Nakipov's version of what I call Russophone super-literature. By proposing the concept of Eurasian literature and referring to some famous writers (such as Aitmatov and Suleimenov) Nakipov acknowledges that this literature already exists. He argues that there is the "newest development paradigm of our literature", and, in his view, to understand the paradigm, it is necessary to frame new concepts. Nakipov argues that the term "Russian-language literature" (*russkoiazychnaia literatura*) has colonial connotations. According to him, this term not only annoys some Kazakh speakers, but, what is more, it hinders our understanding of the contemporary literary situation in the post-Soviet countries. Nakipov would like to rely on the legacy of Aitmatov and those writers who entered literature while writing in Russian such as Bakhyt Kenzheev, Olzhas Suleimenov, Anatoly Kim, Timur Zulfikarov, etc. He states that "it is time for the good of the cause and in order to prevent small literary and philological "disputes" move to a broader and more historically just term "Eurasian literature".²⁶⁴ Nakipov points out that, although this concept "largely has not yet recognized", it can help to maintain some balance between different literary traditions within one country. I argue that here Nakipov's understanding of the term Eurasian is complicated. He argues for combined multinational literature that can include Russian-ness, Kazakh-ness and other ethnic subjectivities and languages rather than for classic Eurasianism or neo-Eurasianism of President Nazarbayev. This means that for him Eurasian literature has nothing to do with politics. In his own prose, Nakipov embodied this idea into his language by incorporation of Kazakh words into his Russophone works. He sometimes gives Kazakh translation of a Russian word hyphenated

²⁶³ Olzhas Suleimenov, *Esse, publitsistika. Stikhi, poemy. AZ i IA* (Alma-Ata: Zhalyyn, 1990).

²⁶⁴ Nakipov, "Rasshiriaia gorizont", 421.

with the Russian word. For example, in his novel *Wind's Shadow* he calls one of episodic characters, an old kind Kazakh woman, *babushka-azheshka* (the first word is a Russian one for “grandmother” and the second word is Kazakh one with the same meaning, but with Russian suffix *ka*).²⁶⁵ “*Azheshka*” – this is how many Russophone Kazakhs call their grandmothers. Most probably, for Nakipov, Eurasianism is more about this mixed language than about political projects. I argue that while proposing the concept of Eurasian literature and developing his own unique literary style (that will be analyzed in the next chapter) Nakipov relies on the literary capital (to use Casanova’s term) of Russian literature (writing in Russian). This capital is prestige of Russian literature and language. He uses this capital as a foundation for “Eurasian literature,” or the Russophone super-literature.

²⁶⁵ D’uisenbek Nakipov, *Ten’ vetra* (Almaty: SaGa, 2009).

Chapter 3. Identity and Imagination of Kazakh Bodies and Landscapes in Anuar Duisenbinov, Bakhyt Kairbekov, and Diusenbek Nakipov

Starting from Suleimenov and later in Duisenbinov and Nakipov the issue of historical interactions between Slavic and Turkic languages as well as deliberate creative blending of Russian and Kazakh are the grounds on which Kazakhstani Russophone literature develops. In this chapter, I argue that Nakipov's prose (as prose written by a poet – Nakipov started his literary career as a poet) illustrates Suleimenov's ideas that the poet is one who fully understand the meaning of words. I argue that in *The Circle of Ashes* Nakipov experiments with language as a poet. I also argue that these experiments should be considered within the framework of Nakipov's aesthetics and philosophy of imagination. In my interpretation, Nakipov (following Suleimenov) aims as if to liberate and fully develop images present in words. He makes this by emancipating (especially in his passages in italics that constitute a big part of *The Circle of Ashes*) words from what can be called the pressure of logic and representation and of pragmatic function of language. Being liberated from this pressure, the passaged become flows of speech in which images and visions manifest themselves more freely. Frequently these images become pure visions, and they lead the author and the reader to the world of pure imagination where imagination ontologically precedes any reality. To describe this visionary experience, Nakipov usually uses ballet metaphors, and ballet is the central topic of the novel. Moreover, in these passages in italics (and in the novel in general) Nakipov tries to express what he calls "dance-word", which is the main metaphor for imagination as the supreme reality. From the point of view of this ontological imagination, there is no significant difference between images produced by means of literary language and ballet. At the same time, for Nakipov images are not something purely intangible and spiritual. They are embodied, materialized, with the dancing body of a ballet artist being the

clearest case of their real presence. I argue that this poetics and philosophy of embodied imagination allows Nakipov to reveal the underlying flesh of the world that is manifested in both in Ballerina's body and the flesh of poetic liberated language.

At the same time, although Nakipov's novel may seem to be a pure aesthetic experiment detached from real life, he pays much attention to Soviet and post-Soviet condition, the issue of identity, memory and language of contemporary Kazakhs. This is in line with Suleimenov's *AZ i IA* that indirectly (by analyzing topics related to the history of language) touched upon some very topical questions of the late Soviet period. One can see from this interest in contemporary social issues that Russophone super-literature is very much preoccupied with the problem of identity. At the same time, in the super-literature, the theme of identity can be addressed on different levels, including deep levels of Kazakh subjectivity connected not only with language, but also with bodily and spatial experience. Nakipov's writing is highly interesting, because he reaches these levels of experience through language. In this chapter, I argue that Nakipov (as well as Duisenbinov and Kairbekov) describes some embodied aspects of Kazakh subjectivity by means of poetic language and particularly through Russian-Kazakh super-language. For all three authors this embodied Kazakh subjectivity overlaps with the flesh of the steppe. In this chapter, I analyse such basic ways of the expression of Kazakh-ness within Russophone literature as the symbolism of the steppe, the body and nomadism. I argue that Diusenbek Nakipov's literary reflections on complex Russophone Kazakh subjectivity led him to the search for a new (Kazakh) body in his novel *The Circle of Ashes*. The body of the novel's protagonist, a ballerina, is a Kazakh one (her connection with Kazakh ancestors is emphasized in the novel), but at the same time it is a different body, because it was to a large degree formed by her studies in a Russian ballet school in Moscow. I argue that Nakipov's images of the body is one of the most intimate manifestations of Kazakh-ness in Russophone literature, and in his novel the body expresses a

wide range of feelings and lived experiences. The beautiful Ballerina's body is the opposite of the suffering bodies and phantoms in Verëvochkin's *Mammoth Tooth* where the disintegrating flesh of the world and time conveys the sense of severe trauma caused by the break of identities. While in Verëvochkin the break of identity causes the crack in the dam and symbolizes all-encompassing destruction, in Nakipov's novel we see the consolidation of the main characters' personal identity through the body-centred art of ballet. In Nakipov, the image of holistic, beautiful dancing body of Ballerina is a cosmos and a universal metaphor. While connecting the image of the body to spatial imagination of Nakipov, Kairbekov and Duisenbinov, I argue that in them the Kazakh body is immersed into the steppe which means that the steppe (the flesh of the steppe) can be considered as the continuation of the Kazakh body and vice versa. This imagination and experience produces intricate complex images of the body-steppe connection. For the three authors the body often remembers the steppe which makes the steppe the maternal landscape of Kazakh subjectivity in works by these writers. Based on my reading of these works I assume that imagination of the steppe is one of the most important ways of the expression of Kazakh subjectivity in Russophone text. I argue that Russophone Kazakh imagination demonstrated by the three authors produces complex centauric images that most probably go back to the archetypical image of a horseman. This chapter proposes another perspective on the topics of Kazakhstani steppe and urban utopian landscapes in comparison with the two memoirs discussed in the first chapter.

I argue that Russophone Kazakhstani super-literature is closely connected with a specific type of imagination generated by hybrid identities and subjectivities of the Russophone writers, especially of those with Kazakh ethnic background. I consider Nakipov's literary works to be particularly interesting embodiment of this specific imagination. His imagination transcends cultural and linguistic boundaries as well as boundaries of different arts, styles and genres. This partly can be explained by the fact that Nakipov is truly bilingual

and bicultural person who draws on both Russian and Kazakh cultures. I argue that the concept of super-literature is especially applicable to his novels. Nakipov fully appropriated the capital of Russian literature and of literariness of the Russian language. He uses this capital to further develop his own creativity and writer's self-consciousness. I argue that Nakipov's works (as well as works by Duisenbinov) mark an important stage in the postcolonial development of Russophone Kazakhstani literature when the writers from former literary periphery can produce something really new and enriching Russian or Russophone literature as a whole.

Dancing Body and the Ontology of Imagination in Diusenbek Nakipov's *The Circle of Ashes*

In this section, I analyse Diusenbek Nakipov's outstanding novel *The Circle of Ashes* (*Krug pepla*), which was first published in Almaty in 1995.²⁶⁶ Nakipov was born in 1946. In 1964, he graduated from Moscow Academic Choreography School and for than twenty years was a ballet soloist in Almaty Opera and Ballet Theatre and in some other ballet theatres. In 1985, he graduated from the department of journalism of Kazakh State University in Almaty and started his literary career at the age of 50. I argue that Diusenbek Nakipov's prose is central for Kazakhstani Russophone super-literature for a number of reasons, first of all because he is a writer who brings the principles of super-literature established by Olzhas Suleimenov to the younger generation of Russophone Kazakhstani writers. While belonging to the older generation of the Kazakhstani writers in terms of his age, from the perspective of his aesthetics he can undoubtedly be identified with the younger generation. Nakipov published several books of poetry and two novels (*The Circle of Ashes* and *Wind's Shadow*) that

²⁶⁶ Diusenbek Nakipov, *The Circle of Ashes* (Almaty, 2005).

constitute a dilogy. His prose has a distinctive postmodern metaphorical style that is based on the synthesis of arts with poetic passages, rich ballet terminology and music notations. My analysis is partially based on my conversation with Nakipov and observation of some events where he presented his works. My analysis of the novel (in this thesis I focus only on *The Circle of Ashes*), biographical materials, Nakipov's interviews and journalism have led me to some assumptions about his poetics and philosophy. First, as it was mentioned, he was a ballet dancer, and for this reason ballet and music largely influenced his creativity and imagination. What is fascinating in his prose is the fact that he thinks as a ballet dancer in his writing, that is, he is developing what he calls the "dance-word" (*SLOVO-TANETS*; this is the only two words that are fully capitalised in the text of *The Circle of Ashes*).²⁶⁷ This means that the body for him is a means of intelligence and imagination. Second, he is a Kazakh who in early childhood lived in completely Kazakh rural environment, and therefore he has Kazakh language and culture as a kind of deep background of his writing in Russian. Third, he found an interesting way to combine his mixed identity with his deep interest in ballet and music in a postmodern style of writing. His writing is definitely postmodern. I argue that Nakipov is a writer who deals directly with the literariness of the Russian language by experimenting with the language and creating his distinctive style. In particular, he does this in his passages in italics (that remind of the fact that Nakipov is a poet who published several collections of poetry) in his novels. According to Casanova, literariness of a language is tightly linked to literary capital of literature written in this language. "Certain languages, by virtue of the prestige of the texts written in them, are reputed to be more literary than others, to embody literature".²⁶⁸ Nakipov takes the Russian language as a self-valuable aesthetic phenomenon, incorporates Kazakh into it and produces Russophone super-literature.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 7.

²⁶⁸ Casanova, *The World Republic*, 17.

The setting of *The Circle of Ashes* is predominantly an opera and ballet theatre in the late Soviet period. It is obvious from the text that this is the theatre in Alma-Ata. The main character of the novel, the prima ballerina of the theatre (who is called simply Ballerina), is close to her final benefice performance before her retirement. Gradually she recognizes that she is attracted by a stage-hand, Gevra, whose life story, as she will learn later, is overclouded with a severe loss of his family and subsequent amnesia. The author presents Ballerina as an embodiment of the Spirit of the Dance. In the novel, the ballet is considered to be the epitome of the beauty and a cosmic cipher. Nakipov describes the theatre as a place that has its own memory or soul, which had been created by artistic performances. It is worth noting that some real historical events are intertwined with the main storyline of Ballerina and Gevra: her father had survived the famine in Kazakhstan in the 30s, and her former partner participated in 16 December 1986 protest in Almaty. The novel also has an interesting mythological storyline about ancient tribe of the samions who are supposed to be ancestors of the Kazakhs and probably of all mankind. In his dreams and visions of memory Gevra feels that the samions are his ancestors. They lived near mountains and first developed language and established norms of human life. A monster living in the mountains haunted them. Their main achievement in the novel is the domestication of wild horses which allowed the tribe to fulfil their dream to go deeper into the steppe. I will analyse the samions' storyline in more detail in the next section of this chapter in the context of the steppe imaginary.

The very beginning of the novel introduces Nakipov's organic and vitalistic metaphors and images. A cat called Batman lies on the windowsill in Ballerina's flat. The writer describes the cat as if from the inner perspective of his self-perception, and from this perspective Batman is a living being with intense and even overwhelming sense, affect of life: "But if you look closely, his external carefree negligence was deceptive: his green-phosphor

eyes lived (and were anxious) with his tense cat life ...”.²⁶⁹ The cat is overwhelmed by the sexual instinct aroused by a female cat outside the window, and by his desire to devour a sparrow sitting on a tree and colored fish in Ballerina’s aquarium. These desires tear him apart, and he cannot discern the objects of his desires clearly, because of their strength and mixture. The cat’s sensations are described as a special kind of thinking. They are “exquisite taste-intellect of a mustached gourmet”.²⁷⁰ In the end of the novel the cat’s intelligence is called “animal-delicate-genetic intelligence-imagination” by which Batman perceives the world and vaguely remembers the pre-history of life on the earth.²⁷¹ At same time, it is clear from the text that these sensations-thoughts are not linked only to the cat’s separate body or intelligence. They rather belong to life as flow and to the affective environment in which the cat lives. The cat here is an embodiment of life as the Deleuzian body without organs: “Batman all hummed like a transformer, chilling with a chill of instinct and choice, but outwardly he was perfectly calm, drawing into the vertical slit of his pupils the slowly dimming light of the day”.²⁷² Thus, this first scene in the novel shows that Nakipov understands life as the flow of intensity which overwhelms the objective world of separated objects and creatures. This kind of conceptualization of life and vitality brings Nakipov close to Henri Bergson’s philosophy of “vital impetus” and instinct as a kind of intellect and intuition. Another parallel can be drawn between Nakipov’s imaginary of vitality and Deleuze and Guattari’s idea of the body without organs.²⁷³ In general, the novel tends to suggest that imagination encompasses all levels and kinds of intelligence.

²⁶⁹ “Но если взглядеться, то внешняя беспечная нега его была обманчива: зелено-фосфорные глаза жили-сторожились напряженной котье-кошачьей, не кошерной жизнью...”. Ibid., 5.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 5.

²⁷¹ Ibid., 218.

²⁷² “Батман весь гудел, как трансформатор, изнывая ознобом инстинкта и выбора, но внешне был совершенно спокоен, втягивая в вертикальные щели зрачков медленно убывающий густой свет дня”. Ibid., 6.

²⁷³ Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press).

Right after the cat's portrayal the first passage in italics follows in which the conceptual idea of the "word-dance" is introduced. Although the conventional logic is largely interrupted in the passage which is of about a page length with no punctuation, its main topic is how intellect and especially language is emerged in the pre-samians semi-animal pre-intelligence: "*And now my beast you are again standing on the crossroads of the instinct before the pre-syllable of a word not yet uttered by your imperfect throat which is now only a direct gulp*".²⁷⁴ However, by the end of the passage it becomes clear that the main thing is the transformation "from the proto-letter to the dance-word".²⁷⁵ To account for the meaning of the passages in italics within the novel, first it should be noted that these passages take about a quarter of the entire book. They almost never have periods and commas, and their syntax is unclear and unstable. I argue that these passages are deeply rooted in Nakipov's philosophy and poetics. The reader is expected to take the passages as super-linguistic messages in which the mood and vague ideas are given as some obscure images that exceed conventional logical structure of language. Actually the first passage in italics gives us a hint at how understand these fragments. They are about some kind of protolanguage in which non-representational aspects of language are emphasized. In the passages there are many onomatopoeic words and interjections. They produce a sense of direct, non-representational naming that refers not to the signified (to the semantic meaning), but to the very object directly. Nakipov is interested in this form of language which (and when in the prehistorical past) language was not too much mediated (or consequential), hierarchized and codified. This technique is reminiscent of stream of consciousness, and indeed it can be called a type of stream of consciousness. However, in my view, there is an important difference between this well-known narrative mode and Nakipov's passages in italics. The main dissimilarity is that stream of consciousness usually an interior monolog or it is focused on some characters and their

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 6-7.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 7.

actions, whereas in Nakipov the passages can be very detached from any character. They can even express some states of the matter or abstract visions.

One more difference from stream of consciousness is that Nakipov's passages are often focused on bodily feelings and pre-articulated sensations as well as vague images. Based on these considerations I argue that Nakipov attempts to bring to the fore the flesh of language or language as the flesh. The flows of speech manifest the fleshfulness of the world and our experience. While the rest of the novel's texts can describe different living being and objects as separated bodies, these passages express the only body of life. I argue that the experience of reading of the passages is expected by the author to be a highly bodily and affective one. Here the process of reading is almost touching the body or the flesh of the world. To put it another way, in the passages Nakipov presents continuity, intensity and instability as basic ontological structures that cannot be expressed through ordinary language, because its syntax and logic presupposes the presumption of the objective reality. In these passages the writer destroys conventional syntax to transform language from structured and discrete to continual. This continuity or the flow of language can express ever imperfect temporality and dynamic stretching spatiality. In addition, the very graphic form of italicized text that is tilted right and seems to be less discrete than usual text with where every word and letter is square and clearly discernible.

While the continual body of the reality is the hidden dimension or imaginary of the first passage in italics, in the first description of the main setting of the novel – the opera and ballet theatre – there are a number of explicit metaphors of the body. It is vital that some parallels can be drawn between how Ballerina's body and the theatre (actually the theatre's body) are described. The metametaphors of these two bodies are central for the whole novel, and they are portrayed on the first pages on the text. The metametaphor here is constructed in such a way that the theatre is depicted as a human body, and Ballerina's body is presented

through architectural associations. They are both temples in the text. Some pages later what can be called the body of the city is described. These three bodies of Ballerina, the theatre and city comprise an important series around which plays a highly important role in the novel.

It is worth mentioning that the first description of the theatre is the only part of *The Circle of Ashes* where the first-person narration is adopted. The narrator provides his own view of the theatre. He admires the autumn colours of the two small public gardens in front of the theatre. He says: “I believe that the palette of autumn is always perfect as if it was mysteriously touched the hand of genius that was driven by a higher plan. Buddhist splendor of forms and the leafy sacrament of Sufism.”²⁷⁶ The religious metaphors are vital here. They suggest that the theatre and the gardens are works of art by a divine painter. Moreover, the whole coloured autumn extravaganza is the fantasy of the painter. The imagery of painting dominates the description of the environment surrounding the theatre, while being supplemented with the imagery of ballet and music: “Behind, on the grandiose scenery flat of the sky a breathtaking panorama of blue-snow mountains is carefully depicted. Openwork mountain peaks resemble a light crown on the head of a ballerina princess. In the evenings, at dusk, the mountains look like a giant organ, and it seems you hear its quiet sounding of dark low tone”.²⁷⁷ Here we see the first mentioning and metaphorical use of Balerina’s body as a model of the world. It is suggested that the mountains of the whole landscape can be compared with her body with the peaks resembling her crown. The metaphor of “the grandiose scenery flat of the sky” projects the structure of the theatre on the world. Now everything can be compared with the building: the mountains are a “panorama” in the

²⁷⁶ “К тому же я верю, что палитра осени всегда совершенна, словно ее неведомым образом коснулась рука гения, ведомая высшим замыслом. Буддийская пышность форм и листовенное таинство суфизма”. Ibid., 7.

²⁷⁷ “Зато позади, как утешение, на грандиозном заднике неба прописана возвышающая дух панорама сине-снежных гор. Ажурные вершины гор напоминают легкую коронку на головке принцессы-балерины. По вечерам, в сумерки, горы похожи на гигантский орган и кажется слышишь его тихое, темного низкого тона, звучанье”. Ibid., 8.

theatrical scenery of Almaty. Importantly, it is not sufficient for the writer to describe the theatre in just visual imagery. He adds an auidial comparison. Sound of the organ here refers to latent life of the mountains (as well as of the theatre and the city) that can be heard or seen only through imagination.

After that Nakipov depicts the theatre as a subject (not an object) that lives bright life of imagination:

I like the thoughtfulness of the theater. It seems to exude thoughts, moods and feelings... For many years the theater was saturated with fantasies, emotions and destinies of All the people who worked here. Or rather of those who lived here with all the intensity of human desires and passions. This incredible mixture of high and low, permeated the theater through, and it became a living organism or a special state of mind. You enter the theatre as if you enter time, not the ordinary time of our life, but another transparent time, which unlike ours never ends.²⁷⁸

One should pay attention to the idea that the theatre “became a living organism or a special state of mind”. This means that it is no longer just one of the objects in the real physical world. It lives, and it is which means that it is no longer determined only by its materiality. It is more likely that now the physical part of the theatre is dependent on its spiritual or imaginary essence. In this regard, it is worth noting that the theatre is associated not with space, but with time. This probably makes the theatre an embodiment of the same continual body that is manifested in the italicized passages. The continuous and imperfective temporality flows within the theatre. To sum up my interpretation, I argue that an intriguing ontology of imagination can be built relying on Nakipov prose. In *The Circle of Ashes* the theatre is not just anthropomorphic; it is some alive entity, but not exactly a living creature. It is what I would call a living image, that is, an image that is not just a representation or reflection of some reality. Metabole tends to be such a living image. The reason is that the

²⁷⁸ “Мне нравится задумчивость театра. Он словно источает мысли, настроения и чувства... За долгие годы театр напитался фантазиями, эмоциями и судьбами всех людей, здесь работавших, вернее, живших здесь всей силой человеческих желаний-страстей и эта невероятная смесь высокого и низменного, пропитала театр насквозь, и он сам стал живым организмом или особым состоянием духа. В театрходишь, как во время, но не как в обычное время нашей жизни, а в иное, прозрачное, которому в отличие от нашего нет конца”. Ibid., 8.

imaginary, while being not dependent on personal imagination, has its own type of life. Nakipov's ontology transcends quite conventional personification and antropomorphization of objects. Actually Nakipov introduces new ontological dimension of living images. In this dimension imagination or the imaginary precedes the real. From this point of view, so-called real life is just an expression of the supreme and extremely saturated life of imagination. Here the imaginary manifests itself through people, and is not invented by them. The meta-image or true metabole can never be fully captured and expressed. Or rather this meta-image is a process (of vision), not an object. It manifests itself in many secondary images and their transformations. The meta-image is hidden, but its images-manifestations fill human imagination.

The first description of Ballerina in the novel is actually the description of her body. She wakes up in the morning and explores her body, because it is her "professional tool":

Having twisted the magnificent foot with a high lift, the Ballerina rose, and only an ashen cat named Batman, could now closely see the wondrous body. He was seeing the gorgeous ankles of his host. From the ankles and from the small oval nucleoli heels thin white trunks of Achilles tendons were stemming and gradually rounding in the form of odorous apples of the calves. Tendons of Achilles were disappearing and melting in gentle and strong perfection of the calves. The apples, looking like Boutonnieres, in their turn, transformed into graceful dimples near the knees. The dimples with their perfection of an ebonite medallion turned into the warm marble capitals of thighs which while connecting with Corinth canon of the Small pelvis were sailing under the beckoning arches of the saffron temple.²⁷⁹

The idea of the ballerina's body as a temple is explicitly expressed right after the passage cited. The narrator says about "wonderful architecture of living female body-temple". In the next paragraph the upper part of Ballerina's body is described in the same highly metaphorical and associative manner: "Undoubtedly this head was once created by a

²⁷⁹ "Покрутив великолепной ступней с высоким подъемом, Балерина встала, и только пепельный кот по имени Батман, мог сейчас близко видеть дивное зрелище: великолепные щиколотки своей хозяйки — от них, от овальных маленьких ядрышек пяток уходили вверх тонкие белые стволы сухожилий ахилловых, постепенно округляясь в пахучие яблочки икр и исчезая-таяли в их нежном и сильном совершенстве, яблочки икр — «бутоньерки» в свой черед передавали свою стройную эстафету изящным ямочкам у колен, эбонитовая медальонная завершенность которых перетекала в мраморный теплый капителей бедер, и они, в свою очередь, соединяясь с коринфским канонем малого таза, вливались под манящие своды шафранного храма". Ibid., 12.

Byzantine master who gave this masterpiece a thousand-year life”. The master created the masterpiece by introducing his semen into a woman and after that by “gently leading his fingers around the navel he fashioned in the middle of the insatiable uterus this clean forehead and he put in it the dark eyes with golden shine, caraway arching of nose with thin nostrils, and under the grapes of her lips he placed a white apple of her chin”.²⁸⁰ In these citations about Ballerina’s body it is presented as the apex of imagination. The body is a whole imaginary world, and as if one can wander around the world and marvel at what one sees. The body is described through vegetable, sculptural and architectural metaphors and images. This makes the body a perfect plant, sculpture and building. This also makes Ballerina’s body the center of the world, because everything that is in the world is similar or even present in her body. It is highlighted in the citations that the body is continual and smooth – one part of it harmonically transforms into another. What is also important is that the biological process of conception and development of the fetus is conceptualized in terms of imagination, and the forming of a human body is understood as sculpting.

One of the most important characteristics of Ballerina’s body is that it is moving, dancing, and in the sense the body speaks in a special language which is highly imaginary. The ultimate significance and metaphysical message of ballet is accentuated throughout the whole novel, but it reaches its climax in the end of the novel when Ballerina’s final benefit performance takes place. Preparations for the performance are described as something very important. They invoke a special mood that is felt by almost everyone in the theatre and especially by Dok, one of Ballerina’s first partners and now chief choreographer of the theatre. For him it is time to “make his magic”. It turned that the benefit performance coincided with “full moon and vivid presence of all the stars in the clear sky”.²⁸¹ Dok

²⁸⁰ “нежно водя пальцами вокруг пупка, вылепил в середине ненасытной матки этот чистый лоб, вписал в него темные с золотом глаза, тминный выгиб носа с тонкими ноздрями, а под виноградинками губ поместил белое яблочко подбородка”. Ibid., 12.

²⁸¹ Ibid., 187-188.

anticipates that the performance will be perfect and “spirited”. “Ballerina will improvise such intuitive pas and such delicate nuances of every movement that... a window into eternity will be open up”.²⁸² This performance is expected to be a cosmic ballet. I argue that such an idea of ballet is based on the novel’s suggestion that dance creates some figures that speaks directly to human imagination. Language of ballet can be called a meta-language (following how prefix meta- is used by Kedrov and Epstein in the concepts of metametaphor and metabole). It can express some patterns or configurations of reality without words. Being direct language of imagination, ballet constitutes the highest level of the novel’s imaginary. Nakipov compares movements performed by a ballet dancer with graphic arts and calligraphy. During Ballerina’s benefit performance Gevra is looking at her incessantly:

He understood everything. Every movement, gust. Nothing could be hidden from him, and she wanted to open herself up more and more in the silent talks-whirlings of dance. She wanted to carry on the tips of her fingers and toes all notes of music and all the nuances-insights of the choreography. She wanted to carry graphic arts of the pas, graphic arts of the heart, graphic arts of the fate.²⁸³

In line with this, in another places in the novel Nakipov creates such vivid metaphors as the “hieroglyph of dance” and the “dance-word”. One can see from this citation that language of dance is associated with the language of the fate. This language is fateful for Ballerina and Gevra first of all because it is language of their love story. They finally understand that they are destined to be together during this Ballerina’s performance. Especially for this performance, Gevra crafts of wood some hand-made article, and when after the performance Ballerina sees this article among many baskets with flowers and she immediately recognizes his art, because this composition made of wood is the “composition

²⁸² Ibid., 188.

²⁸³ “Он все понимал. Каждое движение, порыв. От него ничего нельзя было скрыть и хотелось больше и больше открываться в безмолвных говорениях-кружениях танца, нести на кончиках пальцев и ног все ноты музыки и все нюансы-прозрения хореографии. Графику движений. Графику сердца. Графику судьбы. Ibid., 214.

of the fate” in which he by his “kind, skilful and intelligent hands created an astonishingly accurate image of her dance and the line of her fate”.²⁸⁴

The benefit performance is the culmination of the novel. In this evening a number of pivotal events happen. First, the performance was perfect and exceptional: “Many even thought that as if they saw that besides Ballerina who were dancing magnificently there was somewhere high above the stage, something magical, elusive, as if the light, free and unearthly Spirit hovered there”.²⁸⁵ This means that the audience saw what happened on the stage as not only a performance, but as an imaginary vision, vision of the spirit. Second, Dok ascended to “the high celestial territories where nomads roam and to the other dances, pure and eternal”.²⁸⁶ This happened when, after the performance, Dok was walking home. Suddenly he felt that as if the voices of those who were killed in the December riots called him, and an invisible flow picked him up and carried him above the streets. While ascending, Dok was remembering “that great adagio” in one of his old performances with Ballerina when he was finishing his career as a dancer and she had just started her professional life. This adagio “rose up and shined in him”, and he experienced this as a miracle, transfiguration and that “only” and “undivided” movement of the dance that was created by Ballerina. This only movement or pass is a symbol of eternal ballet to which he was ascending.²⁸⁷

This culmination results in the main vision of the novel that presents the major metametaphor or metabole of imagination – that of the dream caravel. The hand-made article made by Gevra was taken by Ballerina as his love confession and they just left the theatre together this evening. Soon after Gevra saw a vision:

And as if the floodgates opened in Gevra’s mind... and a strange caravel sailed: one with mast-trees and broad-leaved green sails and with multi-tiered decks as if it was a

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 214.

²⁸⁵ “Многим даже показалось, как будто, они видели кроме великолепно танцевавшей Балерины, где-то высоко над сценой, нечто такое волшебное, неуловимое, словно там витал Дух, легкий, вольный, неземной”, Ibid., 214.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 214.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 213-214.

tower or a city. Its stern was crowned with a furious and toothy horse's head, stretched out in a wild leap. Above it there was a head of a furious rider with a copper torso with eyes burning through the distance...²⁸⁸

This image of the ship is definitely a metabole in which different aspects of reality are combined into unity (as much as it was with Ballerina's body). Imagination is ciphered here as the structure of the world, because the dream caravel is simultaneously have features of a tree, tower, city and horse. This implies that the caravel is the invariant structure, that is, the structure of not just something particular, but of imagination as the supreme level of reality. The multifaceted image of the ship manifests many visions present in imagination and imagination's all-encompassing nature. It can be seen as a meta-image or as what Golosovker called the "total image".²⁸⁹ In other words, this image is an embryo that can be developed into many imaginary (mythic, fiction) stories and images. To employ the concept of metametaphor, this intricate caravel with its fancy masts is the metametaphor of imagination, because imagination is also intricate and fancy.

As it was shown in the introduction, the main thing that brings together imagination, metabole and metametaphor is the fact that they try to capture metamorphosis, dynamism and interlacement of different aspects and realities. While expressing metamorphosis, these tropes may manifest experience of some deep transformations. Before analyzing the novel's last vision in which such transformation occurs, I would like to refer to Kedrov's theory again, because it can give us a theoretical basis to explain Nakipov's images. He considers hyperbole and litotes that together constitute a metametaphor (see the introduction) as not just figures of speech, labels, but as something that is present in real experience. He suggests that a man can go through the tropes: "To combine a litotes with a hyperbola, it is enough just to

²⁸⁸ "And as if the floodgates opened in Gevra's mind... and a strange ship sailed: one with mast-trees and broad-leaved green sails and with Multi-tiered Decks as if it was a tower or some city. Its stern was crowned with a furious and toothy horse's head, stretched out in a wild leap. Above it there was a head of a furious rider with a copper torso with eyes burning through the distance..." Ibid., 215.

²⁸⁹ Iakov Golosovker, *Logika mifa* (Moscow: Nauka, 1987).

feel the relativity of the internal and external. If an infinitesimal particle, a ball in the ocean, turns inside out, it will contain the entire ocean, the whole cosmos, the whole universe. If the whole universe is turned inward, it will become the most minimal particle”.²⁹⁰ While I think that this quotation is one of the best expressions of the transcending capacity of poetic imagination, this is what almost exactly happen in the last passage about Ballerina and Gevra:

Ballerina and Gevra ... they left the theater for their lives and were not surprised that the street turned into a long, whimsical spiral with luminous walls as if they had somehow appeared inside the snail, and the snail introduced them into their secret house. On one of the spiral turns they imperceptibly crossed (or heard new music) into the world of flickering flowing water where along with them as if on a busy boulevard strange fishes strolled-floated and where the algae of incredible shapes, sizes and colors were growing and fluttering from the jet light breeze, and the fish were discussing with one another their everyday squabbles-quarreling... and there another metamorphosis happened – they were already flying in a quiet and high sky next to a swarm of comets and listening to their singing a cappella. And the notes of these spheres were long and multidimensional, multiplied by the pure echo of the galactic wind that were bringing here the intimate harmony of distant worlds. And in a very natural way they were approached by the dream caravel...²⁹¹

It is clear that here Ballerina and Gevra experience metametaphor as a real transformation (or inside-down as Kedrov puts it his other works). By going into the spiral they go inside, inside of not something particular, but inside the very reality. On the other side of their way inside the reality (that is, of the other side of metametaphor), they find dimension of pure imagination, or to be more precise, of the plentiful and incredibly saturated world of the imaginary. Moreover, they see the imaginary in the form of the dream caravel.

²⁹⁰ Konstantin Kedrov, “Svet-vest’, ili Chto takoe metametaphora,” *Literaturnaia Rossiia*, 2007, <http://www.litrossia.ru/archive/item/2303-oldarchive>

²⁹¹ “Балерина и Гевра... они уходили от театра в свою жизнь и не удивлялись тому, что улица превратилась в длинную причудливую спираль со светящимися стенками, как если бы они оказались неким неведомым образом внутри улитки и, словно она, улитка, вводила их в свой сокровенный дом: на одном из витков спирали, они незаметно перешли (или услышали новую музыку) в мир мерцающей текущей воды, где вместе с ними прогуливались-проплывали диковинные рыбы, как на оживленном бульваре, где росли и колыхались от струйного легкого ветерка водоросли невероятных форм, размеров и цвета, а рыбки переговаривались меж собой о своих житейских передрягах-дрязгах... и тут произошла еще одна метаморфоза — и они уже летели в тихом и высоком небе рядом сроем комет и слушали их пенье — «а капелла», и ноты этих сфер были протяжны и многомерны, умноженные чистым эхом галактического ветра, принесшего сюда сокровенную гармонию дальних миров, и как-то очень естественно к ним приблизилась каравелла-мечта”. Nakipov, *The Circle of Ashes*, 222.

The Steppe as Primordial Landscape and Body

It is obvious that Nakipov is interested in imagination as a very important aesthetic, ontological and spiritual question. At the same time, for his and for other Kazakhstani Russophone writers imagination is not only about some pure visions. I argue that in Russophone Kazakhstani literature starting from Suleimenov imagination is a powerful tool of claiming postcolonial dignity. Being artists (that is, exercising imagination) allowed many writers from so called “peripheries” to restore their national pride and identity. I argue that the three authors whose writings are analyzed in this section (Nakipov, Kairbekov and Duisenbinov) by developing their imagination of Kazakh-ness (or Kazakh imagination) rethink established cultural hierarchies, canon of Russian and Kazakh literatures, and they contribute to Russian-Kazakh intercultural and interlinguistic interactions and mutual enrichment. I argue that the three authors produce the flesh of Kazakh-ness in their texts. Even though they may pursue purely aesthetic goals, they contribute to strengthening Kazakh identity, because they create images, texts in which the flesh of Kazakh identity is manifested. To illustrate this, one can see how imagination works to produce Kazakh subjectivity and identity in Nakipov who combines Kazakh language, Kazakh embodiment and Kazakh spatiality in what he depicts as the samion’s proto-language. I will show this in more detail later, but now I would like to demonstrate how in Nakipov’s poetic interpretation of the word *dala* (a Kazakh word for plane) language, identity, embodiment and spatiality overlap. The samions (who are supposed to be ancestress of the Kazakhs) enjoyed the very pronunciation of the word *dala* which shows that this word gave them even bodily pleasure. At the same time, this word is a kind of revelation about the steppe in the sense that the word was not just coined, but was suggested by the very samion’s experience of the steppe (see below). I argue that by developing his imaginative interpretation of the Kazakh word *dala* in his text in

Russian Nakipov makes his text Russophone and narrating Kazakh identity. In the storyline of the samions, the issues of proto-language, the steppe and nomadism are intertwined. The samions' dream not to be tied to one place, to escape the monster living in the mountains and to explore the plain is tightly associated with the necessity to domesticate wild horses that are called by the samions Gigi. This name is onomatopoeic as it mimics a horse's neigh (the name is first introduced in one of the italicized passages). The samions adore wild horses. For them horses are a dream and hope, especially for their leader Arukhhkh (most probably the name stems from Kazakh *aruakh* – an ancestor's spirit) who as a young child in his dream had seen himself riding a horse. The samions see wild horses as the embodiment of the plain, that is, as an integral part of the steppe, which could be imperfect without horses.²⁹² They take ggis as the unity with or even the extension of the steppe grass: "Gigi and the grass are inseparable – the grass is in Gigi's gallop".²⁹³ In the beginning of a chapter that introduces the image of ggis it is said that they "appeared from the depth of the plain" which the samions from ancient time had called "ddd-aaa-lll-aaa... and the vowel "a" could be pronouncing for a very long time as it were manifesting the reverence for the plain".²⁹⁴ *Dala* is a Kazakh word for a plain. So it is important that while the whole text of the novel is in Russian, the word for the plain (the steppe) is Kazakh. This fact means that Nakipov in his imaginary of the steppe and horse draws on the Kazakh imaginary of the nomadic past. The plain is presented in the novel as crucial for samions' life, because many important things such as warm winds, birds, animals come from the plain.²⁹⁵ Immediately after the image of the steppe the detailed portrayal of ggis follows. They are described in metaphorical and hyperbolic language:

Oh, Gigi! They were magnificent, they wailed with strength and will ... As they rode, they flew in the form of avalanche, haphazard and irrepressible. They rode all together

²⁹² Ibid., 82-84.

²⁹³ Ibid., 82.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

and individually – and each one is better than a falcon of white and orange deer. And if they stood! Yes! How did they stand, they sunk with drops of honey that is like amber and honeycomb!²⁹⁶

We see that in the novel gighs are an inherent part of the steppe world. To put it another way, a horse can be seen as the extension of the steppe's body and is a vital element of its architectonics (see the introduction). The steppe and the horse comprise an assemblage, which is dynamic and intense. It includes “gallop, wind and the will” that are produced by horses' rapid movements.²⁹⁷

The culmination of the samions' storyline in *The Circle of Ashes* is the moment in the end of the book when the leader Arukhkh eventually manages to straddle the main gigh and tame him. This domestication starts a new epoch in the samions' life because now they could escape the dangerous mountains where they were haunted by a monster Osmichor. Having domesticated horses, the samions now are able to go far into the steppe. Nakipov starts this section of the novel with a highly imaginary portrayal of the steppe. The leader Arukhkh wonders:

Plain, who has created you so huge, boundless, imperishable? Only you, only you can accommodate my heart in your green grassy sky, and thereby equalize-hit the blue sky which is your earthly twin, unquenchable and immense. Where do you connect and conduct your conversations as twins about the vastness of longing and the lakes of silent sadness, and about the joy of seeing and seeing off the sun at sunrise-sunset?²⁹⁸

The mood of the steppe is so important here that immediately after the Arukhkh's wondering about the steppe, Nakipov introduces a musical notation that is supposed to capture the mood of the leader contemplating the steppe.²⁹⁹ This mood is produced by

²⁹⁶ “О, Гиги! были великолепны, от них веяло силой и волей... Как они бежали-летели лавиной косячной-неудержимой, все вместе, и в отдельности — каждый лучше сокола белого и оранжевой лани, а если стояли! да! как же стояли-горели они подсолнцем каплями меда янтарного-сотного!”. Nakipov, *The Circle of Ashes*, 83.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 84.

²⁹⁸ “Равнина, кто тебя сотворил такую огромной, бескрайней, нетленной? Только ты и ты лишь можешь вместить, в зеленое травное небо, сердце мое, и тем уравнишь-поразить небо синее дальнее, близнеца твоего неухватного и необъятного. Где вы смыкаетесь и ведете близнечно беседы свои о просторах печали и озерах тихих грусти, и о радости солнце встречать-проводить на восходе-закате?”. Ibid., 199.

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 199.

“endless internal call” of the plain. A Russian word *nutrianoi* usually referring to the inside of a body shows that the plain here is a body which inside sounds. This moment of the novel is important, because it demonstrates the connection between the mood and embodiment. Here the mood is a feeling of the flesh or body of the steppe. The vastness of the plain (the expanse or the body of the steppe) and the imaginary caused by this vastness as well as the mood brought about by the imaginary are inseparable in the novel.

Nakipov directly associates the plain with imagination. In the vision of the dream caravel an endless plain opens up in front of the ship. This plain is a part of the whole metabole of the caravel-imagination. The image of the plain suggests that imagination is limitless. Imagination as much as the plain stretches into the distance of the endlessness.³⁰⁰ It transcends any boundaries and horizons.

In the contemporary Kazakhstani Russophone literature, another bright example of imagination of the steppe one can find in Bakhyt Kairbekov’s poetry. I analyse Kairbekov’s works, because they convey the strong sense of the flesh of the steppe. In fact, for Kairbekov the steppe is the body. He makes some of his Russophone texts into manifestations of the flesh of the steppe. Written mainly in late Soviet period, his poems still showcased as an expression of the mindset of a contemporary Kazakh whose identity was largely influenced by the Soviet period. Kairbekov belongs to the older generation of writers, and for this reason his poetics more traditional (if compared with Nakipov, although they are almost peers). In his writings and documentaries, he is very much preoccupied with the issue of Kazakh identity. In Kairbekov’s lyrical cycle *Native Herbs* and his poem *Open Letter* () the central image is the steppe, the land of Kairbekov’s ancestors that had gained new importance in the poet’s self-awareness after he left Kazakhstan for Moscow to study in the Maxim Gorky Literature Institute.³⁰¹ Geographically speaking, the steppe in question is the Turgai region in

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 215.

³⁰¹ Bakhyt Kairbekov, *Put’ vody* (Moscow: Tesaurus, 2010).

the Central and Northern Kazakhstan relatively close to Astana: “In the middle of the steppe / my grandfathers grew up: / I will name the seven generations / of the Argyn region. / The seven generations – / these are my roots ...”³⁰² It is symbolically vital that the place is “in the centre of the steppe”. Obviously this place designation conveys both more or less correct geographical attribution and some imaginary view of the location (later approximately the same region will be called “The Heart of Eurasia” by President Nursultan Nazarbayev). The image of “the centre of the steppe” (as much as of the heart of Eurasia) highlights that this is a centre, and not periphery as it could be presumed in the Soviet period. The metaphorical view of “the seven generations” as “my roots” shows that the generations (that is, the past of ancestors) are embodied (because now they are in the earth) in the place. It is also worth noting that the region is presented and called not in just geographical and administrative terminology (it was Arqalyq province during Late Soviet time), but as the land of Kairbekov’s tribe Argyn, so the connection with the land of the ancestors is stressed. This idea is strengthened little later in the poem: “Memory, / in the thickness of the earth / while choosing crops, / knew, / knew: / how it is difficult / to sprout. / and she fed me, / and she turned me, / so that to revitalize / an old love / with me”.³⁰³ Again this image shows that the past and memory is embodied and emplaced because “memory” resides “in the thickness of the earth”. Another plausible interpretation of this stanza is that the steppe is a body that has some memory and consciousness (the fact that the steppe “knew” is underlined by twice repetition of the verb “knew”).

Kairbekov as if experiences very strong affective pressure of the steppe that inspires his imagination and makes him to write poetry – this process is presented as highly affective. For Kairbekov the steppe is an interlocutor rather than objective physical space. Moreover,

³⁰² “В середине степи / мои деды росли: / семь колен назову / из аргынского края. / Семь колен - / это корни мои...”. Ibid., 18.

³⁰³ “Память, / в толще земли / выбирая посевы, / знала, / знала: / как трудно / самым первым / всходить, / и питала меня, / и ворочала смело, / чтоб со мною / былую любовь / возродить”. Ibid., 19.

the steppe is active. In the first rhyme of the cycle, which depicts nostalgia about the steppe and the lyrical subject's sleeplessness in the night, there are such lines: "How can I break night drowsiness? / Where are you, my stallion? / I will not fall asleep – / The steppe breaks into the soul, / For I smelled her scent!"³⁰⁴ These lines can be interpreted in the way that the steppe's imaginary pressures on Kairbekov. The first line of the rhyme says "I have not had time to look at the steppe" which means that the poet is not in contact with the real steppe, but its imaginary still bothers him.³⁰⁵ This motif is definitely nostalgic, but here nostalgia is rather affective than melancholic. The affect and even pressure of the steppe is also strongly present in the poem titled "The Steppe": "The proud of your freedom / And native bitterness of burning herbs / Again intercepts my throat / Ordering to sing about only you".³⁰⁶ Here while the first line is somewhat abstract the next three describes strong bodily feelings caused by the steppe. By "bitterness of burning herbs" the steppe forces the poet to sing, that is, to write poetry. The sense of enforcement and even violence on the part of the steppe is highlighted by "Again intercepts my throat". One can assume from this imagery that if the poet does not sing, he would choke and die. In the last stanza of "The Steppe" the topic of the pressure appears again. As a result of this pressure the steppe acquires a voice in the poet: "In me your voice will win / And will become a ringing line. / I will sing – / Let wormwood wind / To flow in my throat / My heart seeks / Expanses of the awakened steppe!"³⁰⁷ Thus, the steppe speaks through the poet. The voice of the steppe in the poet is connected with some bodily sensations: "Let wormwood wind / To flow in my throat". The last line of the poem is a somewhat romantically traditional, but important image of the steppe as boundless distance.

³⁰⁴ "Чем я дрему ночную нарушу? / Где томишься ты, мой аргамак? / Мне не спать: / Степь врывается в душу, – / Я почуял ее аромат!". Ibid., 10.

³⁰⁵ "Не успел я на степь наглядеться". Ibid., 10.

³⁰⁶ "Мне вольность гордая твоя / И жгучих трав родная горечь / Вновь перехватывает горло – / Петь об одной тебе веля". Ibid., 12.

³⁰⁷ "Во мне твой голос победит, / Строкой звенящей отзовется, – / Я буду петь: / Пусть в горле бьется / Полынный ветер, – / Сердце рвется / В простор разбуженной степи!". Ibid., 12.

This is one of basic expressions of the steppe imagination closely associated with the steppe's spaciousness. The poem ends with symbolic entering into the distance, that is, into the imagination of the steppe.

The poem "My House" is probably central in the lyric cycle *Native Herbs*, and conveys the metametaphor of the steppe as a building, a house: "I know: the sun in the blue sky / And this distance in the endless steppes, / All this breadth and height are my home, / So far without walls, without a roof, without you".³⁰⁸ Here the invisible building of the steppe is the imaginary of the steppe. The metametaphor of the steppe as a house (home) presupposes that this imaginary has some structure – it is like a building. What is peculiar about this structure is that it cannot be seen or touched; it can only be imagined. To put it another way, imagination reveals the internal structure of the steppe. This can be seen the following stanza (while addressing his imagined lover the poet invites her into the house of the steppe): "Enter the house and be its warmth, / Touch the high walls with your hand, / Be its name, be its hearth - / Enter the house as my beloved wife!".³⁰⁹ This moment of entering is highly imaginary and symbolic, because his lover is expected to touch the high walls of the steppe. I argue that when Kairbekov describes the supposed walls and the roof of the steppe he describes the architectonics of the steppe, which means that the steppe is maternal. It is benevolent to people. The concept of architectonics here means that the steppe is not a monolith or a huge clod. It is a composite body, an assemblage that consists of the sun, the distance, the width, and the height. How these different parts of the assemblage fit each other is the architectonics, and this very *how* is the profound source of imagination. The life of these different parts within the whole complex body of the steppe is imagination of the steppe.

³⁰⁸ "Я знаю: солнце в небе голубом / И эта даль бескрайняя в степях, / Вся эта ширь и высь - и есть мой дом, / Пока без стен, без крыши, без тебя". Ibid., 16.

³⁰⁹ "Входи же в дом и будь его теплом, / Высоких стен коснись своей рукой, / Будь именем его, будь очагом - / Входи же в дом любимую женой!". Ibid., 16.

The discussion of Kairbekov's poetry (that is mainly devoted to the region where Astana is located) brought us close again to the topics that were raised in the first chapter – the steppe, utopia and Astana, and now we can look at them from another perspective. While analysing non-fiction (Brezhnev and Nazarbayev memoirs) and fiction, I argue that the analysis of literary depictions of the steppe and Astana is necessary to understand better the spatial imagination that underlies or could underlay the utopian visions of the Virgin Lands Campaign and the project of Astana. The intriguing images of both the steppe and Astana one can find in Anuar Duisenbinov's poetry, one of very few Kazakhstani writers from the younger generation who lived in Astana for a long time. In his reflective poetry, he muses much on the (flesh of the) steppe and Astana. In some Duisenbinov's poems his poetic imagination is concentrated on not just space and temporality of the steppe as separate dimensions, but on the steppe's spatiotemporality. In *Dreams of Balkhash* the steppe is the ultimate space, that is, it is something more than what is usually understood by objective physical space. This is because the steppe is "the splitting of sight / dispersion of attention".³¹⁰ Unlike ordinary space that is filled with various things, the steppe is rather "The absence / That allow to look inside more accurately".³¹¹ At the same time, here the glance stretches against some boundary that is the boundary of space itself. This is "Spatial fatality to learn about the boundaries".³¹² A similar idea of a specific internal bound of space can be found in another Duisenbinov's poem *Boundary*: "Boundary moves along the edge of sight and along the edge of unsteady glance limit. / One cannot come closer to it not closing his eyes and not opening the other eyelids".³¹³ It seems from the text that "Spatial fatality to learn about the boundaries", that is, one's coming to the internal limit of space, is "dematerialization that

³¹⁰ «расщепление взгляда, / рассредоточенность внимания»

³¹¹ «отсутствие, / позволяющее точнее смотреть в себя»

³¹² «Пространственная обреченность познать границы»

³¹³ «Граница движется по краю зрения, по зыбкому пределу взгляда. / К ней не приблизиться, не закрывая глаз - не открывая век иных»

reveals the seamy side”.³¹⁴ This means that the steppe directs one’s sight into a special direction where one can see the space itself, its limit and structure.

I argue that in some Duisenbinov’s poems about the steppe and space the narrator can see the limit of space and can, therefore, see some structure of space, and this means that the narrator deals with not only physical steppe (space), but imaginary one as well. In my view, Duisenbinov is interested in the imaginary construction or architectonics of the steppe, because he sees some important things (such as the limit of space, its reverse side) within or inside the steppe. His gaze does not just slide over the physical surface of the steppe. His glance sees or imagines what is inside the steppe. The imaginary structure of the steppe (or more of space) includes temporality. In *Dreams of Balkhash* temporality is seen through spatial metaphors: time is a distance with ups and downs: “If now is the peak and we are the mountaineers of time...”.³¹⁵

My assumption is that for Duisenbinov memory is somehow connected with the fact that “we are the mountaineers of time”. In the poem, it is the landscape of the area around Balkhash lake that invokes memories. So, memory here is tightly attached to the landscape. It is as if the narrator can see the past in the present landscape. In the fourth stanza, the narrator describes a dream in which different epochs are intermixed; “sorrowful Asan walks along the boulevard Nurzhol, / in Timur like manner Chronos limps”.³¹⁶ At the same time, almost explicitly the connection between the steppe (space) and the past (temporality) is expressed in the only line in Kazakh in the poem: “There is a history of the country. The roots are deep. The steppe is wide”.³¹⁷ The fact that it is the only line in Kazakh in a Russian poem grants it

³¹⁴ «развеществление, вскрывающее изнанку»

³¹⁵ «Если сейчас это пик, а мы альпинисты времени...»

³¹⁶ the boulevard Nurzhol is the central street in the new city center of Astana. “и печальный Асан бредет по бульвару Нуржол; / чуть по-тимурвоски хромает Хронос...”

³¹⁷ “Тарихы бар ел. Тамыры терен. Даласы кең”

special importance. The vastness of the steppe here is linked to the deep roots of the past. This can be interpreted in such a way that the steppe has its own temporality or temporal depth.

From the Duisenbinov poems cited above one can see that the concept of space or place plays an important role in Duisenbinov's poetic imagination. For him space is first of all the steppe. In my long interview with Duisenbinov we discussed how he perceived the steppe. He stressed the continuity of the steppe:

You go outside the city. It starts and endlessly lasts... You look at this emptiness. And this humbles you a lot. You immediately become very small and lost somewhere – and for this reason very calm, because around you is such the gigantic cosmic steppe. Why to be concerned? You just a small point in space. It always reminds me that the earth is just a small point in the huge space.³¹⁸

However, later in the interview Duisenbinov said that the steppe is “therapeutic”. From the citation one can see Duisenbinov's puzzlement with the steppe. One could also notice that Duisenbinov describes natural physical characteristics of the steppe in fantastic language. In the interview, Duisenbinov rejected the idea that Kazakhs have some special sensitivity to the steppe because as he put the steppe “can come down to (*obrushitsia na kazhdogo*) everyone, and one who proved to be in the steppe would realize everything immediately”.³¹⁹

It became clear from the interview that Duisenbinov closely associates the steppe with the city where he lived for a long time, that is, with Astana. Duisenbinov is rather an exceptional figure in that he feels some fascination with Astana and even reflects on Astana in his poetry.³²⁰ Many Kazakhstani Russophone writers admire Almaty, especially what they call “old” Almaty, but Astana is still largely underrepresented in literature (although much said about Astana in official rhetoric). In Duisenbinov's perception, what unites the city and the steppe is the sky above Astana. While we were talking about Duisenbinov's life in the city, he noted: “The sky helps me much here... It is just beautiful. I mean I had travelled may

³¹⁸ Anuar Duisenbinov, interviewed by Dmitriy Melnikov. Astana, July 12, 2016.

³¹⁹ Anuar Duisenbinov, interviewed by Dmitriy Melnikov. Astana, July 12, 2016.

³²⁰ “Mir posle vsego: Interv'iu s Anuarom Duisenbinovym,” Sergei Timofeev, *Arterritory*, September 3, 2015, http://artterritory.com/ru/novosti/4985-mir_posle_vsego._anuar_duisenbinov/

be not very much, but not little. And I have never seen such a majestic beauty. This is rather the only thing that is absolutely beautiful in the city, although it can be not about the city, but about the steppe”.³²¹ Duisenbinov has his own vision of Astana: “I like that Astana is plain. A gaze here penetrates through space... You can look far away... At the same time, when you are walking through Almaty the trees, buildings hinder your look. And you are walking *inside* the city, but in Astana you are walking not inside, but *on* the city, *along* the city. I like this perspective”.³²²

In the interview, Duisenbinov said that Astana is the setting of many of his poems, because he lives in the city and likes to walk through it. Duisenbinov’s poem *Cold Dreams* that is devoted to Astana was made into a piece of video poetry by his friends (director Bakhtiar Badenov, starring Alexandra Proshchenko).³²³ The form of video poetry was embraced by Duisenbinov in our interview. The video clip illustrates Duisenbinov’s text by footage of Astana’s old city centre. The video with its long shots of some places and buildings in the centre suggest its own sense of the city’s landscape. The clip not only illustrates, but also interprets and amplifies the poem that is read in the video by Duisenbinov himself. The city is depicted as cold and even somewhat surrealistic. One of the most important things about the poem is that it is focused on the winter Astana, and the winter, cold defines the whole mood of the poem: “in January you feel nothing / autumn almost forgotten spring still / did not make it into the frozen memory / not dissected by uneven cracks / the ice did not swell with cold / lips not spilled out by buds / of dead tissue did not play / with reflection of the reviving rivers and did not / smell as a small thawed corpse”.³²⁴ It should be mentioned in this

³²¹ Anuar Duisenbinov, interviewed by Dmitriy Melnikov. Astana, July 12, 2016.

³²² Anuar Duisenbinov, interviewed by Dmitriy Melnikov. Astana, July 12, 2016. In italics are the words stressed by Duisenbinov

³²³ Anuar Duisenbinov. “Kholodnye sny” YouTube video, 1:46, posted by “Pavel Bannikov,” December 8, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tsEap5inSpE>

³²⁴ «в январе не чувствуешь ничего / осень почти забыта весна еще / не пробилась в мерзлую память / не рассекла неровными трещинами / лед не набухла простуженными / губами не выплеснулась почками / из омертвевших тканей не заиграла / отблеском оживающих рек не / пахнула оттаявшим трупиком”

context that Astana is one of the coldest capitals in the world. In the winter temperature here can be -30 degrees Celsius and even below. In Duisenbinov this climatic characteristic of the city impacts its inhabitants not only physically but also emotionally and existentially. He describes not just cold, but the flesh and myth of the cold (the same motif can be found in Veryovochkin's depiction of cold in winter Steptomorsk). Cold as if freezes Astana dwellers' soul. It makes them insensible, and their memory is frozen. However, the feeling of cold is presented in the context of upcoming spring with its sense of thaw which is described in very physical terms such as "not spilled out by buds / of dead tissue did not play / with reflection of the reviving rivers and did not / smell as a small thawed corpse". In the poem the imaginary and mood of the frozen winter city prompts Duisenbinov to meditate on abstract themes: "the voice of someone else's struggle does not depend / on independence as imaginary as / a warm day in the capital sometimes / in May with piercing bones / wind on the old square under Abai".³²⁵ To interpret this, Astana's harsh climate impacts the life of not only its dwellers, but of the whole country strongly as well. Here Duisenbinov brings the topic of independence to the fore: independence either personal or political is illusory in Astana as much as a May warm day with its "piercing bones / wind" is illusory in the city. This can be interpreted in the way that something powerful, massive and rather unpleasant impacts people in winter Astana (these can be different things ranging from the climate to the surrounding steppe or the strong political power). The sense of this illusiveness is only strengthened by the following list of concrete buildings in Astana's old city centre such as the monument to Abai on the old central square (on the very place where previously the main statue of Lenin was located), Congress Hall, the former Soviet TSUM (a central department store that was in every Soviet province centre). The uncanny mood of this landscape is highlighted by a surrealist picture of shopping in Supermarket Astana: "near a dilapidated

³²⁵ "Голос чужой борьбы не зависит / от независимости мнимой как / теплый столичный денек где-нибудь / в мае с пронизывающим кости / ветром на старой площади под абаем"

government building / Cafe Venice Congress Hall waterfront / Tsum supermarket Astana with its / overfilled with flesh series / of goods or goods wandering along / the series of what will become their flesh”.³²⁶ The flesh of the goods exposed in the supermarket soon become the flesh of the shoppers who themselves are like goods. This rather a phantasmagorical picture of the city makes Duisenbinov to reflect again on abstract existential themes: “nothing you feel nothing / of what a son must feel toward / his own father and as a father to his son / nothing you feel in January / you soundlessly freezes into dreams / wake up with jointed jaws / bad dreams like a raging compass / lead you to nowhere tighten the hand for / a joint jump into the unknown”.³²⁷ The sense of alienation is vivid in this citation. This feeling is again associated with winter in Astana. The last five lines of the poem once more focus on the physical and existential cold. Duisenbinov imagines his life in this environment as oneiric and somewhat depressive. His lyrical subject is similar to a sleep-walker in this somnambulistic landscape. The mood and imaginary of Astana lead him nowhere, but in the very last line this nowhere (with a negative connotation) becomes just suspense or strangeness (without a negative undertone), which makes the end of the poem open and enigmatic.

To conclude, Duisenbinov’s perception of Astana is ambivalent. On the one hand, Astana is inspirational and energetic, but on the other hand the cold (in both literal and metaphorical sense) makes Astana somewhat phantasmagorical and even uncanny. Duisenbinov’s discourse and poetry on Astana are very helpful to understand how in the city utopia can transform into surrealistic visions of melancholia. For example, the prosperity and supposed bright future of Astana can be seen another perspective as one of more cases of

³²⁶ «около ветхого здания правительства / кафе венеция конгресс холла набережной / цума супермаркета астана с его / переполненными плотью рядами / товаров или товаров бредущих вдоль / рядов того что станет их плотью»

³²⁷ “ничего не чувствуешь ничего / из того что должно почувствовать сыну / к родному отцу и в качестве отца к сыну / ничего не чувствуешь в январе / беззвучно вмерзаешь в сновидения / просыпаешься со сведенными челюстями / плохие сны как беснующийся компас / ведут в никуда сжимают руку для / совместного прыжка в неизвестность”

contemporary consumption that dehumanize people and make them into “goods wandering along / the series of what will become their flesh”. These are unplanned effects of the utopia that can be seen via the lens of poetic imagination.

Conclusion

For the Russophone writers in Kazakhstan the dissolution of the USSR meant that from an influential intellectual and social enterprise within a literary-centric empire their creativity turned into a more individual undertaking in a country that previously was considered as the periphery of the Russian/Soviet state. This painful shift was complemented by the fact that writers used language that was no longer officially preferred and unquestionably dominant. This uncertainty resulted in the lack of publications by Kazakhstani authors in the 1990s and somewhat traumatic mood of what was published in 2000s. The period of silence was time when the formation of the new generation of Russophone Kazakhstani writers started. In this thesis, I analyzed literary works by such contemporary Russophone Kazakhstani writers as Anuar Duisenbinov, Bakhyt Kairbekov, Diusenbek Nakipov, Nikolai Verëvochkin, Il'ia Odegov and Iurii Serebrianskii. These authors represent two generations of the contemporary Kazakhstani Russophone writers. I argued that the term Russophone literature fits most the younger generation of the authors, with Russophone literature being different from Russian literature as the former exceeds the cultural and subjective boundaries of Russian-ness and can be seen as manifestation of Kazakh-ness. Moreover, Russophone literature is sometimes regarded as Kazakh national literature (written by Kazakhs and predominantly for the Kazakh audience), although it is written in Russian (for example, some Kazakhstani scholars consider Nakipov's novels as Kazakh literature). I argued that Russophone literature is a super-literature. It is the realm where the process of formation and manifestation of Russophone Kazakh-ness, other Russian-ness and Kazakhstani-ness takes place. One of the basic features of Russophone literature is its deep incorporation of the other and estranging of "one's own". The Russophone writers tend to constantly rethink their own Russian-ness or Kazakh-ness, because they understand it in continuing correlation with their other identities and in the

correlation with the cultural and linguistic environment they live in. This inclination means that for the Russophone writers their Russian-ness or Kazakh-ness is always contextualized.

The writers' way to Kazakhstani Russophone literature as super-literature that accommodates Kazakh-ness, other Russian-ness and embraces Kazakhstani identities was not straightforward. In the 90s and early 2000s, many authors demonstrated detachment from Kazakhstan, and the local context was clearly underrepresented in works by Kazakhstani authors. One of rare exceptions was Nikolai Verëvochkin's novel *Mammoth Tooth: Chronicles of a Dead City* (published in 2003). The novel portrays the break of the epochs and identities. While proposing the vision of cracking disintegrating time, Verëvochkin's *Mammoth Tooth* deals directly with the issue of lost utopia, absence and phantoms caused by this loss. However, the lack of Kazakh characters and references to Kazakh-ness in the novel indicated the division between Russian-ness and Kazakh-ness within Kazakhstani literature at that time. The fact of the split between the two languages and audiences largely influenced the literary landscape in Kazakhstan. While partially overcoming this cleavage, the younger generation of the writers brought new narrative identities and subjectivities of their characters. As it was shown, Il'ia Odegov is a writer who expressed what I call other Russian-ness in his life and articulated it in his writing. Iurii Serebrianskii's prose demonstrates how contemporary Russophone writers make sense of their diverse social environment. Serebrianskii's protagonist is in the situation of being between identities while traveling. The writer shows the ambiguity of this position. On the one hand, it gives some freedom of being not tied to one particular place, but on the other hand it causes traumatic sense of detachment. The protagonist's melancholy is determined the impossibility to bring together freedom, traveling and the sense of connection with motherland and his lover.

In the thesis, I pay much attention to Kazakh-ness as an essential part of Kazakhstani Russophone literature. I argued that Russophone writing turns out to be very productive for

reflection on Kazakh-ness in such intellectuals as Auezkhan Kodar and Zira Naurzbaeva who both claimed the necessity of “subjective perspective” on Kazakh culture. Importantly, while arguing for the necessity of the revival of Kazakh culture and language and the necessity to overcome colonial legacies, both authors do not oppose this revival to the Russian language in Kazakhstan. I argued that the Russophone writers with Kazakh ethnic background express their Kazakh-ness in the images of the steppe and the body.

Because of the limits of the thesis, I could not analyze many important aspects of the post-Soviet Russophone Kazakhstani literature. One of the most intriguing topics for the further research is what new this literature can bring to contemporary Russian literature as a whole and how the reconsideration of the concepts of literary centre and periphery, of the colonial and postcolonial can change our general view of Russian literature. In addition, it is a well-known fact that postcolonial literatures are more and more prominent in contemporary literary space, and in this regard it can be studied in what ways and to what extent (if at all) Russophone Kazakhstani literature can increase the international capital of Russian literature. The other important direction for further research is Russophone poetry in Kazakhstan that now experiences its rise. The Kazakhstani poets have the strongest sense of literary modernity and seek greater integration into the world literature. The bilingual practices of the Kazakhstani authors also deserve more attention as well as the concepts of Russophone and super-literature. These are just some of many possible topics for further research of Russophone writing in Kazakhstan.

My general conclusion in the thesis is that contemporary Russophone Kazakhstani literature is increasingly characterized by its own literary time (keeping pace with modernity) and its own literary capital, voice and dignity. As one can see from quite vibrant life of the literary community centred around the Almaty Open Literary School, the literature demonstrates a high degree of vitality which makes it different from some other traditional

centres of Russian literature outside Russia such as Ukraine above all. This vigor is manifested in the fact many of the writers are young, and writing in Russian is attractive for many youngsters in Kazakhstan which is evident in Almaty Open Literary School's popularity. This situation means that the new generations of Russophone writers and critics may come in the near future in Kazakhstan. The viability of the younger generation of the writers can also be seen in the spirit of competition they demonstrate (and according to Pascale Casanova, competition is the main law of the world literary space) – they compete for prestigious international literary prizes. However, the bright possible future of Russophone Kazakhstani literature should not be overestimated, because there a number of serious problems that can hinder its development. First, the outmigration of Slavic populations continues that leads to shrinking of the Russian language presence in education, culture and public sector. Second, the book market and literary management in Kazakhstan are extremely poor which makes creative writing unprofitable. Third, the Kazakhstani public as much as the state and public institutions do not demonstrate much interest in contemporary local authors. All this makes the situation of the contemporary Russophone writers in Kazakhstan precarious and uncertain. The analysis of the ways the Kazakhstani authors deal with these problems could enlarge our understanding of contemporary literature in general.

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