

# I'M NOT MAD I AM *NOMAD*



Plateau Assy, August 2020 - Kazakhstan (6 hours drive from Almaty)

'I'm not mad, I am nomad' is an addition to Homo Urbanus, Animal Urbanus. It is also part of a wider discussion on the active formation of the national identity in the context of Post-Soviet Kazakhstan.



[fig. 1] 'Woman making cheese' <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <http://collection.kunstkamera.ru/> - Kazakhs, S. M. Dudin, Kunstkamera Collection (1899)

According to International Union for Conservation of Nature 60% of Kazakhstan is comprised of grassland/ steppe.<sup>1</sup> To give you a sense of scale, with the area of 2,725,000 km<sup>2</sup>, which makes Kazakhstan the ninth largest country of the world, 60% is 1,650,000 km<sup>2</sup> of the territory. 60% of non-urban, uninhabited land.

The vastness of land, and the harsh continental climate has created the need to adapt. This adaptation came in the form of annual migration, nomadism.

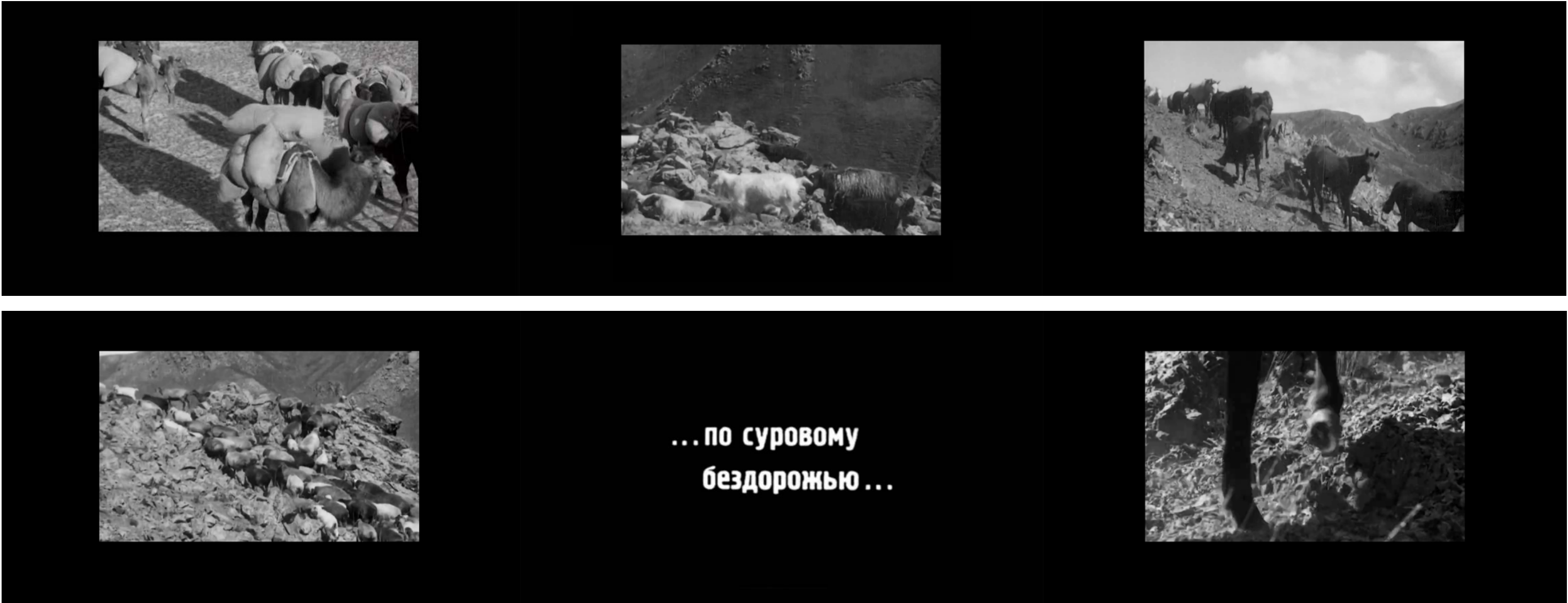
Traditional nomadism in Kazakhstan was meridional, led as a 'closed cycle of migration along strictly regulated routes, with permanent winter encampments (kystau) in the south and a system of organised wandering in the summer (zhailau), around the same sources of water in the north.'<sup>2</sup> It had been terminated in Kazakhstan since the early 1930s, under the rule of Stalin, with confiscation of livestock and imposition of artificial famine.

Agriculture was not economically viable, because of a) the climate b) constant state of war between nomadic tribes and therefore lack of permanent demarcation of territories. Livestock was the main source of food, and other produce, and a single animal was equivalent to a bar of gold.

The need to migrate, carefully considering environmental conditions of the land, deep understanding of the animals and nature had been an integral part of the identity of the Kazakhs.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.iucn.org/content/kazakh-steppe>

<sup>2</sup> Barisitz, Stephan. Central Asia and the Silk Road: Economic Rise and Decline over Several Millennia. Springer, 2017



‘... along the harsh off-road...’

[figs. 3] Stills from archival footage of Steel track, Turksib, 1929<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UzdINb6FJjk&ab\\_channel=CMSVideoFeed](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UzdINb6FJjk&ab_channel=CMSVideoFeed)





[figs. 3] Stills from my short film Growing Up and Down<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <https://vimeo.com/462217691>

Nomadism and semi-sedentism exist because of the seasonality and the need to provide the cattle with grazing ground. There is a cycle of interdependency between the shepherds and the cattle which creates a relationship unimaginable for a city dweller.

**Nomadic lifestyle had been terminated between 1920s and 1930s, under the rule of Stalin and the Bolsheviks.**

**It was done through various means of control, like confiscation of land and livestock, with the process of ‘dekulakization’ [see fig. ] and imposition of artificial famine (holodomor) [fig. ].**

Ownership of livestock directly contradicted the ideology of communism and therefore the ‘nomad’, the ‘kulak’ was the personification, and synonymous with ‘capitalist’. It is important to note that it was a conflict of class and not nationality. The process of confiscation eventually came to collectivisation of the land, where the land belonged to ‘the working class people’ and not the ‘greedy kulaks’. The dekulakization happened throughout the entire territory of USSR, the holodomor also happened in Ukraine and Caucasus and is not unique to Kazakhstan. However, the consequence of going from nomadic to a settled life, is.





Kulak

'A peasant in Russia wealthy enough to own a farm and hire labour. Emerging after the emancipation of serfs in the 19th century the kulaks resisted Stalin's forced collectivization, but millions were arrested, exiled, or killed.' [c] Oxford Reference<sup>1</sup>

The kulak is depicted as a fat antagonist being chased away with a kulak (fist in Russian).

The poster states in bold letters:  
'Down with the kulak from the collective farm'

Top right corner: 'Kulaks are the most brutal, most rude, most feral exploiters, more than once restoring to power landlords, tsars, popes and capitalist in other countries!' Lenin.

The nomads were assumed under the label of 'kulaks', many were killed, arrested or chased out of their homes to seek refuge in other places.



Poster "Let's Liquidate the Kulak as a social group", 1930<sup>1</sup>

The figure of those who dealt with animal husbandry, owned animals was caricatured into emblems of greed and self-indulgence.

In my film the figure of the nomadic shepherd becomes the 'hero' and a 'trend-setter', but perhaps also symbol of capitalist culture that is current in contemporary Kazakhstan today.

<sup>1</sup> [https://urokiistorii.ru/article/438#\\_ftn3](https://urokiistorii.ru/article/438#_ftn3)





числа арестованных направляем на Особое совещание — 53, остальных передаем в суд. Сведения неполны — запрошены места, подробности почтой.  
ЦА ФСБ РФ. Ф. 2. Оп. 6. Д. 567. Л. 426—427. Заверенная копия.

**№ 93**  
**Дополнительная информация ГПУ Казахстана**  
**об итогах репрессивных операций против частных торговцев**  
*17 апреля 1928 г.*  
*Сов. секретно.*

**№ 410**  
Из Кызыл-Орды г. Каширин от 12 апреля 1928 г. на № 7075 в дополнение к нашему № 386 от 5 апреля<sup>1\*</sup> сообщает, что, по поступившим телеграфным сведениям с мест, в результате массовой операции по Казахстану арестовано 1102 человека, из них: хлебников — 332, кожевников-сырьевщиков — 155, мануфактуристов — 249, торговцев других категорий — 98, кулаков — 182, по политпреступлениям — 49, должностных — 37. [Из] общего числа арестованных передано судебнo-следственным органам 654, из них: частников — 487, кулаков — 138 (привлечено по ст.ст. 107 и 173 и др.), по политпреступлениям — 32. [В] Особое совещание места направляют 124, из них хлебников — 86, кулаков — 13, по политпреступлениям — 25, часть которых ПП ОГПУ по мере их рассмотрения и маловажности возвращает.  
ЦА ФСБ РФ. Ф. 2. Оп. 6. Д. 567. Л. 460. Заверенная копия.

<sup>1\*</sup> См. документ № 92.

**№ 94**  
**Постановление Политбюро ЦК ВКП(б) о хлебозаготовках<sup>1\*</sup>**  
*19 апреля 1928 г.*  
2. О хлебозаготовках (тг. Микоян, Вейцер).  
а) Утвердить постановление СТО о плане хлебозаготовок на III квартал 1927/28 г.  
б) Отмечая падение хлебозаготовок за первую половину апреля, объясняемое в значительной мере нарастанием демобилизационных настроений, поручить Секретариату ЦК написать письмо местным партийным организациям с директивами о необходимости принятия мер для повышения хлебозаготовок<sup>2\*</sup>.  
в) Поручить Секретариату ЦК созвать совещание представителей мест по вопросам об усилении хлебозаготовок по соответствующим губерниям с привлечением к работе совещания Наркомторга, тг. Любимова, Каминского и Лобачева. План мероприятий, выработанный совещанием, согласовать с т. Микояном.  
г) Обязать Наркомторг провести максимальную экономию в расходовании хлеба по плану снабжения хлебом на ближайшие месяцы.  
д) Поставить на следующем заседании Политбюро доклад СТО о плане хлебоснабжения в текущем квартале и об остающихся на IV квартал хлебных резервах.  
РЦХИДНИ. Ф. 17. Оп. 3. Д. 683. Л. 1—2. Заверенная копия.

<sup>1\*</sup> Протокол № 21 заседания Политбюро ЦК ВКП(б) от 19 апреля 1928 г. п. 2.  
<sup>2\*</sup> См. документ № 96.

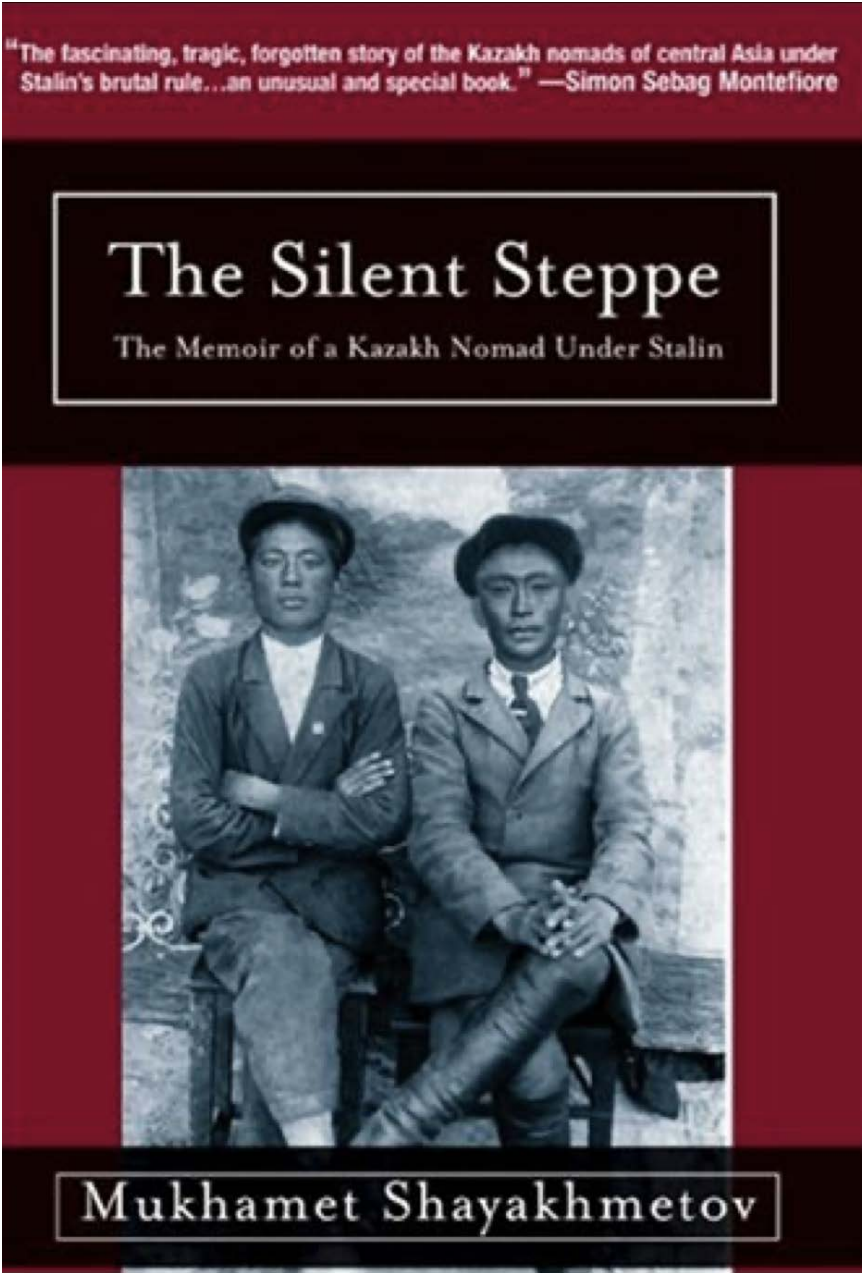
No. 93  
Additional information from State Political Administration under the NKVD about the results of repressive operations against private traders.<sup>1</sup>

From Kyzyl-Orda [...] from 12th April 1928 [...] N7075 additional to our No386 from 5th April informs, that according to the telegram evidences from the location, as a result of the mass operation around Kazakhstan 1102 people have been arrested. Out of which 332 - Bread-makers

155 - Nomadic gatherers

49 - Political criminals  
37 - Special settlers

<sup>1</sup> <http://docs.historyrussia.org/ru/nodes/64775-dopolnitelnaya-informatsiya-gpu-kazahstana-ob-itogah-repressivnyh-operatsiy-protiv-chastnyh-torgovtsev-17-aprelya-1928-g>



‘For as long as I remember, a stock-breeder’s entire life in the steppe had been bound up with his animals. Our people always looked after them with great care, because they were our main livelihood, and we knew just about everything there was to know about rearing them. The death of even one of them was always treated very seriously: a kid accidentally strangling itself on its tether would cause great consternation, and the whole family would mourn the loss of a favourite horse or camel, because they were the main means of transport and work force in the nomadic household. Relatives and friends would solemnly express their condolences, just as if a member of the family had died, and help them to cover their loss. **The Kazakh nomads could not imagine an existence without their livestock: they knew of no other kind, and believed that to be left without their animals would mean certain death.**’



*Otkochevshiki - Off-Nomads*

Literal translation would be closer to 'exiles' because of the prefix 'ot-', implying that they were nomads not because of their lifestyle, but because they were forced to flee Kazakhstan during the Stalinist repressions and the artificial famine.

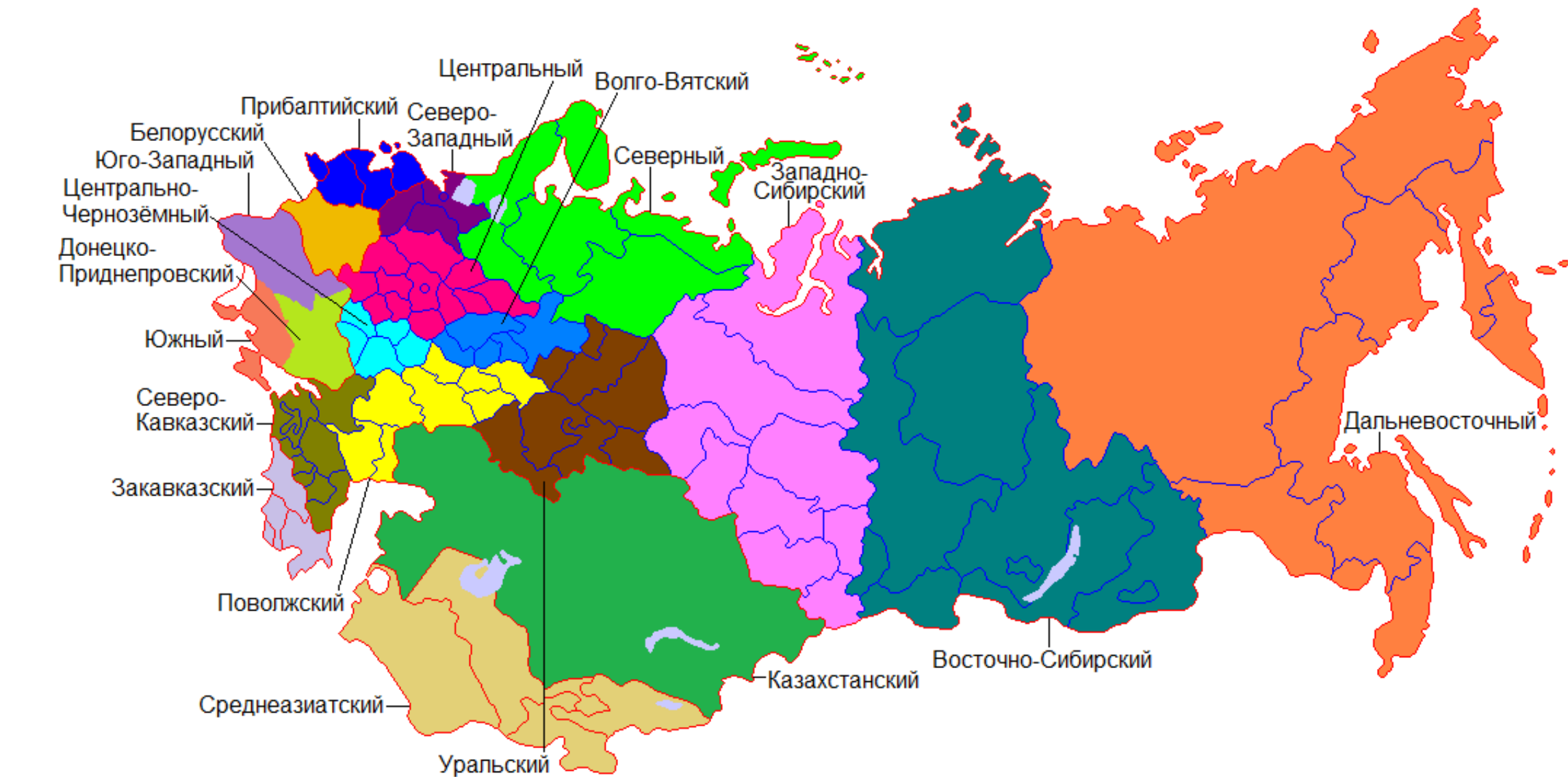
*Semipalatinsk. Winter 1932/1933. Text on the document: "The photo is taken inside the 6th barrack. You can see the starved and exhausted kazakhs and corpses, which have been laying for 4 days. 8th March 1933. Signed by the Management of All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks [KK-RKI.]"<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> <https://e-history.kz/ru/news/show/3720/>

With confiscation of livestock the Kazakhs, who were not equipped with knowledge of food cultivation, were bound to starvation. It's a very dark period of history for Kazakhstan. Almost half of the population (47,3%) was lost to the artificially imposed famine due to starvation or migration for rescue in neighbouring countries.



*Откочевщики. Семипалатинск. Зима 1932/1933 г. Текст на документе: «Карточка снята внутри 6-го барака. Вы можете видеть лежащих истощенных казахов и казашек и трупы, лежащие до 4 дней. 8 марта 1933 г. Управделами ВКП КК-РКИ (подпись)».*



As part of the Collectivisation plan, the Soviet authorities have assigned countries with economical regions. Kazakhstan happened to not have fallen into the Central Asian bureau which included Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan (yellow), which were responsible for production and supply of cotton. Instead, Kazakhstan became the largest supplier of grain and meat (dark green), supplying Moscow and Leningrad with 80% of meat by 1931.<sup>1</sup> By 1932, 87% of the Kazakh farms did not have their own livestock.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Nomads of the Dead Steppe*, D. Satpayev's documentary, 2018  
<sup>2</sup> <https://365info.kz/2019/02/kak-ekonomika-povliyala-na-vsyu-istoriyu-kazahstana-chast-4>





As you may have understood, **the livestock was the main target to force the nomads to settle.** A settled population was easier to tax and control.

Today, in independent Kazakhstan you can see that the strong bond between man and animals remains, once you step outside the city.

[figs. 3] Stills from my short film Growing Up and Down <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://vimeo.com/462217691>





Almaty, city in the south-east of Kazakhstan, 2015

In the city today, the elements of nomadism are non-existent.

The centralised and vertical development of the city has remained since Soviet time and major re-thinking of the urban environment in favour of the nomadic lifestyle cannot be currently foreseen.



Projection of the ornament

The Kazakh collective identity had been catapulted from nomadism through dekulakization and holodomor ; collectivisation and all the way to rapid industrialisation and introduction of the new urban environment in the span of 50 years.

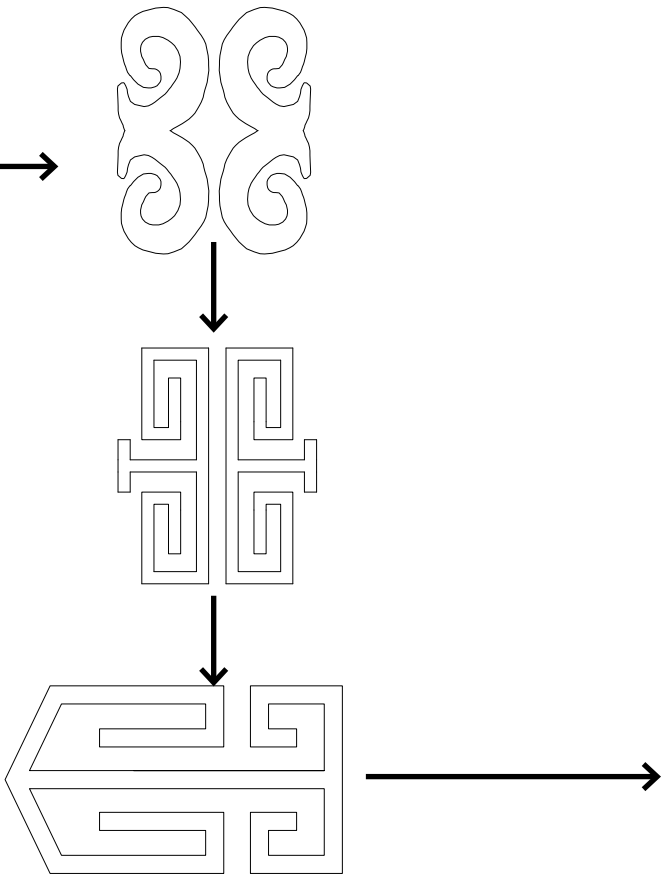
Since the Soviet time, with a newly sedentised population, there was a constant effort of creating or maintaining the national identity of the Kazakhs.

These efforts gave start to the movement of architecture that emerged from projecting of a nomadic ornament onto an urban setting and had an enormous impact on the national identity. The ornaments seen on the Soviet buildings were the translations by Russian architects of symbols found on nomadic necropolis, the only remaining permanent structures and point of reference for architecture.



This act of projecting is one the many methods of actively constructing the collective identity. The ornaments on the necropolis were quite possibly very particular to the subject of burial. By projecting it to panels of Khrushev housing was effectively settling the nomads, by placing them, alive, into an urban necropolis.

[fig.] Ornament carved on a tomb stone of the necropolis

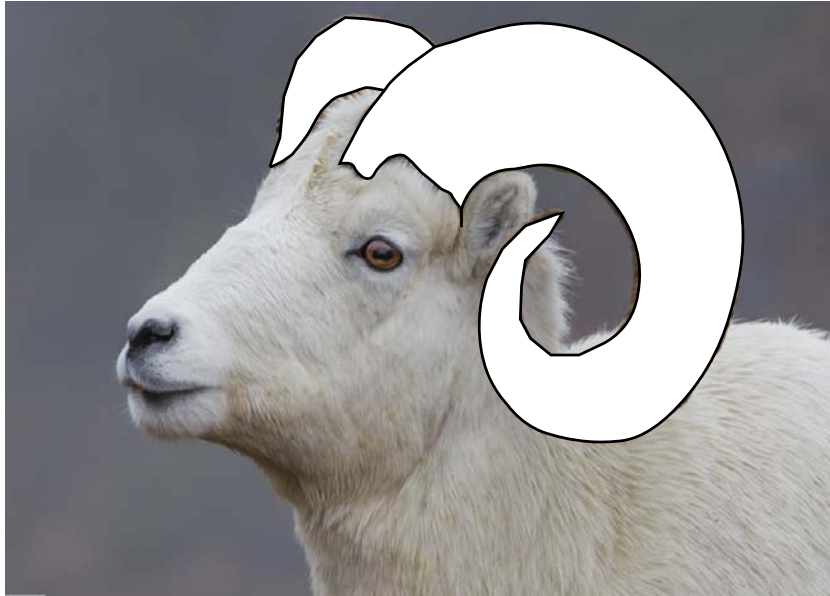


[fig.] Geometrical translation of the ornament



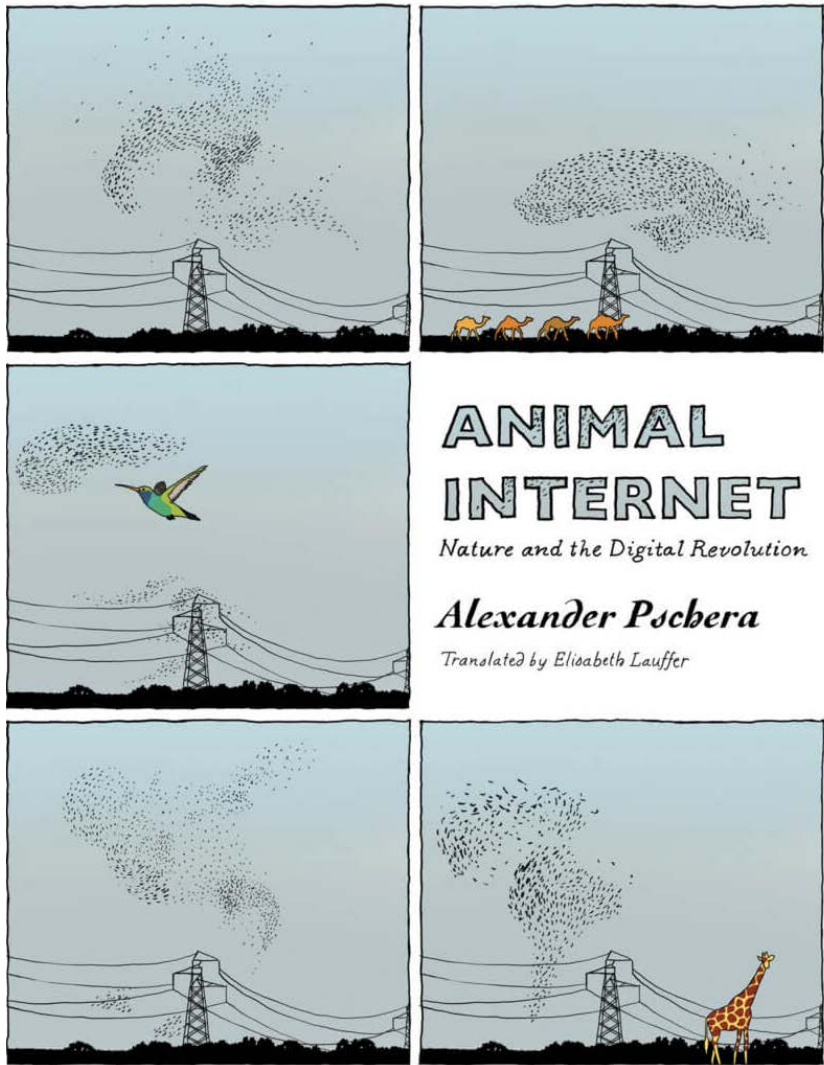
[fig.5] Geometrically translated ornament on a panel of the social housing

In the newly independent country, surrounded by Soviet heritage and the practice of ‘projecting’ of the ornaments, my generation (late 90s kids) was growing up to think that these stone ornaments were the epitomes of Kazakhness. While, in truth, it was the interpretation of the Soviets of the nomadic culture that was deemed necessary to be erased.



**The presence of the animal has been reduced to the ornament resembling it.**





'[...] the connection to nature, to that which grows, is inherent to humans, who are and always will be biophilic creatures. Humans cannot live without animals and plants. Hence the green compensation that has followed the years of nature deprivation and loss. Over the last two hundred years, the real animals have been replaced by likenesses. The process is dialectical: **the further we distance ourselves from nature, the more we produce, reproduce, and disseminate images of animals - all without moving a single step closer to nature in the process. Postmodern awareness of nature simulates green structures and represents animals merely by pictures. But these representations do not replace the animals; instead, they simply fake their presence.**

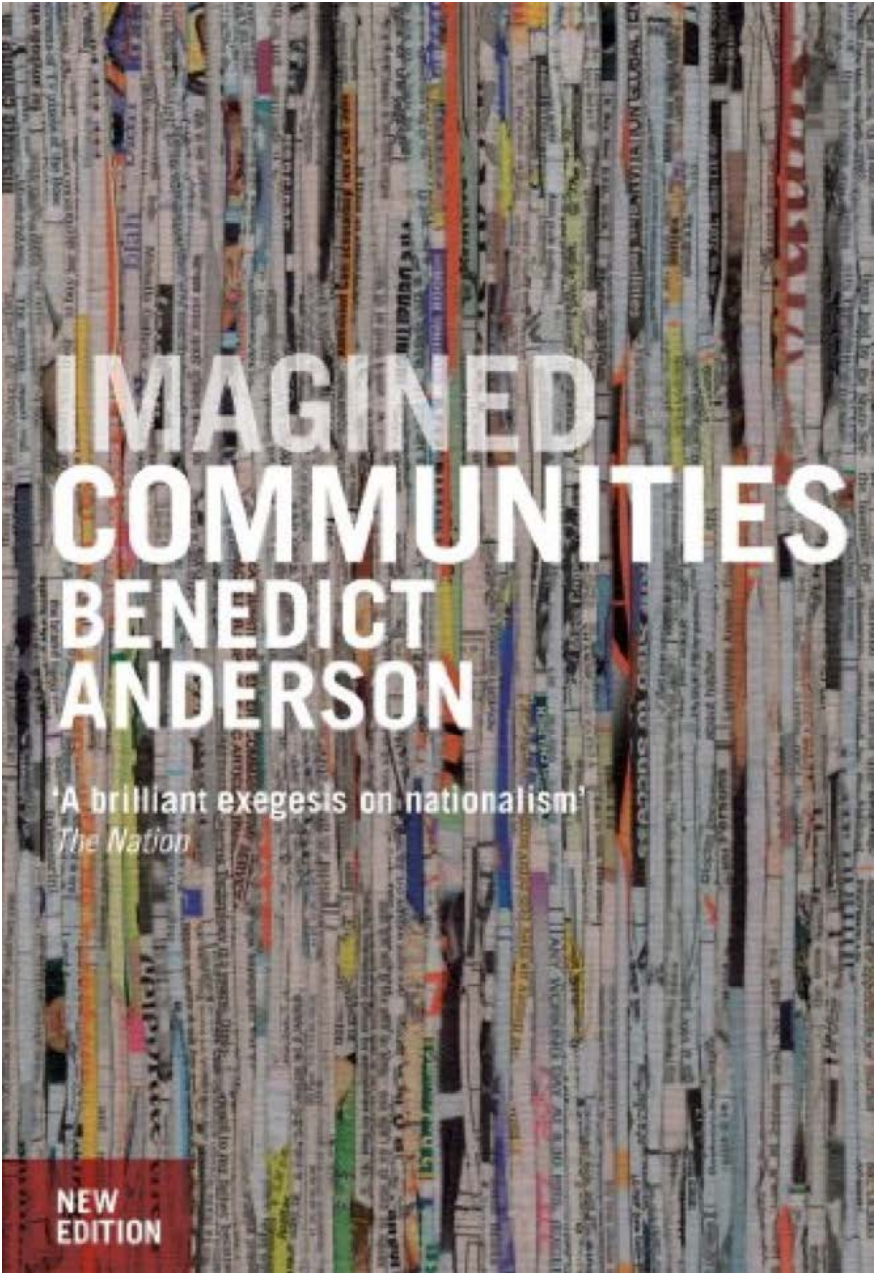




The nomadic lifestyle, mainly based on the symbiotic relationship between humans and animals, was either flat-packed into concrete walls during Soviet time, or glamorized and idealised in today's independent Kazakhstan. Either way - we can see how the national imagery is being fabricated in space.

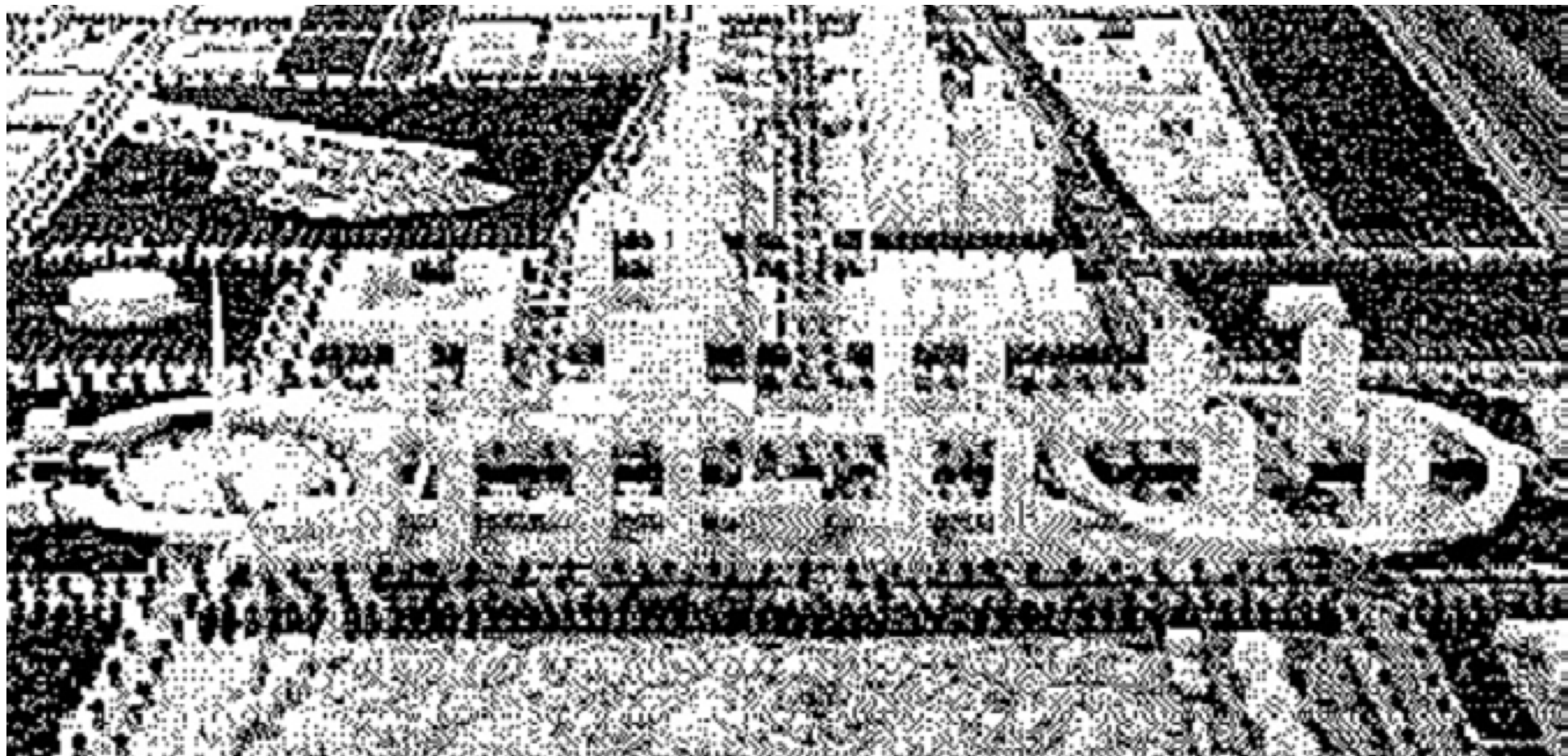




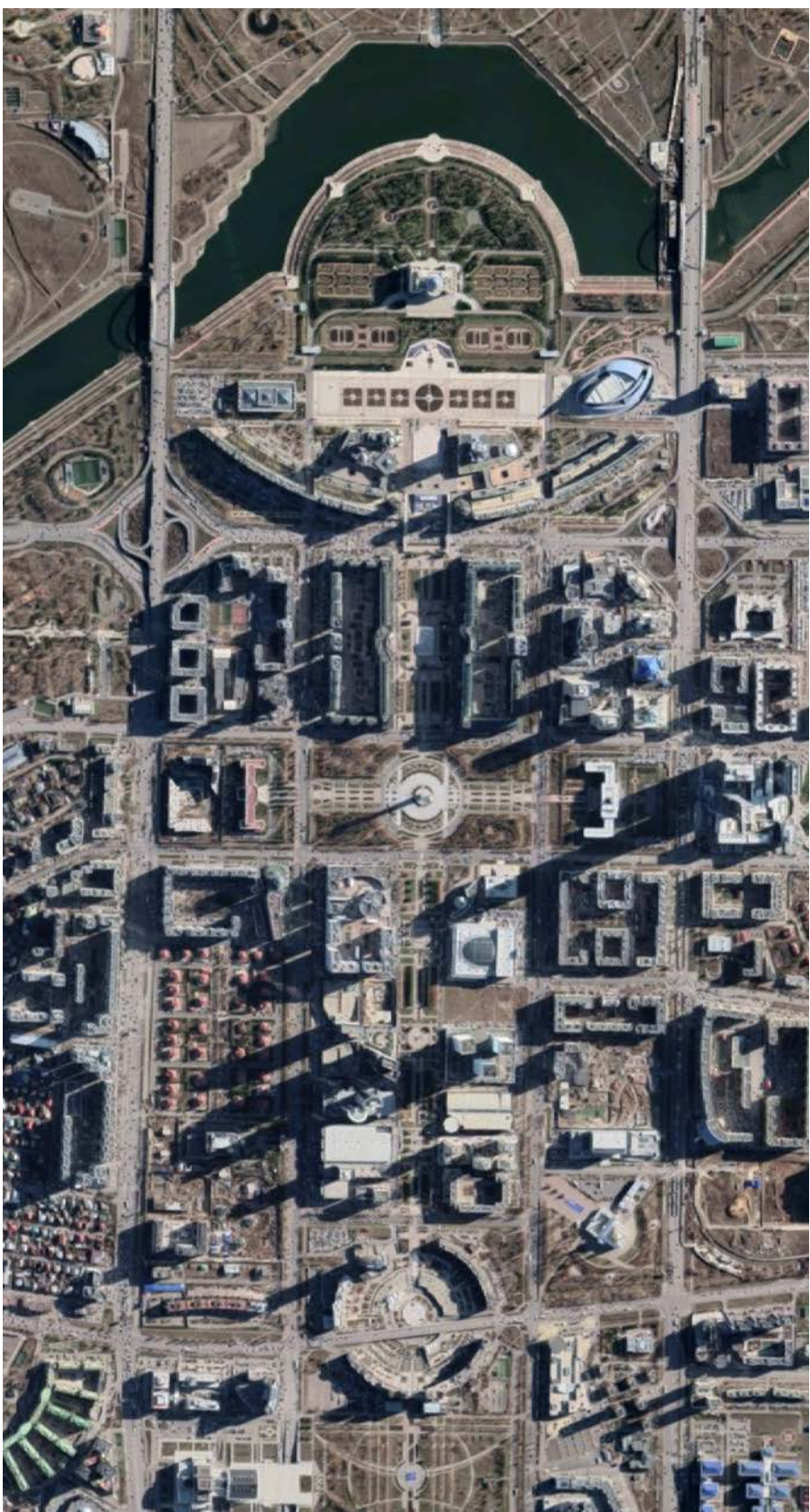


The photograph, fine child of the age of mechanical reproduction, is only the most peremptory of a huge modern accumulation of documentary evidence (birth certificates, diaries, report cards, letters, medical records, and the like) which simultaneously records a certain apparent continuity and emphasizes its loss from memory. Out of this estrangement comes **a conception of personhood, identity** (yes, you and that naked baby are identical) which, **because it can not be ‘remembered,’ must be narrated.**





This active imagining of the national identity can even be witnessed on a scale as large as urban planning, like Kisho Kurokawa's general plan of Astana, Kazakhstan Capital, where his immediate response was to use these giant ornament shapes as inspiration for urban planning. His general plan was never realised, but the intention is still there. Astana, now renamed to Nur-Sultan, is the icon of this active process of fabrication of the Kazakh national identity. Built from scratch, it is a city as a living ornament, sculpted and pampered, yet completely out of a human scale and consideration of living conditions.





Examples of ornaments around the city

Things like this have made me think how easy it is to rely on artificial ornament as a visual reference for a facade of a national identity, and up until now it is still used as such. I went on a quest around the city, to capture these flat emblems [O] And I found many both historical and contemporary examples.







My approach is ethno-fiction , where I am creating a narrative as an interplay between fiction and reality. I take initial inspiration in the works of Jean Rouch, Robert Flaherty and Werner Herzog, who with their films create the works of ethnography, documenting the lives of people and their cultures, with introduction of elements of fiction.





I am using the format of media coverage which is perceived as the most reliable tool of receiving information, to interrogate the medium authority and create suspense of disbelief.

In my film I speculate on the reality where the ornament no longer holds a monopoly on national representation, while the presence of the animal imagery in the city re-escavates a collective memory of the nomadic past.



The name of the TV channel is Шын Өтірік [Şyn Ötirik] translates to Truthful Lie in Kazakh





*The Centrifuge Brain Project*, 2011, Till Nowak

My main inspiration and references are the short films of Till Nowak, where he uses the satirical approach and augmentation of reality to question the human condition,







*Bells from the Deep*, 1993, Werner Herzog

Werner Herzog, in his films *Bells from the deep* and *Fitzcarraldo*, uses fiction to excavate 'ecstatic truth'.

His film *Fitzcarraldo*, even though has a fiction plot, where a man cuts through the Amazon forest to get his massive ship on the other side, but all of it was actually executed in reality. Watching the *Making Of* the film feels like watching the true events that ficticiously were depicted in *Fitzcarraldo*.



*Fitzcarraldo/ The making of Fitzcarraldo*, 1982, Werner Herzog



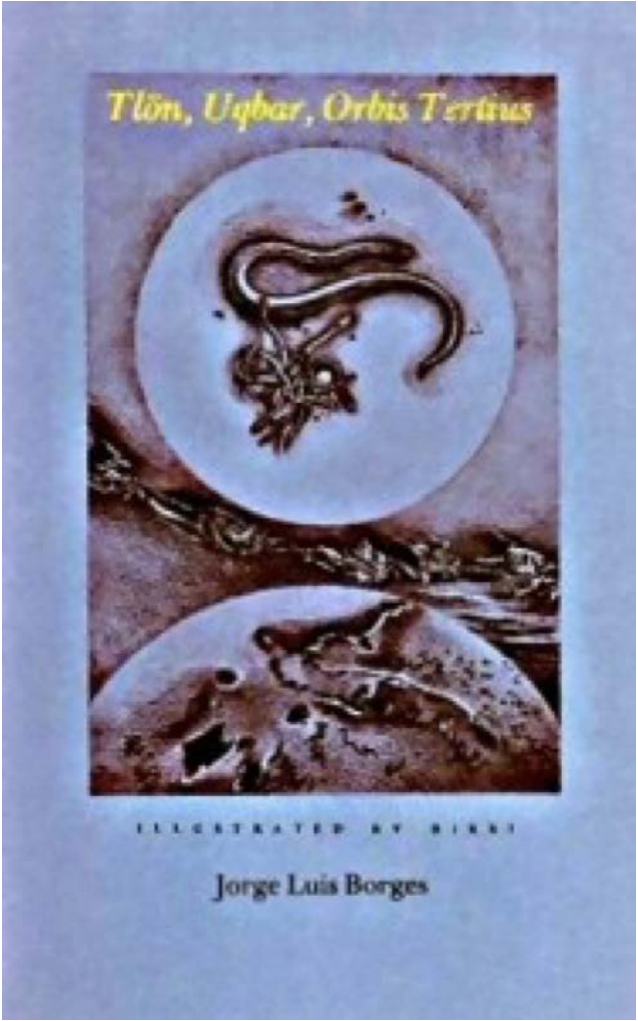
*Nanook of the North*, 1922, Robert J Flaherty

Nanook of the North, the first documentary, but the director had a leeway of constructing his own narrative, therefore making it the first ethno-fiction film.

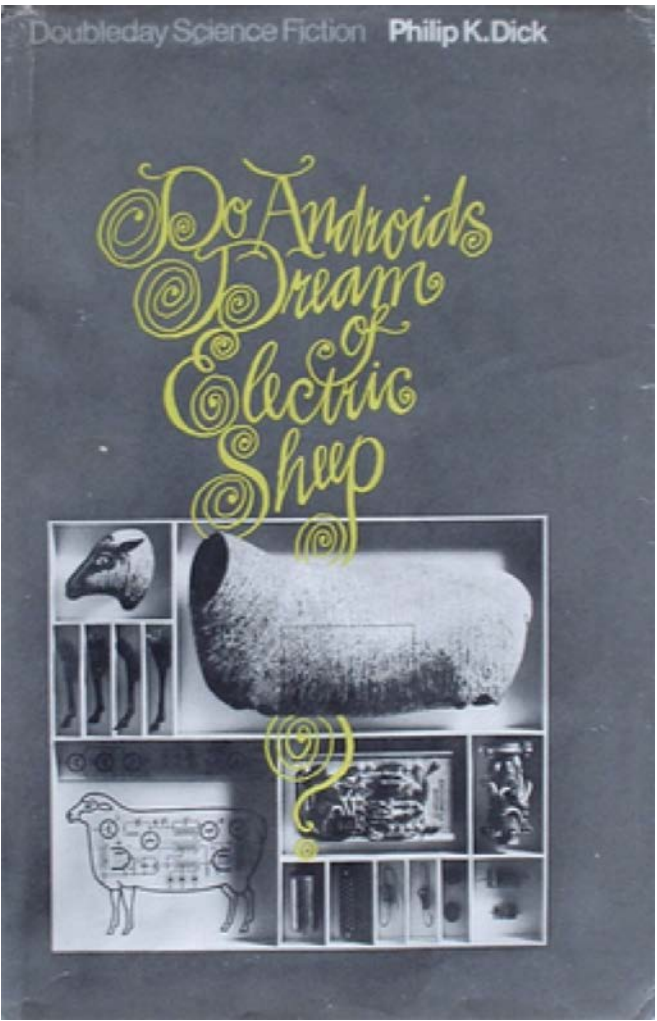




*Stranger than fiction*, 2015, Joan Foncuberta



*Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*, 1940, Jorge Luis Borges



*Do androids dream of electric sheep?*, 1968, Philip K. Dick



# HOMO URBANUS

LABORATORY FOR SENSITIVE OBSERVERS

## TUTORS

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