

Neo-Tribalism in Kazakhstan: The
Manifestations of Ru-Based Identity and the
‘Return’ of the Batyrs

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Abstract

The motivation behind composing this thesis stemmed from the perplexity on why the contemporary settled Kazakh society in Kazakhstan continues to not only align itself with tribal (*ru*) associations, but also actively participates in tribal activities on a consistent basis. The existing scholarship sheds light on some of the practices and places of memory and the existence of actors, apart from the state, that contribute their own funds for building a variety of commemorative sites in honor of their tribes and tribal warriors. Moreover, the prevailing research literature has predominantly focused on well-known commemorative locations. However, there is limited research on the study of the *agency* and inner workings of non-state local actors (*ru-based associations*) as full-fledged actors in the niche of national identity and development of national identity. Therefore, in order to examine the dynamic social processes on the ground, I ask a series of research questions. In particular, what are the manifestations of *ru*-based identity in Kazakhstan and how is it performed in contemporary society? Does such *ru* identity pose challenges to the national identity promoted by the state or complement it?

The entanglement of the state rhetoric on *tribal* identity, on the one hand, and the promotion of local agenda by local actors, on the other, exhibit an interesting interweave, where they both feed and respond to each other. Using a firsthand ethnographic study based on tangible primary materials and semi-structured interviews with respondents that represent diverse Kazakh *ru*, such as Shegir, Qanly, Atyghai, Besterek and Zhaghalbaily, I revealed a compelling form of hybridity, in which there is a movement from '*tribal*' towards '*nation-state*,' in which the celebrated tribal warriors are portrayed as Kazakh heroes, rather than emphasizing the superiority of one particular *ru* over all Kazakhs. Findings also suggest that the existence of alternative voices in Kazakhstan exhibits both the *agency* of local institutions and the presence of local *agenda* in regions, while their activities ultimately complement the grand narrative of the state on promoting an integral element of national identity, based on promoting Kazakh national heroes.

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Acronyms and definitions

AKP - Adalet ve Kalkınma Party [Justice and Development Party in Turkey], led by the current President of Türkiye, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan

CD disc – the compact disc data storage

QR – a quick-response matrix code

UNESCO – United National Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Preface.

In the course of the preparation to conduct the first stage of field research in the summer of 2022, I was advised to attend an interesting research object, located in Shymkent, which would be curious to examine for research purposes because the mosque carried the name of the tribe. The site is officially called as the “Tasken Mosque,” also known as the “Zhaghalbaily Mosque,” according to the residents that dwell there, located in the ‘Tasken’ micro-district, in the outskirts of Shymkent city. When I attended the mosque, I had an opportunity to meet with the local *imam* (prayer leader), a fellow Zhaghalbaily by tribal background, Abzal, and conducted an interview with him. The conversation with the religious leader generated certain provocative insights; in particular, Abzal drew my attention to the then trend of building mosques in honor of one’s apical ancestor in early 2010s that almost turned into a mass competition. Furthermore, Abzal Imam said the following: *“the religion of Islam prohibits the construction of monuments or drawing paintings of people, but people take my comments emotionally when I say not do so and reply that ‘others are also doing it,’ therefore, there is a sense of bragging and ego on the part of people.”* Apart from the Zhaghalbaily Mosque, where Abzal currently works, there are various other mosques nearby, such as the “Qarabura Awlie Mosque” in Tasken, built by the people of *Tama* tribe (Junior Horde), and the “Sirgeli Mosque” (Senior Horde), located in the neighboring micro-district, Qaitpas, which, in turn, was erected by the members of eponymous tribe, *Sirgeli*, from Senior Horde, to commemorate their apical ancestor. What I found more surprising and provocative is when Abzal Imam shared his personal experience, namely, the fact that certain people that come from the Sirgeli tribe only attend the mosque that is named after their ancestor, while avoid visiting the Zhaghalbaily Mosque or some other religious entities, which Abzal Imam finds as a ‘sign of ignorance.’ I believe that these examples illustrate us, in general, the importance of one’s ancestors for Kazakhs, their celebration via commemorative practices and illumination in the public space, and therefore appear to shed light on the supposed popular notions in the society that there are clear ‘tribalist’

divisions among Kazakhs. However, such social processes are not about tribalism *per se*, since numerous people from diverse Kazakh tribes that I have interviewed, provided thoughtful explanations to their commemorative activities that do not conform to ostensible manifestations of tribalism. Besides, Kazakh tribes, ‘despite the heterogeneity and varied milieu, exhibit a notable degree of national self-consciousness.’¹ Therefore, public associations of various Kazakh tribes (*ru*) are dealing with what I call the symbolic ‘return’ of their supposedly forgotten *batyrs* (warriors) to enter on the social scene as a means of exhibiting their historic accomplishments in the name of Kazakh people, their aspired freedom, independence and sovereignty.

¹ Omar, Hakim. В чем сила казахского рода – историк. [A Historian on the Strength of Kazakh Genesis]. Original publication March 30, 2023. <https://www.caravan.kz/news/v-chem-sila-kazakhskogo->

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Author's declaration

I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise formally indicated within the text, is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree, and does not incorporate any material already submitted for a degree.

Introduction

Although the belonging to a certain tribal amalgamation and the knowledge of one's genealogy (*shejire*) served as social capital and guide in the steppe for nomadic Kazakhs, for instance, "when meeting strangers or for the proper observance of seniority at various social occasions,"² it remains puzzling why the settled society of Kazakhs in contemporary Kazakhstan still practices not only attaching themselves to tribal unions, but also engaging in tribe-related enterprises on a regular basis. Such events are generally characterized by the erection of monuments to commemorate the tribal warriors (*batyrs*) as a result of the romanticization and reimagination of the past, construction of mosques in honor of forefathers, organization of tribal assemblies (*qurultai*) with elements of public entertainment, and the formation of official public associations that are used as a platform to implement their initiatives.³

Therefore, this dissertation work seeks to answer the following research questions. What are the manifestations of *ru*-based identity in Kazakhstan? How is it expressed and performed in contemporary society? Does this *ru* identity pose challenges to the national identity or complement it? The presence of a specific state rhetoric on *ru* identity and the promotion of local agenda by non-state local actors exhibit an thought-provoking entanglement that worth attention. In order to comprehend such social processes more profoundly, it was imperative to look for interesting cases on the ground and delve into researching the field appropriately. Accordingly, the initial stage of the collection of qualitative data took place in July and August of 2022, when I conducted field-visits to a number of cities and regions, namely, Taraz, Shymkent, Turkestan region, Almaty, Almaty region, Aqtobe and Aqtobe region, and Petropavlovsk to meet with my interviewees and visit the actual sites of *batyrs*. The second stage of data collection was conducted in November and December of 2023. The participants represent diverse *ru* from the

² Hudson, Alfred. Kazak Social Structure. *Human Relations Area Files Press*, (1938): 22.

³ Participation in events, organized by various Kazakh *ru* or descent groups, is rather a niche identity, but such phenomenon is quite spread across Kazakhstan and its topicality is universal almost for all the groups. It is usually the elders and senior representatives of families, who attend such gatherings, who later keep informed their relatives at home regarding the event and its important issues.

Great Horde, Middle Horde, and Junior Horde, such as Shegir, Qanly, Atyghai, Besterek and Zhaghalbaily. The bulk of the data for this dissertation comes from semi-structured interviews with respondents, and to a minor degree, participant observations. A series of case studies, such as the monument of Aqpan Batyr from Shegir tribe, located in city-center of Shymkent, Qulsari Batyr from Atyghai tribe in North Kazakhstan region (near Petropavlovsk), memorial complex of Qanly tribe in Qazyghurt area of Turkestan region, monument in honor of Sarke Batyr in Aqtobe region, and first ever site of Besterek tribe that is planned to be completed some time in 2023, was conducted that focused on depth rather than breadth of the issues under investigation.

Using an ethnographic study based on interviews, findings demonstrate that the rationale for the involvement in initiatives of *ru* or descent groups is manifold. Firstly, there is a steady demand from Kazakhs of different tribal (*ru*) backgrounds to “reinvent” and “rediscover” their long-ago history that had often been suppressed and distorted for many decades. An effort is made to enhance the current state by retrospectively revitalizing the past, seeking inspiration for the nation-state. One of the common trends that appeared in Central Asia in post-independent years was to detach themselves with the Soviet past and reinvent⁴ their “rich” pre-colonial histories and traditions that had been corrupted by the Soviets, hence, justifying their choice for ‘nationalizing’ their states. They aspire to discern the “forgotten” *batyrs* of their respective tribes (*ru*) to learn more about themselves, to form a tribal legacy in the shape of knowledge for the current and future generations, and to leave a firm trace in the history, in order to justify their place in society with the help of re-claiming ancestral achievements. The reason for such aspiration might be the fact that “the history of origins of the majority of tribes are either not addressed in the literature or have long become obsolete and ceased to satisfy the requirements

⁴ Nikolay Tsyrempilov, Ulan Bigozhin, and Batyrkhan Zhumabayev. 2021. “A Nation’s Holy Land: Kazakhstan’s Large-Scale National Project to Map its Sacred Geography.” *Nationalities Papers*, (2021): 10-11.

of modern science.”⁵ Also, the endeavors of *ru*-based public associations derive their *raison d'être* because of the supposed prohibition in the Soviet period on the profound investigation of the history and culture of Kazakhstan, while, in fact, “a few hundred Kazakhs were commemorated in the Soviet era.”⁶ Although weighty Kazakh historical figures as *khans*, statesmen, advisors or warriors of various Kazakh *ru* were not actually commemorated, there were exceptions, as for the canonized poet, Abay, whose “large statue was erected in 1961.”⁷ Therefore, the idea that mentioning one’s lineage background or ancestral lands in public places was a taboo, especially when non-Kazakh persons were appointed to rule over Kazakhstan, is perhaps a very ‘post-Soviet’ perception of the Soviet past, since the reality was not so skewed.

A category of Kazakh people now find it significant to refer to their *ru* (descent group) as a mechanism to search for answers from the past that may unravel contemporary problems. In this regard, tribal public associations are functioning as *mutual-aid societies* that can be represented as ‘localized’ civil society organizations via solving their fellow tribesmen’s socio-economic struggles where the government’s outreach is limited. As one of the impediments to the willingness to search for and ‘reimagine’ their past, interviews with various members of descent groups (*ru*) revealed the resentment, instigated by the so-called “dominance of the Shapyrashty tribe” and its agents over all Kazakhs in post-independence period.

Besides, prior to the establishment of monuments or any other commemorative site related to *ru*, it is generally conventional that leaders of *ru* first conduct research-based investigation of their past and tribal warriors via employing historians,⁸ *shejireshi* (genealogy researchers) and activists that allocate their time to work on elucidating not only the actual existence of such *batyrs*, but also embodying their triumphs in battles in the public space, some

⁵ Vostrov, Venyamin, and Sabit Mukanov. Родоплеменной состав и расселение казахов (конец XIX-начало XX в.). [*The Tribal Composition and Settlement of Kazakhs (late XIX – early XX centuries)*]. Academy of Sciences of Kazakh SSR, (1968): 4.

⁶ Mehmet Volkan Kasikçi, “The Soviet and the Post-Soviet: Street Names and National Discourse in Almaty.” *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 71, No. 8, (2019): 1352.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 1351.

⁸ Note: some of such historians do not necessarily have professional trainings or degrees in history; rather they study history as a hobby, at an amateur level.

of which will be deliberated on in this dissertation work. More importantly, the tribal attempts of immortalizing their respective heroes and warriors are not seamlessly carried out unilaterally, but contested on the regional level, and eventually approved at the state level.

Speaking of the latter, I find it germane to introduce the short chronology of the state's narrative, expressed in the discourse of the President, concerning the issues of commemoration, in particular, by various non-state local actors. Firstly, on 13th of March 2023, the President of Kazakhstan, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, held a meeting with the participation of *Akims* (mayors) from all regions and state-level cities of Kazakhstan as well as heads of government bodies to discuss the socio-economic development of regions. One of the key moments from the President's speech was devoted to the issue of enforcing nationwide identity and unity of the nation. In particular, President Tokayev marked the following:

*“It has recently become a trend to erect monuments to personalities known only in one region. Local commissions on onomastics should not allow this. The State Onomastic Commission must prevent illegal decisions. If everyone erects monuments exclusively to their ancestors, tribalism and parochialism will reign in the country. This issue requires close attention...”*⁹

Three months later, during the work of the Second National Qurultai¹⁰ (Assembly), held in Turkistan on June 17th 2023, he gave a talk concerning the pressing socio-political issues in Kazakhstan. At that meeting, the President Tokayev once more addressed the issue of onomastics in two ways: (a) by referring to it as the “most important ideological instrument of great importance for strengthening historical self-awareness”¹¹ and (b) clarifying that “onomastics is not the business of the descendants and relatives of one's ancestors or famous personalities, it is the prerogative of the state and that all onomastic procedures must be clearly

⁹ Akorda.kz. Глава государства провел совещание с акимами и руководителями государственных органов, <https://www.akorda.kz/ru/glava-gosudarstva-provel-soveshchanie-s-akimami-i-rukovoditelyami-gosudarstvennyh-organov-1321138> (accessed Mar. 14, 2023)

¹⁰ The National Qurultai under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan was formed on 14th of June 2022 with a decree №930, as a consultative and advisory body to develop ideas and mechanisms for the further development of public consolidation.

¹¹ Akorda.kz. Выступление Главы государства Касым-Жомарта Токаева на втором заседании Национального курултая “Әділетті Қазақстан - Адал азамат,” <https://www.akorda.kz/ru/vystuplenie-glavy-gosudarstva-kasym-zhomarta-tokaeva-na-vtorom-zasedanii-nacionalnogo-kurultayaadiletti-kazakstan-adal-azamat-175233> (accessed Jun. 18, 2023)

regulated, taking into account not only regional characteristics, but also national priorities.”¹² As for tracing the sequence of the state’s most recent perspective on matters of commemoration, the President Tokayev once more made his remarks at the third meeting of the National Qurultai under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan that took place on March 15 of 2024, where he urged for the reinforcement of the unity of the nation. Particularly, he underscored the existing “debates and polemics among the Kazakh intelligentsia now that compare and contrast the historical figures, starting from Genghis Khan, Alash Orda leaders, and figures from the Soviet period. In order to move forward, people of Kazakhstan must thoroughly realize the volume of the national history, preserve and promote their cultural heritage. Recently, the practice has included various collective letters with requests to perpetuate the memory of certain people on the principle of kinship and fraternity, by erecting monuments to them, and by assigning their names to streets. Such approach distorts the single ideological space of the country. The Onomastic policy must emphasize the nationwide values and key concepts, embodying the ideals of our statehood, such as Independence, Republic and Unity. People who put national interests above personal interests should be an example for our descendants and us.”¹³

There are several points from the President’s key points from a series of his speeches that should be reviewed. Firstly, it is clear that Tokayev overtly condemned the performance of onomastic commissions both at the regional and state levels due to the rising tendency of erecting monuments for personas that are recognized in just one region. The state still seeks to keep tight control and institutionalize both the state-building and nation-building processes, but its attempts turn out to be not always productive, since regional lobbyists of onomastic commissions promote their own ‘local’ agenda that are supposedly not in line with state’s

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Akorda.kz. Выступление Главы государства К. Токаева на третьем заседании Национального курултая “Адал Адам - Адал еңбек - Адал табыс” [Speech of the Head of the State, K. Tokayev, at the third meeting of National Qurultai], 2024, Retrieved from <https://akorda.kz/ru/vystuplenieglavy-gosudarstva-ktokaevana-tretem-zasedaniinacionalnogo-kurultaya-1525116>

interests, as we observe in President Tokayev's address. Probably, the only exception when local initiatives of commemoration was conceptually and financially supported by the Kazakh government is the erection of a bronze monument in honor of the Kazakh composer, Qurmangazy, in the Russian city of Astrakhan (*former Khanate of Astrakhan*) for its 450th anniversary,¹⁴ where Qurmangazy lived out the rest of his time.

With regard to the bullet points from the President's discourse that highlight the importance of scrutinizing the national history, the ideals of the state, such as *independence*, *republic* and *unity*, or setting examples of figures that valued national interests over personal ones, I find it nearly paradoxical that the state is contrasting the aforementioned values with the activities of local actors. The descent groups under study are investing their resources in examining the history of their *ru* and historical achievements of their warriors, which they believe adds meaning to the comprehension of the Kazakh history. If the ideals of the state revolve around the preservation of the statehood, independence and solidarity, as argued by the state, then, the endeavors of descent groups celebrate their descent-based warriors as *Kazakh national heroes* or *state defenders*, who lost their lives in the name of Kazakh freedom, fought for safety and protection of the land, and therefore deserve the national recognition. The representatives of various Kazakh *ru*, regardless of their glorifications of distinct heroes, are not commemorating their respective descent-based historical figures as superior to or *paramount batyr* of all Kazakhs. Instead, these public associations are demonstrating the inputs of their respective heroes through exploratory research findings that shed light on their role and contribution in a given historical timeframe.

Also, the state discourse on commemorative enterprises of local actors, expressed via descent groups across Kazakhstan, can be evaluated as intolerable, partially due to the fact that "as Kazakhs increase majority in Kazakhstan, tribal confederations among them acquiring dangerous new importance, and Tokayev is worried about this development because these

¹⁴ Aq Zhayiq.kz, "В Астрахани открылся памятник Курмангазы." [*The Monument of Kurmangazy was opened in Astrakhan*]. 2008, Retrieved from <https://azh.kz/ru/news/view/1918>

divisions could easily be exploited by Russia or some other outside power to weaken Kazakhstan now that relying on the ethnic Russian minority is no longer as possible or as effective as it was in the past.”¹⁵ Thus, in general, we observe that the government is concerned about the rising tendencies of the so-called ‘tribalism’ in Kazakhstan, but such seemingly parochial processes are in fact a manifestation of the nation-building processes on the ground. When we study this phenomenon more profoundly, then, it could be addressed that the narrative behind the erected monuments has a focus towards *nation-state* that underlines the importance of lineage, its symbolic power as well as importance for Kazakhs. This is not, however, to deny the existing elements of ‘tribal’ competition between various *ru* of Kazakhs to a certain degree, but such rivalry, firstly, co-exists along with their aspiration to knit or engage their respective ‘historic’ ancestral warriors with the idea of *nation-state*, and secondly, tribes compete while doing so within a circle of being ‘all Kazakhs,’ having a common history. Besides, it is common knowledge that “throughout history, there has been a persistent sense of competition among clans [ru], evident in various forms such as sports, poetry contests, and during celebratory or ceremonial occasions.”¹⁶ This means that even if people observe the presence of certain features of competition between the tribes, they do not compete as separate nations, but rather as *descent groups* within Kazakhs.

While there is a rhetoric of the state that describes the activities of *ru* and their commemorative undertakings as signs of parochialism and tribalism that apparently have a divisive characteristic, non-state local actors in the form of public associations are concerned by such perspective and responding to the state pressure through defining their enterprises in a positive manner, advancing the idea that *ru* identity is an integral part of being Kazakh.

¹⁵ Goble, Paul. “As Kazakhs Increase Majority in Kazakhstan, Tribal Confederations among Them Acquiring Dangerous New Importance, Prokhvatilov Says.” *Window on Eurasia – New Series*. Original publication March 19, 2023. <http://windowoneurasia2.blogspot.com/2023/03/as-kazakhs-increase-majority-in.html> (accessed March 21, 2023).

¹⁶ Omar, Hakim. В чем сила казахского рода – историк. [A Historian on the Strength of Kazakh Genesis]. Original publication March 30, 2023. <https://www.caravan.kz/news/v-chem-sila-kazakhskogo-roda-istorik-922878/> (accessed April 14, 2023).

Therefore, I argue that calling the activities of tribal associations a consequence of ‘tribalism’ that produces cleavages in the society is misleading. Instead, based on the gathered data, I observe an interesting form of hybridity, that is, the movement from ‘tribal’ towards ‘nation-state,’ in which the revered tribal warriors are portrayed as *Kazakh heroes*, rather than emphasizing the superiority of one particular tribe over all Kazakhs.

In this regard, attempts to reimagine the past almost resemble the phenomenon of German Romanticism of Hardenberg, Schlegel or Müller that strove “to enrich the present by reviving the past”¹⁷ retrospectively by searching for inspirations for their nation-state from the Middle Ages. The concepts of German Romanticism and romantic nationalism are complex in their content, in which its pioneers stressed the significance of emotions in contrast to logic, and advocated for the close ties with nature, a harmonious life far from material advancement and urban fuss, and search for an unknown, poetic as well as idyllic past, which was not necessarily an authentic one. However, the reason why I draw a parallel with German Romanticism is not because Kazakh descent groups attempt to restore “the unity and harmony of the past [as] in the classical Greece or the Middle Ages that had been lost forever by the advent of civil society and Enlightenment,”¹⁸ but rather due to the role of emotions or emotive attachment and a quest for an ideal past, where *batyrs* bravely sacrificed themselves, demonstrated rigor, and acted as the guardians of the people, whose symbolic presence in today’s social space serves as sort of role models for contemporary members of Kazakh society. At the same time, such request for an ideal past was given a meaning as Kazakhs imagined that they have “lost” their age of greatness during the Soviet period due to numerous factors, such as the “expropriation of peasants with confiscation of property, repressions of almost the entire Kazakh intelligentsia, Kazakhs becoming a minority in their homeland and feeling more like guests than hosts, transferring of three southern regions to the jurisdiction of Uzbekistan, and catastrophic environmental

¹⁷ Hans Kohn, “Romanticism and the Rise of German Nationalism.” *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 12, No. 4, (1950): 446.

¹⁸ Beiser, Frederick C. *The Romantic Imperative. The Concept of Early German Romanticism.* *Harvard University Press*, (2003): 32-33.

consequences of a number of experiences.”¹⁹ In this regard, I believe Kazakhs picture that if only there were mighty *batyrs* back then [in the Soviet era], like those who are now revered on monuments, people would have safeguarded their national values and a heroic past. Moreover, the existing monuments for *batyrs*, regardless of their belonging to one or the other descent group, not only *revive* the achievements of ancestral warriors, their fighting spirit, masculine strength and supposed communion in the name of the nation, but are also utilized to restore an *imagined* national identity of Kazakhs that had been substantially disrupted under the Russo-Soviet colonization.

As a consequence, contemporary Kazakhs do not only maintain traditional customs and habits, but also actively *romanticize* the past, especially of the pre-colonial era, through ubiquitous commemoration of heroic warriors in the public space. In such romanticization of the *batyrs*, various Kazakh *ru* aim to establish the idea of virtuous Kazakh warriors as the personification of the nation, who have had nothing but an altruistic outlook that prioritized freedom, protection of the land, and readiness to gallop everywhere at any time to war against ‘Kazakh enemies,’ placing their own selves lower than the interests of the Kazakh people or nation. Therefore, it is visible that one of the outcomes of such re-imagination of the past by local actors is the presence of pompous monuments and memorial complexes in honor of historic figures of respective descent groups, and not merely figures *per se*, but masculine champions that were selected on purpose and depicted with traits for being physically strong, wearing a heavy beard and galloping on a powerful horse. Unlike the local actors, the state exercises the so-called ‘acceptable femininity,’ in which it celebrates the World War II achievements of heroines as A. Moldagulova and M. Mametova “as a way of incentivizing Kazakh men to fight.”²⁰

¹⁹ Exclusive.kz, “С чем СССР оставил Казахстан на самом деле?” [*What did the USSR really leave Kazakhstan with?*]. 2021, Retrieved from <https://exclusive.kz/expertiza/politika/125598/>

²⁰ Kristoffer Michael Rees, “Recasting the Nation: Transforming Heroes of the Soviet Union into Symbols of Kazakhstani Patriotism.” *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 39, No. 4, (2020): 5.

It also appears that tribal enterprises in erecting monuments for their ancestral-warriors in some respects are remnants of the Soviet legacy. In particular, the Soviet ideology for World War II, in which millions of ordinary people served the common goal by fulfilling their part, for instance, working in the fields and sending cotton or wool for common military welfare, or operating in a factory that produced lead and using it to prepare bullets, thus, jointly contributing to the victory of the ‘motherland’ in the war. Moreover, the persisting Soviet commemorative inheritance in modern Kazakhstan is evident when it comes to the practices of remembrance of significant historical figures and fateful events because Kazakhs of pre-colonial times had not formerly possessed such tradition in their socio-cultural repertoire. The narrative of tribal activists from diverse Kazakh tribes, settled in various regions of Kazakhstan, appears to advocate the idea that the celebrated *batyrs*, regardless of their tribal background and disparate timeframe of activities as warriors on the stage of history, were fighting for the alleged common goal of freeing Kazakhs or struggling in the name of their sovereignty. Moreover, tribal associations organize their internal events in such manner that it resonates with the *state* format, such as the organization of jubilees of celebrated warriors or honored personalities, holding of scientific conferences, opening of museums, and erection of monuments, which exhibits that tribal activities are wrapped not only in academic, but also state-like frameworks, including Soviet patterns of commemoration.

On the one hand, there is a state-approved and recognized pantheon²¹ of heroes, however, on the other, there is a promotion of local agenda, although tribesmen²² do not separate their

²¹ The notion of ‘pantheon’ has a couple of meanings. Firstly, it primarily refers to the celebration of heroic figures from the past that is commemorated by the state and is consonant with the state’s national ideology. Secondly, the idea of building a national pantheon for burial of the dead was introduced in 2016, with an allocated area of 959 hectares, located about 17 kilometers away from Astana, around the mausoleum of Qabanbay Batyr, in order to perpetuate the memory of prominent statesmen, figures of science and art, as well as individuals, who contributed to the development of Kazakhstan. The criteria for eligibility for burial in the Pantheon grounds are subject to renewal as of March 24, 2023, according to the draft order of Prime Minister of Kazakhstan, Alikhan Smailov.

²² It is generally conventional that there are 11 major tribes in the composition of the Senior Horde (*Alban, Suan, Dulat, Zhalayir, Qanly, Saryuisun, Shapyrashty, Ysty, Sirgeli, Oshakty, Shanyshqyly*), 6 tribes in the Middle Horde (*Arghyn, Naiman, Kipchak, Qonyrat, Kerei, Uaq*) and 25 tribes in the Junior

activities from the state's grand narrative of national heroes. In fact, tribal commemoration across Kazakhstan actually *complements* the already existing monuments for *batyrs* that were built by the state. More importantly, tribal activists under scrutiny, from Zhaghalbaily, Besterek, to Qanly, Shegir, Atyghai, imagine their respective *batyrs* as part of the 'big' picture, every warrior constituting the part of the system, and contributing to the all-encompassing 'imagined' resistance of Kazakhs in the past, located in a single spatial continuum from the Caspian Sea to Altai Mountains, fighting for the supposed 'common' good. Furthermore, they imagine that their distinguished *batyrs* were already fighting for an independent, modern Kazakhstan in its current geographic borders.

This dissertation proceeds sequentially through the historical account of Kazakhstan, development and maintenance of kin relations in the nomadic past and its current reimagination in novel forms, contestation over nation-building dynamics in the contemporary society by state and non-state local actors. In Chapter 1, I take on the background research of the problem, namely, the attempts of presenting the imagined uninterrupted continuity of Kazakhstan, colonial depictions of Kazakh lifestyle and repercussions of the social experiments under the Soviet Union, survival and endurance of tribal identity in Kazakh society. This chapter also deals with the invention of symbolic representations of the state through commemorative activities in the post-Soviet period, selective reading of the past, including historical figures and events, and relevance of retaining practices of nomadic ancestors as the dissemination of genealogical knowledge and maintenance of *ru*-based ties. Chapter 2 explores several interconnected themes, including the dynamics of nation-building processes through the establishment of commemorative rituals in post-Soviet Kazakhstan, the promotion of a state-sanctioned pantheon of acknowledged national heroes, the enduring influence of Soviet practices in creating memorials, efforts to revive the overlooked aspects of national and tribal history, the increasing prevalence of monuments in public areas, the emergence of a cult surrounding *batyrs* (warriors)

Horde (*Zhetiru or Seven Tribes, 12 Ata of Baiuly, 6 Ata of Alim*). <https://sputnik.kz/20220207/qazaq-ush-zhuz-dereker-22587887.html> (Accessed April 19, 2023).

as well as their significance and function as a phenomenon in the society. It also covers both *top-down* and *bottom-up* factors in the niche of memory in reproducing the Kazakh nation, in particular, the *agency* of local actors and the presence of local *agenda* in regions, which are actively integrating their ‘distinguished’ tribal warriors into the list of Kazakh national heroes, promoted by the state. I also present an in-depth analysis of findings from firsthand ethnographic study, based on interviews with respondents that represent diverse Kazakh *ru*, such as Shegir, Qanly, Atyghai, Besterek and Zhaghalbaily. Chapter 3 examines the public associations of Kazakh *ru* (descent groups) as organizations by shedding light to their structural organization, internal procedures, financial aspects, representation in various areas of the country, implementation of significant functions as ‘*localized*’ mutual-aid societies and providing an explanation for the consequences of teaching Kazakh traditions in the school curriculum that partially result in joining *ru*-based organizations. Chapter 4 analyzes the contents of the collected rare tangible resources from the members of *ru* under study that encompass different brochures, books, documentaries, booklets, and CD discs that illuminate both the factual and imagined aspects of the history of *ru* (descent groups), narrate the life experiences and achievements of their warriors (*batyrs*) by proving academically the worth of their cause, and elucidate the genealogical lineage of respective ‘*ru*.’ It also touches upon the issue of national ideology, particularly, an exceptional case that frequently appeared from the discourse of participants on an alleged promotion of the Shapyrashty *ru* as a kind of *ideology*, while conflating the idea of *tribalism* with *nepotism*. The conclusion addresses the rationale behind participation in *ru*-based associations and a variety of mechanisms, through which Kazakhs of various *ru* romanticize the past by showcasing the historical achievements of their ancestors that are embodied in the concepts of sovereignty, independence and freedom. Moreover, it discusses the reason why commemoration of ancestors appears to be significant from the perspective of non-state local actors and how their activities interweave with the rhetoric of the state in its endeavor of

preserving a unified large nation, while minimizing the trepidation of the state about the supposed expanding influence of what is referred to as ‘tribalism’ in Kazakhstan.

Terminology

Before further proceeding with this dissertation work, I find it necessary to introduce certain terminological clarifications with regard to the prevalent terms as ‘tribe’ and ‘clan,’ the colonial inventions, which have little relevance and explanatory power to the Kazakh context. The utilization of such terms as ‘tribes’ or ‘tribalism’ is quite widespread in the Kazakhstani society, as they are used on a daily basis, both by the media and ordinary people to refer to instances of mutual help, provided in a variety of forms between individuals, that have genealogical closeness to each other, which is usually an outcome of nepotism rather than tribalism *per se*. I myself used the word ‘tribe’ several times prior to developing this section on terminology as a means of acquainting the reader with the issue this dissertation investigates as well as showing the local understanding and usage of these concepts.

In fact, scholars from varying disciplines have dissimilar views on the utilization of the terminology. For instance, political scientists interchangeably use the terms such as ‘tribe’ and ‘clan’ to refer to “informal identity networks based on kin or fictive kin bonds” that are utilized as political tools,²³ while anthropologists have initially embraced but later criticized both the English and Russian terms of ‘tribe’ (*plemya*) and ‘clan’ (*rod*) on account of its “evolutionist connotations and imprecise usage in the literature,”²⁴ hence, “obscur[ing] local expressions of relatedness.”²⁵ The basis of such evolutionist approach can be traced beginning from the work of Morgan, who asserted that human species followed a developmental path “from savagery to

²³ Kathleen Collins, “The Logic of Clan Politics. Evidence from the Central Asian Trajectories.” *World Politics*, Vol. 56, (2004): 224.

²⁴ Peter Finke, “Ethnicity of Turkic Central Asia.” *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Asian History*, (2018): 3.

²⁵ Gullette, David. *The Genealogical Construction of the Kyrgyz Republic: Kinship, State and ‘Tribalism.’ Global Oriental*, (2010): 5.

barbarism to civilization, that was achieved as a result of series of fortuitous circumstances”²⁶
The idea of his work found its continuation and significance in the ideological foundation of Russo-Soviet Orientalism, in which Marxist-Leninist and Stalinist concepts of evolution categorized the social organization and traditional structures of authority of Central Asian peoples as that of Kazakhs as ‘*barbaric*’ and ‘*uncivilized*,’²⁷ by artificially putting them at the ‘lower’ levels of evolutionary stages of human development.

Such prejudiced views of nomadic peoples as Kazakhs and Kyrgyz promoted the ‘colonial’ view of treating such entities as ‘*primitive*,’ ‘*pre-state*’ or ‘*traditional*,’ since the ‘tribal’ element of these kin groups placed them at the bottom of supposed evolutionary stage of development. By advancing the notions of Western and Soviet ‘Orientalisms’ regarding the modern state and its components, which accentuate the significance of centrality, territory and bureaucracy, characteristic of so-called ‘authentic’ nation-states, the scholarship put labels on nomadic kin groups for being ‘backward’ and ‘pre-state,’ and declared as an immature model of development, which “needed foreign [Russian] help for further development.”²⁸ However, in fact, the remnants of such evolutionist thinking that treated pastoral nomads and their kinship model as attributes of an allegedly *non-state society*, are irrelevant to the Kazakh case for reasons that it was a convenient narrative for the production of knowledge that advanced the colonial agenda, while “in inner Asia many of the forms of power thought to be characteristic of states actually existed independently of the degree of overarching political centralization.”²⁹

Moreover, the terms such as ‘tribe’ and ‘tribal identity’ have been originally invented and utilized by European colonizers in Africa, and in fact, “in a number of cases, African ‘tribes’ were the (conscious or unconscious) creations of colonial administrators and professionals,

²⁶ Morgan, Lewis Henry. *Ancient Society or Researches in the Lines of Human Progress from Savagery through Barbarism to Civilization*, (1877): 563.

²⁷ Bustanov, Alfrid. *Soviet Orientalism and the Creation of Central Asian Nations*. *Routledge*, (2015): 38-39.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 60.

²⁹ Sneath, David. *The Headless State. Aristocratic Orders, Kinship Society, and Misrepresentations of Nomadic Inner Asia*. *Columbia University Press*, (2007): 5.

including ethnographers, with other interests in colonial government.”³⁰ Even if colonial officials intended to inflict the belief that tribes among Africans have continuously existed, at least, in theory, that were static and everlasting, “far from there being a single ‘tribal’ identity, most Africans moved in and out of multiple identities, defining themselves at one moment as subject to this chief, at another moment as a member of that cult, at another moment as part of his clan, and at yet another moment as an initiate in that professional guild.”³¹ In other words, irrespective of the colonial idea that has “regarded African societies as particularly tribal...and tribalism is thought of as peculiarly African, then the ideology itself is particularly European in origin.”³² Since the invention and inaccurate application of these concepts in Africa, the operation of the term was extended to cover nomadic pastoralists and depict their sophisticated, multi-layer lineage and descent system in an oversimplified order of ‘tribe and clan.’

In his analysis of the nomads and their relations with the outer world, Khazanov describes their social organization as *complex* [my emphasis], in which the stratified segmentary system of Kazakhs was depicted in the following way: “the ‘black bone’ was the estate to which all the Kazakhs, with the exception of the Jenghizids [the white bone] and individuals tracing their ancestry back to [prophet] Muhammad and his descendants that are often called as Muslim sacred families, belonged,”³³ which among Kazakhs are known under the name of Saids/Seids and Qozhas/Khodjas. In today’s Kazakh society, such segmentary model is no longer pertinent, since the secular socio-political system does not discriminate against the representatives of the the so-called ‘black bone’ estate, although in everyday life Kazakhs of Tore and Qozha background refer to their aristocratic, “white bone” antecedents, when explaining their descent background.

³⁰ Scott MacEachern, “Genes, Tribes, and African History.” *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 41, No. 3, (2000): 363.

³¹ Terence Ranger. *The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa*. In: *The Invention of Tradition*, edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, (1983): 248.

³² Archie Mafeje. “The Ideology of ‘Tribalism.’” *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 9, Issue 2, (1971): 253.

³³ Khazanov, Anatoly M. *Nomads and the Outside World*. *The University of Wisconsin Press*, (1994): 177.

Some of the earlier works on the social order of Kazakhs made an important nuance in terms of examining the native terminology, in which “there is only the single indefinite term *uru* [*ru*] which signifies tribe, sub-tribe, gens and sub-gens.”³⁴ It is surprising that the utilization of native terminology is still germane among Kazakhs today, since all of my interviewees constantly kept using the word “*ru*” (in Kazakh: *py*) to designate their social grouping. From one perspective, it is tempting to use the local language in order to examine the social processes *from* the ground to better account for the findings and avoid some type of self-orientalization. On the other hand, the use of the term “*ru*” exclusively might perhaps lead to self-fulfilling prophecy and miss its comparative and analytical powers, thus, limiting the possibility of contrasting the term vis-à-vis the existing terminology in the scholarship.

In general, Kazakhs and those under my study, trace their lineage from fathers, which is a (unilineal) patrilineal descent that turns them into a part of their forefathers’ group. An interesting circumstance is that the notions of descent and lineage are interrelated and complement each other because it is typically the case that Kazakhs trace their lineage up to seven generations (forefathers), whose identity is known or traceable, however, the source of their identification is much broader and associated with their ancient ancestor, founder of the relevant descent group or *ru*, real or imagined. In fact, although such descent groups have further multi-layered sub-divisions and lineages within them, my interviewees, regardless of their belonging to separate sub-groups and lineages within a major assembly, do not limit the recognition of their senior kins only up to the seventh generation, but nevertheless refer to their respective *ru*, as Arghyn, Qanly, Zhaghalbaily, Besterek or Shegir in a broader sense, who are considered to be their apical ancestors. Thus, the starting point of the identification of these groups of people instigates from the grand progenitor, based on the consanguineal (blood) principle, derived primarily from the written genealogical knowledge, although the biological³⁵

³⁴ Hudson, Alfred. Kazak Social Structure. *Human Relations Area Files Press*, (1938): 17-18.

³⁵ There are scholars in Kazakhstan, such as Sabit Zhaxylykov, that conduct historical and genetic research of Kazakh genealogies (tribes) by using the methodology of population genetics at the National

relation to such earliest forefathers may not necessarily be detectable and thus remains ‘imaginary.’



Figure №1. Custom-made wall panels of household *shejire* (genealogy) that I came across while visiting the house of relatives.

For instance, in the course of my personal life experience, I encountered a fascinating occurrence, namely, the innovative practice of revering the memory of seven ancestors via their reimagined genealogy (*shejire*) in the form of a custom-made wall panel artwork (see Figure 1). When I visited the home of my relatives during their festive event in honor of acquainting in-laws between their son and his bride, I saw one of such artwork on wall that lists the chronology of seven grandfathers in a descending order, while placing their great ancestor, Ysty, in this case, on the top, as their ultimate founder. Similarly, one of the families from Qanly background have the similar-style panel that lists both the references to seven grandfathers and the offspring of the man of the house and their children, respectively. In both Ysty and Qanly cases, I observe that

Center of Biotechnologies (Astana). Since each tribe may have several (from 2 to 14) versions of its genesis, such genetic analyses therefore help to filter out the plausible versions from the implausible ones. National Center of Biotechnologies, <https://biocenter.kz/ru/proekty-ru/ap09058538-istoricheskoe-i-geneticheskoe-issledovanie-kazahskih-shezhire/> (accessed Jan. 17, 2024)

there is a necessary indication of their belonging to a certain Juz (e.g Senior Horde), reference to their descent group and the sequence of their most recent seven grandfathers (*zheti ata*). Although each household traces its genealogy up to seven latest ancestors as a way of upholding tradition of reminiscing one's origins, the basis of their identification is much more comprehensive with an indispensable link with their grand founder, that is, forefather of the descent group. Thus, Kazakh households make such costly and masterly panels of genealogy at the micro-level, which repeatedly indicates that they highly appreciate the notions of *ru* and one's origin. In other moderate occasions, in the absence of genealogical books or financial means, it is conventional that people mostly preserve their *shejire* in laminated sheets of papers and use them as directed.

Furthermore, the notion of Kazakh *ru* may be pondered from different outlooks, in particular, "a functional sense as applied to one group fairly closely related, living together as an economic and political unit under their own leader, referring to nomadic encampments with comparatively specified grazing lands, and, in a purely genealogical sense, as applied to any number of groups claiming descent from a common ancestor however remote."³⁶ Nowadays, the functional and genealogical elements of the term are somehow interwoven, since public associations on the basis of *ru* exist, claiming descent from a shared forefather, while fulfilling an economic role by helping kinsmen, especially of economically vulnerable, implementing essential life-cycle events and so on. Although public associations of *ru* have appointed chairmen and principal regional delegates in almost every region of Kazakhstan, they do not pursue, at least overtly, any political goals, since their agenda is revolved around revision of their genealogical knowledge, enhancement of ties between in-groups, and investigation of their past with an aim to understand their distinctiveness better and illuminate such historical facts to a broader audience. By considering the aforementioned nuances, I will use the term 'descent group' interchangeably with the local word choice, '*ru*,' throughout this dissertation work, to

³⁶ Ibid, (1938): 22.

attempt to both remain in the academic theoretical framework and take into account the local terminological peculiarity.

Chapter 1. Background Research of the Problem

This chapter delves into the contextual research regarding several key aspects: the portrayal of the imagined seamless historical narrative in Kazakhstan, the colonial depictions of Kazakh culture, the consequences of social experimentation during the Soviet era, the resilience and persistence of tribal identities within Kazakh society. Additionally, this chapter addresses the creation of symbolic representations of the state through post-Soviet commemorative practices, the selective interpretation of history including notable figures and events, and the significance of preserving the traditions of nomadic ancestors for the transmission of genealogical knowledge and the sustenance of *ru*-based relationships.

In the framework of this research study, it is essential to grasp the idea on why the modern population of Kazakhs, which currently leads a settled lifestyle with a developed urban and rural infrastructure and conforms to the fundamental laws under a secular form of government, still retains certain practices of its nomadic ancestors, including communication of genealogical knowledge through generations, maintenance of close descent-based ties (tribal affiliation), etc. Therefore, it is essential to understand what were the factors that allowed the Kazakh clan or tribe identification to survive into the twenty-first century. Did the Soviet policies serve more to disrupt or rather to entrench ‘tribal’ identity in Kazakhstan? The existing scholarship puts it clear that the Soviet authorities proudly claimed that “the war on tribalism was repeatedly declared victorious.”³⁷ In reality, the socio-political initiatives of the Soviet Union that were aimed to liquidate such ‘primitive’ and ‘uncivilized’ social structures in the

³⁷ Khazanov, Anatoly M. After the USSR: Ethnicity, Nationalism, and Politics in the Commonwealth of Independent States. *The University of Wisconsin Press*, (1995): 125.

early 20th century, in fact, gave a new impulse for their preservation,³⁸ yet making them develop in slightly altered forms. For the purpose of apprehending the clan politics in the Kazakh steppe and its moderately historical continuity, I believe it is worth to trace back to their history in order to grasp the importance and pervasiveness of *juz/ru* identification of Kazakhs today.

The contemporary Republic of Kazakhstan traces its history from the times of the establishment of the Kazakh Khanate in the second half of the 15th century, established by Kerey and Janibek Khans, up to the achievement of the independence in 1991 under the first President, Nursultan Nazarbayev. There is a tendency on the part of Kazakh political elites and historians to portray the alleged uninterrupted continuity of the history of Kazakhs, lasting for several centuries. Actually, it must be recognized that a little more than five centuries have passed, containing plentiful and diverse historical events, which included being under the Russian protectorate and later colonization, participation in World Wars, experiencing drastic famine, political repressions, and many other tragedies, which contributed to the formation of Kazakhs, as a distinct ethnic group, with compound socio-economic and cultural transformations. Despite imposed external modifications and adaptations in the social and economic structures of Kazakh people by the Tsarist and Soviet Russia, clan politics remained persistent over time and still manifests itself in power relations in modern-day Kazakhstan, since the disintegration of the Kazakh Khanate in sixteenth century that has been formed as a result of the collapse of the Golden Horde.

It is common knowledge that “the Kazakhs emerged from an amalgamation of tribal groups in the late 1400s.”³⁹ The dissolution of the Kazakh Khanate in the second half of the 19th century and its new make-up in the form of three Kazakh Hordes (*Juz*) indicated the tribal confederations of Kazakhs, with continuing variations in their composition, motivated by

³⁸ Khazanov, Anatoly M. *After the USSR: Ethnicity, Nationalism, and Politics in the Commonwealth of Independent States*. *The University of Wisconsin Press*, (1995): 126.

³⁹ Iliya I. Alimaev and Roy H. Behnke, Jr., “Ideology, Land Tenure and Livestock Mobility in Kazakhstan,” In: *Fragmentation in Semi-Arid and Arid Landscapes. Consequences for Human and Natural Systems*. (eds.) Kathleen A. Gavlin, Robin S. Reid, Roy H. Behnke, Jr., and N. Thompson Hobbs. Springer, (2008): 155.

practical concerns, a lack of unity and constant struggles with each other. The term “Juz” (Kazakh: Жүз) itself, however, has a number of connotations and there is no conventional wisdom in the scholarship regarding the semantic aspects of the word “Juz,” its origins or what was the rationale behind the formation of tribal unions under the *Juz* (Hordes), why there were three *Juz* and so on. In Kazakh, the word “Juz” usually has several meanings, such as “hundred,” “facial expression,” “blade” or “edge.” Some scholars contend that “the term Juz does not mean ‘hundred’ or ‘hundred tribes,’ [a myth, widely circulated among the population], but rather a ‘part’ or ‘branch’ of the whole [a single nation], deriving from Arabic, referring to the main part of something.”⁴⁰ Although Amanzholov believes that “the three confederations of tribes of Kazakhs as Juz or Hordes began forming in the period of Turkic Khanate (V-VIII centuries) and ultimately finished its formation in X-XII centuries,”⁴² Vostrov and Mukanov argue that “the first trustworthy and quite specific descriptions about the divisions of Kazakhs into Juz was shared by the translator, M. Tevkelev, who had visited the Junior Horde in 1731.”⁴³

Evidently, the distinct tribes only joined forces when confronted by a shared external threat. This suggests that, during that period, the Kazakhs did not constitute a well-organized singular entity with a unified identity. In particular, some of the reasons for unification of tribes into tribal confederations (*juz*) were “driven by public necessity, safety (defense) and offence, attempt to become more powerful and independent.”⁴⁴ In this regard, Diener emphasizes that Kazakhs “were prone to decentralization and fragmentation along a number of sub-ethnic

⁴⁰ Amanzholov, Sarsen. Вопросы Диалектологии и Истории Казахского Языка. [*The Issues of Dialectology and History of Kazakh Language*]. Abay Alma-Ata State Pedagogical Institute, (1959): 111.

⁴¹ Vostrov, Venyamin, and Sabit Mukanov. Родоплеменной состав и расселение казахов (конец XIX-начало XX в.). [*The Tribal Composition and Settlement of Kazakhs (late XIX – early XX centuries)*]. Academy of Sciences of Kazakh SSR, (1968): 15.

⁴² Amanzholov, Sarsen. Вопросы Диалектологии и Истории Казахского Языка. [*The Issues of Dialectology and History of Kazakh Language*]. Abay Alma-Ata State Pedagogical Institute, (1959): 122.

⁴³ Vostrov, Venyamin, and Sabit Mukanov. Родоплеменной состав и расселение казахов (конец XIX-начало XX в.). [*The Tribal Composition and Settlement of Kazakhs (late XIX – early XX centuries)*]. Academy of Sciences of Kazakh SSR, (1968): 10.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 111.

cleavages.”⁴⁵ For instance, Abylai Khan was one of the few rulers that demonstrated his political acumen not only in resolving conflicts between tribes, but also being successful in uniting incongruent Kazakh tribes in the name of saving their land in the fight against the Jungars and their constant military attacks.⁴⁶ According to Kazakh historian, Nurbolat Masanov,⁴⁷ the term “Kazakh” implied no ethno-national meaning before the arrival of the Soviets in the early 20th century, but rather suggested their lifestyle as nomadic, with pastoralism being their major economic and social modus. At the same time, the appearance of the first nationwide newspaper, called *Qazaq* (“Қазақ” in Kazakh), took place in February of 1913, the objective of which was to ensure the timely dissemination of international, all-Russian in addition to domestic news to the Kazakh steppe.^{48,49}

The Kazakh steppes’ socio-economic and political structures were closely linked with people’s belonging to one or the other tribe within a horde, including the white bone (*aq suyek*) representatives, making the tribal identity the principal political and social form of community. Although there was a loose amalgamation of tribes within and between three hordes, “the Kazakhs identified collectively with Mongol Khans and Sultans in addition to a genealogical treatment of their origins.”⁵⁰ The Kazakhs lived under the clan/tribal system well before their inclusion into the Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union over the course of their colonial expansion. One of the explanations marks the persistent *movement* of nomads, as a strong factor for the continuity of tribal structure because “the mobility of nomads which limits the

⁴⁵ Alexander Diener, “National Territory and the Reconstruction of History in Kazakhstan.” *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, Vol. 43, No. 8, (2002): 640.

⁴⁶ Saulesh Yessenova. “Nomad for export, not for domestic consumption: Kazakhstan’s arrested endeavor to ‘put the country on the map.’” *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema*, Vol. 5, No. 2, (2011): 196.

⁴⁷ Nurbolat Masanov. “Perceptions of ethnic and all-national identity in Kazakhstan.” In: *The Nationalities Question in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan*, ed. Nurbolat Masanov, et al. (Chiba, Japan: Institute of Developing Economies), (2002).

⁴⁸ Since this news was written in a Qazaq language distinct from Chaghatay, it seems to imply a national connotation for the term, likely referring to the Qazaq identity.

⁴⁹ Ayan Oribayev and Qanat Tokabayev. 105 лет газете “Қазақ.” Исторический репортаж “Казинформа.” <https://www.inform.kz/lenta/gazeta/ru/> (Accessed April 19, 2023)

⁵⁰ Saulesh Yessenova. “Nomad for export, not for domestic consumption: Kazakhstan’s arrested endeavor to ‘put the country on the map.’” *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema*, Vol. 5, No. 2, (2011): 188.

development of direct territorial and neighborly links, [left] kinship as the best alternative for the expression of social relations.”⁵¹ In terms of the census data on the quantity of the members of each Kazakh tribe, a Kazakh historian and statesman, Mukhamedzhan Tynyshpaev, in his book, “*Материалы к истории киргиз-казакского народа*” [Materials on the History of Kazakh people], published in 1925, provides the following information as of 1917:

Senior Horde: “Dulat - 460 thousand, Alban - 80 thousand, Suan - 40 thousand, Sary-Uisun - 10 thousand, Shapyrashty - 70 thousand, Ysty - 50 thousand, Oshakty - 70 thousand, Sirgeli - 70 thousand, Qanly and Shanyshqyly - 190 thousand, Zhalayir - 130 thousand, totaling to 1,170,000 overall;

Middle Horde: Argyn - 890 thousand, Naiman - 530 thousand (with additional 150 thousand in Bukhara and another 150 thousand in China), Kipchak - 160 thousand, Kerei - 160 thousand (*with additional 300 thousand in China*), Uaq - 70 thousand, Qonyrat - 210 thousand (*with additional 100 thousand in Bukhara*), totaling to 2,720,000 overall;

Junior Horde: Bai-Uly - 880 thousand (*with additional 100 thousand in Khorezm and another 50 thousand in Bukhara*), Alim-Uly - 530 thousand (*with additional 50 thousand in Bukhara*), Zhetiru - 360 thousand (*with additional 50 thousand in Bukhara*), totaling to 2,040,000, with the combined numbers equal to 5,930,000.”⁵² These numbers seem highly inflated, if we take into account the consequences of famine that happened in 1930s, which “led to the death of 1.5 million Kazakhs, approximately 40 percent of all Kazakhs in the republic,”⁵³ thus, Tynyshpaev’s account in terms of *ru* are most likely inaccurate. Although the data on the quantity of each Kazakh *ru* was provided more than a century ago and are obsolete as of today, we nonetheless find interesting facts regarding the relative size differences between major Kazakh descent groups, with Junior Horde being the most populous and the Senior Horde

⁵¹ Khazanov, Anatoly M. Nomads and the Outside World. *The University of Wisconsin Press*, (1994): 138.

⁵² Tynyshpaev, Mukhamedzhan. *Материалы к истории киргиз-казакского народа* [Materials on the History of Kazakh People], 1925 (2023): 126.

⁵³ Cameron, Sarah. *The Hungry Steppe: Famine, Violence, and the Making of Soviet Kazakhstan*. Cornell University Press, (2018): 5, 21.

standing as the least populous. The data gives a combined amount for the large groups of descent groups of the Junior Horde without an internal breakdown, while within the other two Hordes it can be seen that certain *ru*, in particular, Dulat, Qanly, Zhalayir, Arghyn, Naiman and Qonyrat, are the largest in size. Today, the most updated records we have on the estimated number of people per Horde are given by Kazakh historian, N. Masanov, who estimates that there are around “1,1-1,5 million representatives of the Junior Horde, including Kazakhs from Russia and Turkmenistan,⁵⁴ about 3-4 million people from the Middle Horde, including Kazakhs living in Russia, Mongolia, China, and Central Asia,⁵⁵ and approximately 2-2,5 million from the Senior Horde, including Kazakhs from China and Central Asia as of 1989.”⁵⁶ If we compare the available data on the population size of Kazakh descent groups as of 1917 and 1991 by Tynyshpaev and Masanov, respectively, we observe a significant difference in size among the Hordes. In particular, Masanov argues that the general population of the Junior Horde has not increased steadily since they were the most damaged as a result of the famine in 1930s, while the Senior Horde and the Middle Horde grew significantly as they have been the least affected by the famine consequences.⁵⁷ After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, it is intriguing to note the absence of comparable census counts during the post-independence period. Consequently, it remains uncertain whether the state has such data and, if it does, whether it intentionally withholds it.

Moreover, Kazakhs have long been practicing certain traditions, such as the ability of one’s self “to name seven ancestors [*zheti ata*], an essential requirement in a community which

⁵⁴ Sputnik.kz. *Младший жуз - какие роды входили, известные выходцы*, <https://ru.sputnik.kz/20220208/mladshiy-zhuz-istoriya-22575545.html> (accessed Sept. 21, 2023)

⁵⁵ Sputnik.kz. *Средний жуз - где находился, какие роды входили, известные выходцы*, <https://ru.sputnik.kz/20220206/sredniy-zhuz-rody-kazakhstan-izvestnye-vykhodtsy-22558366.html> (accessed Sept. 21, 2023)

⁵⁶ Sputnik.kz. *Старший жуз - роды, история происхождения и известные выходцы*, <https://ru.sputnik.kz/20220205/starshiy-zhuz-rody-istoriya-proiskhozhdeniya-i-izvestnye-vykhodtsy-22545177.html> (accessed Sept. 21, 2023)

⁵⁷ Sputnik.kz. *Младший жуз - какие роды входили, известные выходцы*, <https://ru.sputnik.kz/20220208/mladshiy-zhuz-istoriya-22575545.html> (accessed Sept. 21, 2023)

forbade marriage between relations over so many generations.”⁵⁸ The tradition of ‘*zheti ata*’ is much more than merely being able to name one’s direct seven grandfathers or avoiding marriages that are biologically unfavorable; it is rather a compilation of wisdom, reputation and knowledge, passed on generations. In this regard, the centuries-long memory of genealogy of Kazakhs that served as a social guide in the steppes could not easily be removed by the Soviets, at least, in private settings. Therefore, the advent of Soviet modernization could not effectively mute the ‘primordial’ tribe or clan system of Kazakhs. The question of the identity of Kazakhs, in turn, was no more altered than in the times of Tsarist Russia and later Soviet Union’s colonization of such nomadic people. Much of the pre-colonial identity of Kazakhs in their habitat was characterized as follows: “while nomadism would become a central facet of the later crystallization of a Kazakh ethnic identity, to be a nomad in the pre-colonial steppe did not imply ethnic belonging.”⁵⁹

But, it was not until the appearance of the Russian colonial administration in the nineteenth century in the Kazakh steppes that put an end to the system of Turko-Mongol patronage with an intention of deteriorating the traditional authority structures among Kazakhs. Beginning from Abulkhair Khan’s pledge of allegiance to the imperial crown and following of other khans as well, caused by the lack of unity among Kazakh tribes and constant military invasions by outsiders, opened up prospective avenues for Russia’s control over the steppes. This situation is summed up in the work of Hancock-Parmer on the Barefooted Flight of the Kazakhs, which “was a small but crucial tool in that endeavor, a non-Russian cataclysmic threat to Kazakh survival that instilled the proper respect for Russian colonization and alliance.”⁶⁰ Although the matter of Kazakh survival was exacerbated by Jungars and Oirats, the Russian protectorate has gradually switched towards executing colonist policies, in which Kazakhs, their

⁵⁸ Hiro, Dilip. *Inside Central Asia: A Political and Cultural History of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkey, and Iran. Overlook Duckworth, (2009): 237.*

⁵⁹ Schatz, Edward. *Modern Clan Politics: The Power of ‘Blood’ in Kazakhstan and Beyond.* University of Washington Press (2004): 32.

⁶⁰ Michael Hancock-Parmer. “The Soviet Study of the Barefooted Flight of the Kazakhs.” *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 34, No. 3, (2015): 283.

lifestyle and traditional institutions were treated as backward. Hence, the Tsarist Russia's rulers were the first to employ its *mission civilisatrice* by introducing a number of administrative measures that aimed to settle Kazakhs, thus, making them more 'civilized' that started with the eradication of the institution of the 'Khan.' For instance, in some of the ethnographic works as that of Levshin⁶¹ in Ural regions, Kazakhs are shown as 'primitive' and 'irrational' that only practice pastoralism as the ultimate goal of their life. Similarly, another colonial officer and ethnographer, Gins, contends that the use of land by Kazakhs is 'unreasonable' and that they are better off by leading a settled way of life and turn to agriculture, which would also minimize the conflicts between these nomads and peasant settlers, who were given lands of Kazakhs for cultivation⁶². However, it was only with the beginning of the modernist Soviets that "the transformation of the Kazakh nomadic institutions and identity were undertaken in a complete manner."⁶³ The Kazakh *ru/juz* identification survived, despite the vast social experiments, placed upon them, due to ambiguity of policies and Soviet leadership's compromise in reinforcing their patron-client relationships with the Soviet Republics,⁶⁴ which received loyalty from the heads of non-Russian republics in exchange for their autonomy in running their domestic politics by appointing close kin members and other suitable candidates for key government positions, thus, arguably entrenching tribal identity to a certain degree.

As for the factors that may have contributed to the growing awareness of dichotomy between 'us' (Kazakhs) and 'them' (all others), it seems that with the massive state-led resettlement of Russian peasants and Cossacks to Kazakh steppes not only added to the demographic modification of the area, but also dramatically lessened the lands, used by Kazakhs generally, depriving them of land and water resources needed for pasturage, inducing "the Kazakh elites and ordinary nomads to forge a common ground by highlighting their common

⁶¹ Левшин, Алексей. 1832. Описание Киргиз-Казачьих, или Киргиз-Кайсацких, Орд и Степей, (1832): 327.

⁶² Гинс, Георгий, "В киргизских аулах: очерки из поездки по Семиречью" (1913).

⁶³ Dave, Bhavna, *Kazakhstan – Ethnicity, Language and Power*. London: Routledge, (2007): 30.

⁶⁴ Willerton, John P, Jr. "Clientelism in the Soviet Union: An initial examination." *Studies in Comparative Communism*, Vol. 12, Issues 2-3, (1979): 181.

experience of economic and cultural dispossession.”⁶⁵ Therefore, since the early Soviet periods, Kazakhs “irrespective of tribal or *zhuz* affiliation experienced an increasing land problem [that] made a collective Kazak identity more relevant to the interpretation of reality than it had been before,”⁶⁶ gradually developing a sense of Kazakhness. Subsequently, the apogee of national struggle in the Soviet Union that paved the way for the preservation of Kazakhs and their rights in their corresponding Kazakh lands took place in December of 1986, mass protests that demanded the appointment of a Kazakh political figure to rule over Kazakh SSR, instead of Russian Gennady Kolbin.

Other instances of social alterations also included the elimination of the “feudal ways dominated by *bais*, *aqsaqals* and clan or tribal leaders.”⁶⁷ Later on, it is due to the activities, held by *Alash Orda*⁶⁸ leaders such as that of Alikhan Bokeikhanov in the early 20th century, the vision of a unified Kazakhness or some sort of ‘Kazakh identity’ began to materialize, though Bokeikhanov and the like-minded preferred to gain autonomy but still remain within the Russian framework. In reality, even *Alash Orda* leaders faced confrontations from Kazakhs themselves, not to mention Russian authorities, such that the *Alash* was split when political figures as “Zhansha Dosmukhamedov created another *Alash Orda* government in the western ‘Kazakh’ steppe,” proving its political futility.⁶⁹ On top of that, in his spatial analysis of the activities of Kazakh intelligentsia, Uyama⁷⁰ argues, “although the Alash movement was supported by many people from all tribes, its position was strongest among the Arghyn [one of major tribes in the

⁶⁵ Dave, Bhavna, *Kazakhstan – Ethnicity, Language and Power*. London: Routledge, (2007): 42.

⁶⁶ Haugen, Arne. *The Establishment of National Republics in Soviet Central Asia*. Palgrave Macmillan (2003): 46.

⁶⁷ Hiro, Dilip. *Inside Central Asia: A Political and Cultural History of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkey, and Iran*. *Overlook Duckworth*, (2009): 237.

⁶⁸ Alash Orda or Alash Autonomy was a self-proclaimed Kazakh state entity, controlled by the Provisional People’s Council of Alash Orda, which was established by the Second All-Kazakh (All-Kyrgyz) Congress in 1917 and liquidated by the Bolshevik Revolutionary Committee on March 5, 1920.

⁶⁹ Ubiria, Grigol. *Soviet Nation-Building in Central Asia. The Making of the Kazakh and Uzbek Nations*. Routledge, (2016): 78.

⁷⁰ Tomohiko Uyama. “The Geography of Civilizations: A Spatial Analysis of the Kazakh Intelligentsia’s Activities, From the Mid-Nineteenth to the Early Twentieth Century.” In: *Regions: A Prism to View the Slavic-Eurasian World: Towards a Discipline of ‘Regionology’*. Edited by Matsuzato Kimitaka, (2000): 87.

Middle Horde] intellectuals, and its opponents were mainly non-Argyhns.” The latter statement may not necessarily suggest the standing struggles between Kazakh *ru* for power or ideology between representatives of various Kazakh tribes at the time, but it nevertheless hints us that there *was* an additional or essential component of an identity within a broader and yet growing Kazakh identity.

Moreover, Stalin’s Great Terror campaign eradicated the ‘national bourgeois’ of Kazakh intelligentsia including Alikhan Bokeikhanov, Mirzhaqyp Dulatov, Akhmet Baitursynov, Saken Seifullin and many others, the loss of which depreciated the intellectual and social capital of Kazakhs, leading to the sense of loss and lack of understanding as to where they should go further. On the other hand, there were some exceptions, such as the novel by Mukhtar Auezov, “Abay’s Path” (Kazakh: “*Абай Жолы*”), which was labeled as a fine work of socialist realism, in which the main figure, Abay, known as the founder of modern Kazakh literature, “was plausible as a Soviet hero largely due to his ties with Russian revolutionary thought,” thus, Auezov “succeeded in using him to prove Kazakh literature was always already socialist.”⁷¹ In turn, Abay praised Russians and the Russian language as the medium to achieve modernity, while depicting his fellow Kazakhs as ‘lazy, ignorant, and backward,’⁷² which was not only congruent with the Communist party lines, but also generated a complex of inferiority vis-à-vis Russians for future generations that also contributed to the identity and self-esteem of Kazakhs. However, given the fact that the works of Kazakh Soviet authors were heavily edited and censored, we might not be genuinely familiar with Abay, as a creative unit. Therefore, the Soviet ideologues celebrated not the authentic Kazakh traditional culture, but the version they have created themselves. It can be argued that neither the extermination of the Kazakh intelligentsia nor cherry picking of ‘good’ or ‘suitable’ Kazakh figures as the ‘Soviet heroes’ succeeded in diminishing the blood ties and social relations of Kazakhs that are based on patrilineage.

⁷¹ Gabriel McGuire. “*Aqyn agha? Abai Zholy* as socialist realism and as literary history.” *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, Vol. 9, (2018): 3.

⁷² Kudaibergenova, Diana. *Rewriting the Nation in Modern Kazakh Literature*. Lexington Books, (2017): 28.

It is commonly known that the ‘real’ transformation of the identity of Kazakhs, including their socio-cultural lifestyle, was under firm grip starting from the establishment of Kyrgyz (Kazakh) Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (KASSR) in late 1920s. The promise of the Soviet leadership that would grant the right for national self-determination for non-Russians, contradictory in its essence, paved the way for growing national self-awareness among Kazakhs, when the national delimitation took place in 1924. The attempt to territorialize (or ethno-territorialization of) Kazakhs within confined borders, instead of opting for seasonal migrations in tentatively boundless steppes, instilled the sense of ‘self,’ which were further elaborated by conducting ethnographic censuses, museums and political-administrative maps.⁷³ In particular, the instruments of ‘state-sponsored evolutionism’ as that of census were used “to deliberately transform its [the Soviet regime] subjects’ identities.”⁷⁴ Such state tools of restructuring the peoples of Central Asia along national lines, though not without its errors, led to the emergence of loosely integrated Kazakhs into a ‘nationality’ for the first time with its native language, and administrative-political borders set. One of the most fateful periods in the history of Kazakhs was the forceful settlement and collectivization of these nomads in 1920-1930s, by which the lands and livestock were taken away for the sake of ‘greater’ Soviet good, which according to some accounts as Cameron⁷⁵ had dreadful consequences, such as the genocide of millions of Kazakhs due to the artificially-made mass starvation in the steppes. We may acknowledge that the descent-based ties of Kazakhs began to weaken, once the processes of their “sedentarization and collectivization” were realized.⁷⁶ However, the introduction of socialism generated much scarcity in terms of goods that people needed on a daily basis, hence, “the command political economy produced access networks (kin connections) to access to economic, social or political

⁷³ Hirsch, Francine. *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union (Culture and Society after Nationalism)*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, (2005).

⁷⁴ Hirsch, Francine. *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union (Culture and Society after Nationalism)*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, (2005): 102.

⁷⁵ Cameron, Sarah. *The Hungry Steppe: Famine, Violence, and the Making of Soviet Kazakhstan*. Cornell University Press, (2018).

⁷⁶ Khazanov, Anatoly M. *After the USSR: Ethnicity, Nationalism, and Politics in the Commonwealth of Independent States*. *The University of Wisconsin Press*, (1995): 125.

goods, such as housing, healthcare, consumer durables.”⁷⁷ In other words, the *shortage economy* boosted the frequency of contact between people, especially in-groups, who could trust each other more, in comparison with those, who were non-Kazakhs. Furthermore, some scholars as Fowkes⁷⁸ highlight that “the membership of the kolkhoz was often identical with membership of a clan (particularly in Kazakhstan),” implying that such was the conditions on the ground, no matter how the authorities sought to embed communist values. The latter argument is also bolstered in another study that examined the cadre policy in the Soviet period, which points out that unlike “the composition of cadres in the district capitals, kolkhoz and village soviets were entirely in the hands of local apparatchiks, functioning on a logic of group solidarity and not state control.”⁷⁹ Despite the fact that clan or tribal networks were minimized or abolished in the public sphere, it is critical to “not conflate the lack of a public presence with the lack of importance.”⁸⁰ For instance, the significance of *shejire* (genealogy) has always been a socio-cultural marker of Kazakhs for generations, as it enabled “to connect to an urgent awareness that every Kazakh should locate themselves in history or in the broader ‘family tree’ of the nation and follow cultural protocols.”⁸¹ The latter is complemented by the fact that Kazakhs have a continuous oral tradition, which requires individuals, in particular, men, from the very childhood to name their seven ancestors.⁸² Therefore, the introduction of state and collective farms may have transformed the nomadic identity of Kazakhs and deprived of economic pastoralism by ways of sedentarization and collectivization, but the outcomes of such policies were not as expected, since the knowledge of *shejire* provided each person a crucial information on his immediate relatives who they can count on in troubled times. Besides, Kazakhs still today rely

⁷⁷ Schatz, Edward. *Modern Clan Politics: The Power of ‘Blood’ in Kazakhstan and Beyond*. University of Washington Press (2004): 61.

⁷⁸ Fowkes, Ben. *The Disintegration of the Soviet Union: A Study in the Rise and Triumph of Nationalism*. Macmillan Press Ltd., (1996): 65.

⁷⁹ Roy, Olivier. *The New Central Asia: The Creation of Nations*. *New York University Press*, (2000): 106.

⁸⁰ Schatz, Edward. *Modern Clan Politics: The Power of ‘Blood’ in Kazakhstan and Beyond*. University of Washington Press (2004): 48.

⁸¹ Guldana Salimjan. “Mapping loss, remembering ancestors: genealogical narratives of Kazakhs in China.” *Asian Ethnicity*, (2020): 4.

⁸² Azim Malikov. “The Cult of saints and shrines in Samarqand province of Uzbekistan.” *International Journal of Memory Anthropology*, Vol. 3, (2010): 138.

upon clan or tribe affiliations to advance themselves in political and economic matters.⁸³ Moreover, the phenomenon of *shezhire*, “as one of the fundamental practices of memory in Kazakhstan, is currently going through re-conceptualization.”⁸⁴

Interestingly, similar to the concept of Orientalism, coined by Said⁸⁵ that brings up the idea of the Western hegemonic discourse in describing and authorizing the views of the Orient; there was also a Soviet Orientalism, as an instrument, devoted to characterizing the peoples of the Soviet Orient, including those of Kazakhs. In this regard, Bustanov,⁸⁶ who specifically investigates the creation of new Central Asian republics, insists that “their creation was to be accompanied with the collection of sources and the production of an official, codified version of history for each republic.” Furthermore, one of the consequences of Soviet Orientalism in Kazakhstan was the writing of the ‘History of Kazakh SSR,’ led by Anna Pankratova as a Chief Editor, with two separate publications different in content in 1943 and 1957, respectively, with the second edition to be adopted as the ‘proper one’ due to its applicability in “strengthening of the nomadic concept, which represented Kazakhs as a backward people in need of foreign help for further development.”⁸⁷ There was a convenient colonial narrative on treating Kazakh *ru* or descent-based ties as ‘holdover’ that needs to be eliminated from the public sphere, hence, colonizers sought a legitimate ground in order to get involved in ‘civilizing’ its subject peoples with supposedly primitive peculiarities. In turn, such nomadic (‘backwarded’) lifestyle was to be eliminated, along with the tribal and clan ties because of the forces of Soviet modernization, but in reality, “just as the clan was covertly a means of advancement and protection during the Soviet period, now the clan has proven a resilient identity and mechanism of survival in harsh

⁸³ Barbara Junisbai. 2010. “A Tale of Two Kazakhstans: Sources of Political Cleavage and Conflict in the Post-Soviet Period.” *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 62, No. 2, pp. 235-269.

⁸⁴ Kulshat Medeuova, and Ermaganbetova Kuralai, M. Kikimbaev, D. Mel’nikov, Z. Naurazbaeva, A. Ramazanov, U. Sandybaeva, D. Tolgambaeva, and A. Tlepbergen. “Praktiki i mesta pamiati v Kazakhstane (strukturno-tipologicheskii obzor).” Astana, Kazakhstan: TOO Master Po, (2016): 35.

⁸⁵ Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. Vintage, (1978).

⁸⁶ Bustanov, Alfrid. *Soviet Orientalism and the Creation of Central Asian Nations*. London and New York: Routledge, (2014): 26.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* (2014): 60.

exterior conditions.”⁸⁸ Such cases suggest that the notion of Kazakhs’ identity was played by the Soviet elites in various means to meet the official ideology and justify the *Soviet/Russian man’s burden* on cultivating such ‘inferior’ people as Kazakhs, but the Soviet policies actually backfired by further embedding a tribal identity in Kazakhstan, an integral constituent of Kazakhness.

Newly emerged Central Asian republics in 1991 were not an outcome of nationalism that led to the dissolution of the Soviet Union, rather it was an arbitrary phenomenon. Kazakhstan was no exception. In fact, it was the last Soviet Republic to leave the Union, which shows either the reluctance or unpreparedness of then Kazakh Soviet communist elites, led by Nursultan Nazarbayev, to leave ‘the Soviet nest.’ In the aftermath of the World War II, scholars have predicted that states would more likely to forge supranational identities in a modern and gradually globalizing world, but Connor⁸⁹ argues that there was an erroneous “tendency to equate nationalism with a feeling of loyalty to the state rather than with loyalty to the nation.” In the context of Kazakhstan, however, the political elites had to engineer some approaches to embed a loyalty to the nation, as a ‘single people’ of Kazakhstan based on inter-ethnic peace, as well as loyalty to the state, introducing state-sponsored patriotic ideology to win the hearts and minds of not only Kazakhs, but of many other ethnic minorities residing on its territory. In this sense, Laruelle⁹⁰ emphasizes how the state intermingled with the three almost mutually exclusive identities such as ‘Kazakhness,’ ‘Kazakhstanness’ and ‘transnationalism,’ with the latter replacing the first two a couple of decades after the period of gaining independence. Generally, researchers tend to perceive the processes of nation-building as either positive or neutral, but it has in fact a likelihood of eliminating, sometimes using power, what was existent earlier. Thus,

⁸⁸ Kathleen Collins. “The Political Role of Clans in Central Asia.” *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 35, No. 2, (2003): 177.

⁸⁹ Walker Connor. “A Nation is a Nation, Is a State, Is an Ethnic Group is a...” *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 4, (1978): 378.

⁹⁰ Marlene Laruelle. “The Three Discursive Paradigms of State Identity in Kazakhstan: Kazakhness, Kazakhstanness, and Transnationalism,” In: *Nationalism and Identity Construction in Central Asia: Dimensions, Dynamics, and Directions*, edited by Mariya Omelicheva, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, (2014).

any nation-building initiative embraces ‘invention of traditions’ that is commonly aimed at dismissing the existing paradigm of how people view themselves and their integration within a new or existing one, as in the example of the Breton identity in France.⁹¹ Certain inventions of traditions may take place by historians in a relatively peaceful manner as that of the popularization of tribal identity and efforts of inserting it into the historical identity of peoples as those of Bashkir, who purportedly seek to establish a firm view regarding their ethno-genesis, which is nowadays expanding territorially to certain regions of Tatarstan and declaring some historical rights to those lands.⁹² This shows that there is a lot of contingency in nation-building developments, indicating the absence of a straight path from group (*e.g. tribe*) to nation.

One of the common trends that appeared among novel Central Asian states in post-independent years was to detach themselves with the Soviet past, while glorifying their ‘rich’ pre-colonial histories and traditions that were ‘robbed’ by the Soviets, hence, justifying their choice for ‘nationalizing’ their states. In this regard, Brubaker⁹³ relevantly points out the tripartite scheme, in which, despite the presence of national minorities and their external national motherland [e.g. Russians/Russia], the new leadership justified their action for “undertaking action to promote language, culture, demographic preponderance, economic flourishing, or political hegemony of the core ethnocultural nation” as an offset for preceding injustices related to disruptions in socio-economic and political lives of Kazakhs. Therefore, the President of Kazakhstan, K. Tokayev, announced that according to his initiative, a “systematic work [was] underway to write a new academic history of Kazakhstan in seven volumes, in which more than 250 scholars are involved, including 60 foreign specialists. For the first time in the academic

⁹¹ Weber, Eugene. *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914*. 1st Edition. Stanford University Press, (1976).

⁹² Yarkhamov, Ilnur. 2021. Фантазеры: как обашкиривают историю татар и татарского рода Ельдак. Available online at: <https://kazanfirst.ru/articles/552236>

⁹³ Brubaker, Rogers. *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*. Cambridge University Press, (1996): 9.

practice of preparing such publications, a separate volume will be devoted to the period of Ulus Jochi.”⁹⁴

In general, the attempts of forming new, independent states requires much invention of ‘banal’ nationalism⁹⁵, which includes the invention of symbolic representations, such as the state flag, emblem and national anthem, that augment the psychological bond of the people. Besides, the Kazakh state invested substantial amounts of money to the invention of new traditions⁹⁶ such as the discovery of The Golden Man, uniforms containing national ornaments and emblems for professional national sports teams that compete on an international level, the eagle on Kazakh flag, “national” holidays, feasts, playing of the national anthem at sporting and official events as well as the reinvention of old traditions with the introduction of new changes to the rules, for instance, such national sporting games as *‘kokpar.’*⁹⁷ An attempt to unify multi-ethnic and multi-confessional populace of Kazakhstan entailed the forging of a new national identity to make them believe that they now are ‘one nation’ or ‘single’ people in a unitary manner. In this sense, Kazakhstan may have followed the trails of the “deliberate political construction of France, when a lot of ‘Frenchmen’ did not know that they belonged together until the long didactic campaigns of the later nineteenth century told them they did.”⁹⁸ In the regional context, similar processes were simultaneously happening in other Central Asian countries, in particular, “the invention of the Kyrgyz court of elders as an official organ of the state in 1995,”⁹⁹ modern reinvention of Uzbek identity via organizing “mass spectacles of holidays, divided into diverse thematic blocks,

⁹⁴ Akorda.kz. Выступление Главы государства К. Токаева на третьем заседании Национального курултая “Адал Адам - Адал еңбек - Адал табыс” [Speech of the Head of the State, K. Tokayev, at the third meeting of National Qurultai], 2024, Retrieved from <https://akorda.kz/ru/vystuplenieglavy-gosudarstva-ktokaevana-tretem-zasedaniinacionalnogo-kurultaya-1525116>

⁹⁵ Billig, Michael. *Banal Nationalism*. Sage, (1995).

⁹⁶ Hobsbawm, Eric. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge University Press, (1983).

⁹⁷ Serik Yergali. *Көкпар спортын жетілдіру тәжырымдамасы*. <https://adyrna.kz/post/63931> (Accessed April 12, 2023).

⁹⁸ Weber, Eugene. *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914*. 1st Edition. Stanford University Press, (1976): 113.

⁹⁹ Judith Beyer. “Revitalisation, Invention, and Continued Existence of the Kyrgyz Aksakal Courts: Listening to Pluralistic Accounts of History.” *Journal of Legal Pluralism*, (2006).

such as ‘regions,’ ‘international,’ ‘children’s,’ ‘sport,’ ‘military,’¹⁰⁰ complemented by “*mahalla* (a local Islamic administration system) in Uzbekistan... and the popular council in Turkmenistan.”¹⁰¹ It could be argued that the state’s sponsoring of eclectic endeavors from the creation of national symbols up to the invention of new traditions served to maintain the legitimacy of the political elites.

However, were such ‘nationalizing’ attempts of Kazakhstan consistent and logical throughout its fulfillment? On the one hand, no one can negate the fact that “Nazarbayev faced historical divisions between three hordes (tribal groupings) and smaller clan lineages.”¹⁰² Either as a way to mitigate the already prevalent intra-Kazakh divisions or avoid its conflict-prone developments in early years of independence, “the Kazakhstani ruling elite continued to pursue the project of constructing an authoritarian civic national identity, based on the country’s achievements over the years of independence, ‘imagined’ shared values, and common nationality through nation-branding practices.”¹⁰³ In this regard, the Kazakh ruling elites and state-making engineers unrealistically aspired to accomplish two incongruous phenomena concurrently. They promoted the revival of the long concealed and suppressed traditions, customs and language of ethnic Kazakhs, while developing the notion of an unprecedented ‘Kazakhstani nation’ through silencing mono-ethnicity, but stressing pluralism and interethnic solidarity. In other words, Burkhanov¹⁰⁴ relevantly points out that “attempts to build a civic identity on top of ethnic identification much resemble the infamous project of creating ‘the Soviet people.’”

Also, it is interesting to note the persisting Soviet legacy in modern Kazakhstan, when it comes to the practices of commemoration of significant historical figures and fateful events. For

¹⁰⁰ Adams, Laura L. *The Spectacular State: Culture and National Identity in Uzbekistan*. *Duke University Press*, (2010): 73-75.

¹⁰¹ Sergei Abashin. Nation-construction in post-Soviet Central Asia. In: *Soviet and Post-Soviet Identities*, edited by Mark Bassin and Catriona Kelly, Cambridge University Press, (2012): 154.

¹⁰² Kathleen Collins, “The Logic of Clan Politics: Evidence from the Central Asian Trajectories.” *World Politics*, Vol. 56, No. 2, (2004): 257.

¹⁰³ Sabina Insebayeva, “Imagining the Nation: Identity, Nation Building, and Foreign Policy in Kazakhstan.” *Central Asia Program Papers* 175, (2016): 12.

¹⁰⁴ Aziz Burkhanov, “Kazakhstan’s National Identity-Building Policy: Soviet Legacy, State Efforts, and Societal Reactions.” *Cornell International Law Journal*, Vol. 50, No. 1, (2017): 13.

instance, in his analysis of the processes of street renaming in a cosmopolitan city of Almaty, Kasikçi¹⁰⁵ argues that practices of memorialization have been politicized as a result of ‘Kazakhisation’ of urban landscape, but it should not be seen as “essentially anti-Russian process, nor does it represent a rejection, or even a form of criticism, of the Soviet past of the Kazakh nation.” That is, Kazakhstan not only continues the Soviet habit of eternalizing ideological figures and events of national value via erecting monuments, but also selectively reads the Soviet past by removing notorious Soviet figures or events, while leaving the ‘neutral’ ones (e.g. *Mate Zalka street in Almaty*) in the public space. For instance, the former street of “Mira” (Friendship or Peace) in Almaty has been altered to “Zheltoksan” (December) to commemorate the appalling consequences of protests that took place in December of 1986 as a sign of resentment against the Soviet cadre policy. At the same time, the fact that one of the former central streets in Almaty, known as “Lenin,” was renamed into Kazakh “Dostyq” that signifies ‘Friendship’ or ‘Peace,’ much resembles the Soviet concept of ‘*Druzhiba Narodov*,’ i.e., the friendship of peoples. In other words, although at first glance it appears that there was a significant trend in Central Asia by virtually erasing the Soviet past via criticizing its oppressive effect, we still view the permanence of certain Soviet-style practices in the post-Soviet period.

As a result, an innumerate number of monuments and memorial complexes reproduce the nation on a daily basis in the form of a ‘banal’ nationalism, whatever the divergent messages they communicate to both the domestic and external audiences. The local audience usually consists of citizens, the recipients of the sites of remembrance, crafted by both state and non-state local actors, while the attention of external audience is attracted for objects that are sustained by the state in the framework of its state-building objectives (e.g. *The Residence of Abylai Khan in Petropavlovsk*). With regard to similar cases in Central Asia, Malikov¹⁰⁶ examines the cult of saints and shrines in Uzbekistan, whereby people enjoy openness to attend

¹⁰⁵ Mehmet Volkan Kasikçi, “The Soviet and the Post-Soviet: Street Names and National Discourse in Almaty.” *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 71, No. 8, (2019): 1346.

¹⁰⁶ Azim Malikov. “The Cult of saints and shrines in Samarqand province of Uzbekistan.” *International Journal of Memory Anthropology*, Vol. 3, (2010): 123.

sacred sites for a variety of reasons, which were previously prohibited in the Soviet Union. Likewise, a study of shrine visitations in rural Azerbaijan by Grant¹⁰⁷ demonstrates that “people visited the shrine as much then [during the Soviet period] as they do now” that only displays the available techniques of avoiding punishment for such ‘backwardness’ at the time, but also the moderate continuity of the shrine popularity. In the context of Kazakhstan, shrines are also utilized as an alternative form of commemoration, through which some tribes as Aday from the Junior Horde, provide their “historical narrative [that] relies on the idea that the tribe’s ancestors [*Beket Ata*] defended and preserved Kazakh traditions, rituals, and their imagined fatherland, Kazakhstan.”¹⁰⁸ On top of underlining the warrior-like features of tribal ancestors as *Beket Ata*, who fought against Turkmen nomads and many other enemies, such personalities are simultaneously regarded as *saints*, the idea of which also resonates among other descent groups that celebrated the achievements of Qulsari *batyr*¹⁰⁹ of Atyghai (Arghyn) and others. Since warriors of various *ru* are acknowledged for both their military talent and capability to cure people thanks to some extraordinary power, their offspring attempt to convey specific messages about the significance of those individuals for the all-Kazakh development.

In sum, the centuries-long practices of Kazakh nomadic ancestors are still retained by modern descendants, which are expressed in maintaining descent-based relations and communicating the knowledge of *shejire*. Historically, belonging to a certain *ru* (descent group) entailed diverse socio-economic standings and political entitlements. The advent of Tsarist Russia and later Soviet Union generated compulsory novelties, such as the elimination of the traditional authority structures of Kazakhs, an eradication of the institution of ‘*Khan*’, elimination of *ru* leaders and *bais* (rich), conducting of social experiments via sedentarization and collectivization, and introduction of the command political economy. Despite the existing

¹⁰⁷ Bruce Grant. “Shrines and Sovereigns: Life, Death, and Religion in Rural Azerbaijan.” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 53, No. 3, (2011): 663.

¹⁰⁸ Ulan Bigozhin, “Beket Ata: Reimagination of Sainthood in Contemporary Kazakh Hagiographies.” *Éditions de L’école des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales*, 199, (2022): 157.

¹⁰⁹ Mambetov, Lev. “Qulsari Awlie is one of the most revered objects in the regional sacral map.” *North Kazakhstan Newspaper*. 2017.

harsh circumstances and unprecedented social experiments at the time, driven by the ‘civilizational’ endeavors of the Soviet Union, the so-called ‘leftover’ and ‘barbaric’ practices of kinship still endured various restraints and manipulations. Despite Kazakhs experiencing limitations on practicing their traditions in public, the tradition of knowing one’s seven ancestors, maintaining cultural (*genealogy*) and social capital (*descent relatives*) was nonetheless feasible privately. In current times, given the independence and autonomy to form ideological agenda, we witness the revival of descent-based relations in novel forms that include commemorations of *batyrs*, representing various *ru*, in the public space. While it may initially seem that there was a clear trend in Central Asia of nearly erasing the Soviet past through criticism of its oppressive impact, we still observe the persistence of certain Soviet-style practices of memory in Kazakhstan, especially in erecting monuments, memorial complexes, jubilees, etc.

Chapter 2. The Making of Identity and Research Enterprise of Tribes

This chapter will discuss a number of intersected topics, namely, the dynamics of nation-building processes on the ground via formation of commemorative practices in the post-Soviet Kazakhstan, promotion of the state-sponsored pantheon of recognized (national) heroes, the continuity of Soviet traditions of erecting sites of remembrance, attempts to revitalize the *forgotten* and *muted* history of the nation and tribes, the growing pervasiveness of monuments in the public space and the rise of the novel cult of *batyrs* (warriors) as well as their significance to the society.

Numerous state-of-the-art constructions of pedestals and statues were built in an independent and sovereign Kazakhstan over the course of thirty years. Such constructions include, but are not limited to, the memorial to the Queen Tomiris, the Independence Squares, the monuments of *Qazaq Eli* (State of Qazaqs), the statues of renowned Khans as Kenesary and Abulhair, heroines of the Great Patriotic War as Aliya Moldagulova and Manshuk Mаметova,

the founder of modern Kazakh literature, Abay Qunanbaiuly, and a traditional folk singer Zhambyl Zhabayev, along with many others that are nearly ubiquitous in the public space of Kazakhstan's various regions, cities, towns and villages. In late 2018, the book on the monuments of culture and history and unique natural sites of Kazakhstan was released by the Kazakh Research Institute of Culture under the Ministry of Culture and Sports of Kazakhstan. This edition contains illustrations of 366 historical sites and cultural objects across all the regions of Kazakhstan,¹¹⁰ in which I found a great number of monuments, erected in honor of national figures from the distant and near pasts, whose achievements and personalities were deemed to be principal to be included in this registry, prepared by the respective Ministry, that is, approved by the State. Some of the monuments of figures, real and imagined, that have historical significance to Kazakhstan's history, from the perspective of the state, are as follows:

- *B. Momyshuli, Kerey and Zhanibek Khans in Astana; A. Imanov, A. Qunanbaev, Sh. Walikhanov, A. Zhangildin, D. Kunaev, and M. Auezov in Almaty;*
- *Baidibek Bi and '550 Years of Anniversary of Kazakh Khanate' in Shymkent;*
- *Sakkulaq Bi, Baubek Batyr, Ch. Walikhanov, and Qabanbay Batyr in Aqmola region; Nauryzbai Batyr and 'The First President of the Republic of Kazakhstan' in Almaty region;*
- *Necropoles sites of Abat-Baitaq, Dauimshar, and Qarasaqal, A. Moldagulova, Eset Batyr Kokiuly, Qobylandy Batyr and Isatai Batyr in Aqtobe region;*
- *M. Utemisov, Isatai-Makhambet, Baibaqty Batyr, Sultan Beibars, and D. Nurpeisova in Atyrau region;*
- *Abai-Shakarim and Boranbai Bi in East Kazakhstan region;*
- *Zh. Zhabayev, Baidibek Bi, Aisha Bibi, Karakhan, and Babadja Khatun in Zhambyl region;*
- *Zhangir Khan and S. Datov in West Kazakhstan region; Jochi Khan, Zhidebai Batyr, and N. Abdirov in Karaganda region;*

¹¹⁰ In Astana - 40, Almaty - 36, Shymkent - 18, Aqmola region - 22, Almaty region - 24, Aqtobe region - 18, Atyrau region - 16, East Kazakhstan - 26, Zhambyl region - 24, West Kazakhstan - 16, Karagandy region - 28, Kostanai region - 20, Qyzylorda region - 32, Mangystau region - 20, Pavlodar region - 16, North Kazakhstan - 18, Turkestan region - 32. See: *Album of Historical and Cultural Objects and Places of General Pilgrimage in Kazakhstan, Ministry of Culture and Sports of Kazakhstan, 2018.*

- *Satybaldi Ishan, A. Imanov, Y. Altinsarin, A. Zhangildin and Keiki Batyr in Kostanay region;*
- *Tolegetai-Qylyshy Ata, Asan-Ata Qaigy, I. Zhakhaev, Korkyt Ata and M. Shoqai in Qyzylorda region;*
- *Isa and Dosan Batyrs, Otpan Tau, T. Shevchenko, Omar and Tur, necropoles sites of Sisem Ata and Wali of Adai in Mangystau region;*
- *Zhasybai Batyr, Bukhar Jyrau, S. Toraigyrov, Isabek Ishan, and M.J. Kopeev in Pavlodar region; Abylai Khan's Residence, Qarasai and Aghyntai Batyrs, and Qulsari Batyr in North Kazakhstan region;*
- *Arystan Bab, Kh.A. Yassawi, Qarashash Ana, Rabia Sultan Begim, Yessim Khan, Abdul Aziz Baba, Ukash Ata, Ibragim Ata, Qarabura, Baba Tukti Shashty Aziz and Domalaq Ana in Turkestan region.*

The aforementioned personalities represent diverse time periods, starting from the 10th century, to the establishment of the Kazakh Khanate, colonial periods under the Tsarist Russia and Soviet Union, up to the post-independence era, which are cherished by the state as a means of presenting the imagined ‘uninterrupted continuity’ of the Kazakh statehood. It is also interesting to note that none of the research sites that I investigate in this dissertation, with the exception of Qulsary Batyr’s *mazar (grave)*, located in the North of Kazakhstan, are included in this list of monuments of culture and history, authorized by the state. For instance, the ‘*Qanly*’ memorial complex was built in 2009, while the ‘*Aqpan Batyr*’ monument was opened in 2012, which could theoretically be incorporated into the list of objects, but somehow were not. This once again indicates that the state promotes its own particular vision of the past through highlighting certain historical figures and events that stay in line with the state’s nation-building objectives. Nevertheless, public associations of numerous descent groups (*ru*) actively attempt to illuminate the stories of their respective historical ancestors that, according to them, also fostered the contiguity of Kazakhstan, thus, merit the state’s favor.

The selective preservation and maintenance of the ancient sites on the territory of Kazakhstan as well as the erection of new monuments under the supervision of the state implies

that the state administration's "ethno-nationalist expectations are met largely by commemorations of Kazakh khans and *batyrs*, and famous Soviet Kazakh writers, composers, poets, and World War II heroes."¹¹¹ In particular, starting from 2000s, there was a rise of the new cult of *batyrs* (warriors) on the part of the state that sponsored the mass construction of monuments and museums for heroes, such as Kerey and Janibek Khans, Abylai Khan, Bauirzhan Momyshuli and many others that embody the rich history of Kazakhstan. Scholars argue that states actually "affirm the might of their authority and legitimacy via commemorative objects."¹¹² Nonetheless, it begs the question regarding who the *batyrs* and khans are in the first hand and why it is critical to take them into account in the study of remembrance in the public space of Kazakhstan. For instance, Kuralai Yermagambetova, in her online YouTube lecture, reveals the meaning and role of memorials of *batyrs* and *khans* in the cultural space and public squares of Kazakhstan, and highlights that *batyrs* and khans carry "*emotional* (feeling of identity with them), *sacred* (known for their unique qualities and competences) and *semiotic* (notion of statehood) connotations."¹¹³ Such reasons explain why the celebration of *batyrs* is of sensitive nature for Kazakh people. Moreover, there is no systematic study of the state's reasoning for picking the events or personalities that were deemed worthy in terms of their historical significance and therefore value to the country. In other words, it is intricate to ensure a response as to why some *batyrs* or khans enjoy their embodiment on a large national scale, while others, including warriors of various descent groups, are merely neglected or given some secondary importance.

¹¹¹ Mehmet Volkan Kasikçi, "The Soviet and the Post-Soviet: Street Names and National Discourse in Almaty." *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 71, No. 8, (2019): 1362.

¹¹² Kulshat Medeuova, and Ermaganbetova Kuralai, M. Kikimbaev, D. Mel'nikov, Z. Naurazbaeva, A. Ramazanova, U. Sandybaeva, D. Tolgambaeva, and A. Tlepbergen. "Praktiki i mesta pamiati v Kazakhstane (strukturno-tipologicheskii obzor)." Astana, Kazakhstan: TOO Master Po, (2016): 58.

¹¹³ Kuralai Yermagambetova, "Қазақстанның көпшілік кеңістігіндегі батырлар мен хандар ескерткіші" (The Monuments of Batyrs and Khans in the Public Spaces of Kazakhstan). YouTube Lecture Series of Tselinny Center of Contemporary Culture, (2020). Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=02ESQQdkL6E&feature=emb_imp_woyt

As far as the phenomenon of *batyr* is concerned, it is claimed that a *batyr* is an individual that has a solid comprehension of “the art of war, known for his diligence and accomplishments, leader, warrior, and the one, who can easily sacrifice himself for the sake of the homeland’s and nation’s prosperity, and image of national culture and national spirit.”¹¹⁴ In turn, the title of *khan* was a supreme position in the state service during the administration of the Kazakh Khanate, “symbol of not only heroism, rigor, and patronage, but also statehood and freedom”¹¹⁵ Also, it is important to note here that *batyrs*, unlike khans, can represent any *ru* (descent group) and thus appear to be ‘more Kazakh’ by its very nature in comparison with the Chinggisid Tore, i.e. the White Bone representatives. In this regard, why does the state establish monuments of *batyrs* and khans in the public space? There are several points, in particular, a willingness to display them as the “forefathers of the spiritual unity and national uniqueness, the symbol of Kazakh people’s peculiar military art and experience, an appearance of Kazakh nation’s tradition, culture and national significance, an instrument to teach patriotism, as well as serve as a sacred place and a touristic sight.”¹¹⁶

One of the major state-sponsored commemorative traditions in Kazakhstan is exemplified via the memorials of Kerey and Janibek Khans, which are located in the nation’s current and former capital cities as Astana and Taraz (*Zhambyl*), respectively, which are devoted to the founders of the Kazakh Khanate and were opened in 2010.¹¹⁷ In turn, Abylai Khan is also acknowledged countrywide for his talent to be able to unite the groups of descent groups of

¹¹⁴ Ibid. “Қазақстанның көпшілік кеңістігіндегі батырлар мен хандар ескерткіші” (The Monuments of Batyrs and Khans in the Public Spaces of Kazakhstan). YouTube Lecture Series of Tselinny Center of Contemporary Culture. (2020). Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=02ESQQdkL6E&feature=emb_imp_woyt

¹¹⁵ Ibid. “Қазақстанның көпшілік кеңістігіндегі батырлар мен хандар ескерткіші” (The Monuments of Batyrs and Khans in the Public Spaces of Kazakhstan). YouTube Lecture Series of Tselinny Center of Contemporary Culture. (2020). Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=02ESQQdkL6E&feature=emb_imp_woyt

¹¹⁶ Ibid. “The Monuments of Batyrs and Khans in the Public Spaces of Kazakhstan.” YouTube Lecture Series of Tselinny Center of Contemporary Culture, (2020). Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=02ESQQdkL6E&feature=emb_imp_woyt

¹¹⁷ An interesting point here is that no one actually knows what these khans or batyrs looked like, except for the sketch of Abulkhair Khan, created by an English traveler and artist, John Castle, suggesting that most of the other sketches are simply being imagined.

fragmented three Hordes altogether, which were previously diverged from each other and even at wars occasionally. Hence, he is legitimately perceived by the state as one of the essential providers of Kazakh national unity. In fact, we must also be aware that the idea of Ablai's outstanding ability for bringing various Kazakhs *ru* together is the state's perspective that is communicated in a polished and an unequivocal way. However, scholars such as Yessenova, referencing to Sh. Walikhanov's records, reveal Ablai Khan's curious directions to his sons, namely, "never to solve inter-tribal problems because it is the squabbles and enmities that are the most reliable source of [a] khan's power."¹¹⁸ The presence of such alternative outlook on the issue of Ablai Khan as a leader also shows the adherence of the state on upholding an inter-tribal harmony via the embodiment of such historic individuals through sites of commemoration.

Other prominent *batyrs*, such as Bogenbay, Qabanbay and Nauryzbay are renowned as military leaders with excellent knowledge of military tactics. Whereas other warriors as Rayimbek and his memorial complex is more of a sacred site, which displays that *batyrs* were not just extraordinary persons, but those with irregular transcendent power, real or imaginary, whose figurative presence in Almaty city, for instance, emits "power to protect drivers."¹¹⁹

Besides, when *batyrs* passed away, they were traditionally "buried in places, where they were born in line with their affiliation with clans within their hordes."¹²⁰ On contrary, the monuments of Qarasai (*Shapyrashty tribe of the Great Horde*) and Agyntai (*Arghyn tribe of the Middle Horde*) are placed in a geographically neutral area, that is, in the north of Kazakhstan, which is not the place of origin of the aforementioned *batyrs*.¹²¹ The latter were genuine

¹¹⁸ Saulesh Yessenova. "Nomad for export, not for domestic consumption: Kazakhstan's arrested endeavor to 'put the country on the map.'" *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema*, Vol. 5, No. 2, (2011): 196.

¹¹⁹ Dubuisson, Eva-Marie. *Living Language in Kazakhstan: The Dialogic Emergence of An Ancestral Worldview*. University of Pittsburg Press (2017): 77.

¹²⁰ Ibid, "The Monuments of Batyrs and Khans in the Public Spaces of Kazakhstan." YouTube Lecture Series of Tselinny Center of Contemporary Culture, 2020, Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=02ESQQdkL6E&feature=emb_imp_woyt

¹²¹ Ibid, "The Monuments of Batyrs and Khans in the Public Spaces of Kazakhstan." YouTube Lecture Series of Tselinny Center of Contemporary Culture. 2020, Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=02ESQQdkL6E&feature=emb_imp_woyt

comrades, which helped each other in a number of battles, thus, demonstrating peace between Kazakhs of different hordes. Furthermore, about 20 kilometers away from Kazakhstan's capital, Astana, there is a mausoleum and a burial place of Qabanbay batyr, which was opened in 2000, that celebrates Qabanbay and "squads under his leadership that will always remain in age-old memory as courageous and invincible defenders of Kazakh people,"¹²² where now people make pilgrimages to it. Another category of *batyrs* is that of Alpamys and Qobylandi, who have more of mythological geneses, found in oral epics of Turkic peoples as Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Uzbek and some others.

In general, the sites of *batyrs* and *khans* that are sponsored by the government usually provide the names of celebrated men and women with descriptions of their fulfillments, but without specifying their tribal affiliation. In doing so, the state provides and preserves the narrative that these are all historical figures that communicate a joint heritage to every single Kazakh person, instead of exclusively fitting to concrete (descent) groups of people. In turn, when representatives of diverse Kazakh *ru* research their history, the life background of warriors and their roles in the history of Kazakhstan, that eventually lead to the construction of certain sites of remembrance, such actions are evaluated by the state as manifestations of parochialism or regionalism.

In early independence years, the Kazakhstani state utilized the existence of historical objects on its terrain as that of the mausoleum of Aisha Bibi that has its roots in late 11th century, located in modern-day Taraz, to claim its own exclusive right to the site in order to "prove the longevity of Kazakh territorial continuation in present day Kazakhstan."¹²³ Interestingly, contrary to the Soviet style of remembrance where the Communist party was the only legitimate authority to sanction such erections of sites, the state in Kazakhstan is not the sole stakeholder in such affairs, given the existence of different actors as tribe-related public associations,

¹²² VisitKazakhstan.kz. "Мавзолей Кабанбай-батыра." [*Kabanbay-batyr's Mausoleum*], 2021. Retrieved from <https://visitkazakhstan.kz/ru/guide/places/view/604/>

¹²³ Catherine Alexander. "The Cultures and Properties of Decaying Buildings." *Focaal*, No. 44, (2004): 14.

philanthropists and affluent individuals that contribute their own funds to celebrate one or the other historical figure, as in the case of ‘*Adai Ata*’ memorial complex in Aqtau city.¹²⁴ In this regard, the public activities of non-state local actors do not necessarily oppose the state politics of memory, but instead supplement the state’s vision and representation of itself in history on the ground by celebrating ancient historical figures (e.g. Adai Ata).

Also, the opportunity for introducing particular versions of the history of Kazakhstan was not monopolized by the state, given that some individuals from the art and film industry offered their alternative versions of nationhood. For instance, in her analysis of the epic film ‘Nomad,’ which tells the story of Abylai [Khan’s] becoming, Yessenova¹²⁵ argues that “the film was expected to project a positive and coherent image of the country as a way of branding it as a creative modern economy.” Conversely, the examination of the link between films and nation-building, Isaacs¹²⁶ asserts that “nation-building is a process which is often contested, not just among different ethnicities within a nation-state, but also among the titular ethnic majority [Kazakhs].” Besides, Isaacs’ in-depth investigation of various Kazakhstani films such as ‘Racketeer,’ ‘A Gift to Stalin,’ ‘*Kelin*,’ ‘*Zheruiyk*,’ ‘*Myn Bala*’ and many others, convey diverse ideas, starting from ancient religious belief of Kazakhs as Tengrism, harsh economic situation in early 1990s up to the notions of tolerance, inter-ethnic peace and glorious history of Kazakhs, all of which displays both the contested nature of nation-building arena and presence of alternative ideas of nationhood in Kazakhstan.

At the same time, the rise of the cult of *batyrs* was taking place simultaneously. In early 2000s, given the relatively better socio-economic standing of the country in comparison with the early 1990s, the elites approved the mass celebration of historical local figures all across

¹²⁴ Kulshat Medeuova, and Ulbolsyn Sandybaeva. “Sakral’naia geografiia v Kazakhstane: kommémorativnaia politika gosudarstva i lokal’nye praktiki v publichnykh prostranstvakh.” *Mir Bol’shogo Altaia*, Vol. 4, No. 3, (2018): 440.

¹²⁵ Saulesh Yessenova. “Nomad for export, not for domestic consumption: Kazakhstan’s arrested endeavor to ‘put the country on the map.’” *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema*, Vol. 5, No. 2, (2011): 190.

¹²⁶ Rico Isaacs. “Nomads, Warriors and Bureaucrats: Nation-Building and Film in post-Soviet Kazakhstan.” *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 43, No. 3, (2015): 399.

Kazakhstan as a means of reviving the ‘forgotten’ and ‘muted’ past. In this respect, Schatz¹²⁷ underlines given that certain regions as Qyzylorda were financially fragile, it could not reach the level of booming commemorative establishments as in other regions of the country. This endeavor seemingly backfired, because “state actors preferred to unify ethnic Kazakhs as a strategy of ethnic nation building, but instead, their actions lend political salience to the subdivisions among ethnic Kazakhs.”¹²⁸ In turn, the celebration of local figures and heroes belonging to particular descent groups (*ru*), erected as a result of the donation of financial resources from the representatives of the same *ru* as those of respective *batyrs*, arguably opened an avenue for ‘showing off,’ in which Kazakhs of certain tribal affiliations ostensibly began forming their separate micro, tribal identities. The reason being is that “Kazakhness [the core nation in Brubaker (1996)] is the only paradigm that is not totally controlled by the regime.”¹²⁹ In this regard, scholars such as Tsyrempilov, Bigozhin and Zhumabayev¹³⁰ express a contrary perspective by asserting that “authorities promote the discourse of Kazakhstan as a civic state, while acting to reinforce the idea of Kazakhstan as the state belonging to the Kazakh people.” My findings similarly suggest that the monuments and memorial complexes of the tributed warriors, regardless of their descent background, indicate the sacrifice, struggle and spatial existence of those *batyrs* on the present-day soil of Kazakhstan, bolstering the primordial right of Kazakhs to be treated as the owners of the country.

In this regard, we may notice the existing contentions between theories of primordialism and modernism in the case of Kazakhstan’s national identity-making endeavor. The concept of primordialism was developed by Edward Shils and later by Clifford Geertz, who have promoted

¹²⁷ Schatz, Edward. *Modern Clan Politics: The Power of ‘Blood’ in Kazakhstan and Beyond*. University of Washington Press (2004): 120.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.* (2004): 121.

¹²⁹ Marlene Laruelle. “The Three Discursive Paradigms of State Identity in Kazakhstan: Kazakhness, Kazakhstanness, and Transnationalism,” In: *Nationalism and Identity Construction in Central Asia: Dimensions, Dynamics, and Directions*, edited by Mariya Omelicheva, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, (2014): 37.

¹³⁰ Nikolay Tsyrempilov, Ulan Bigozhin, and Batyrkhan Zhumabayev. 2021. “A Nation’s Holy Land: Kazakhstan’s Large-Scale National Project to Map its Sacred Geography.” *Nationalities Papers*, (2021): 11.

the idea that nations are formed naturally or organically, which entails the emergence of endless various nations. The primordialist point of view is in sharp contrast with the theory of constructivism, which suggests that nations or other similar entities are social constructions, rather than a 'given' organic phenomenon. In the context of Kazakhstan, we may trace the logic of primordialism in pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial times, shaped by the idea of ancestral heritage over the assumed territories. For instance, Smith,¹³¹ referring to Geertz, points out that there is a conflict "between the desires for an efficient, rational order based on 'civil ties' and their continuing cleavages and 'primordial' attachments to certain social and cultural 'givens' in the new states of Africa and Asia." In pre-colonial Kazakh steppes, the lands were allocated along tribal (*ru*) lines that were comparatively effectively used for winter and summer pasturage that were continuous over generations. The state-building endeavors of the Soviets in the 1920s via constructing ethno-territorial units in Central Asia were also established on a primordialist basis, highlighting their territory, language and history. Hence, it could be one of the potential reasons why there is an ongoing identity disparity among Kazakhstan's population, with Kazakhs finding it problematic to be restraining from the primordialist idea of residing on ancestral lands and not willing to bargain by blending into state-promoted 'one single' entity via merging with ethnic 'others,' rejecting constructivism and modernism to a certain extent.

In turn, the advocates of the modernist theory as that of Gellner, Deutsch, Mann and many others believe that it is only with the start of modernity nations come into existence. Without the modernization processes that include the industrialization, urbanization, development of transportation systems, mass education and literacy, and economic growth, it is purportedly difficult for nations to be formed in the modern sense. Similarly, Anderson¹³² pioneered the idea of 'imagined political communities' that becomes feasible with the advancement of industries, print media, including newspapers, leaflets, magazines that spread

¹³¹ Smith, Anthony D. *The Cultural Foundations of Nations: Hierarchy, Covenant, and Republic*. Wiley-Blackwell (2008): 9.

¹³² Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread* (1983).

the power of words, given that there is technological development that may distribute the printed media across various areas of the imagined community to let people ‘imagine’ their nation. Although the modernist perspective is well acknowledged among scholars for its explanatory power, it is not without its limitations. In this regard, Smith (2008, 13) contends that the modernist conception of the nation accounts only “to a specific subtype of the generic concept of the nation.” In this regard, a scholarly work with a special emphasis on genealogy on Kyrgyzstan, which is culturally and linguistically similar to Kazakhstan, challenges the aforementioned theories by stating the following: “genealogical abstractions facilitated constructing imagined relations among people, groups and practices through discourse and symbols.”¹³³ Unlike Anderson’s view on developing imagined closeness of the nation via the advent of print media, Light¹³⁴ argues that “such imagined relatedness existed as well in pre-modern states, although largely framed in genealogical and religious terms.” In other words, the phenomenon of ‘*shejire*’ (genealogy) existed in the Kazakh steppes, the primary function of which constituted not only in “helping to form political alliances, social structuring, and lineage segmentation, but also serving as a key social guide and a powerful discursive representation.”¹³⁵ In turn, the notion of *shejire* could relate both to a specific family (*nuclear*) and the whole Kazakh nation, the record of which generally preserved verbally, until the first attempts to systematize the genealogy by Shoqan Walikhanov, Shakarim, Mashkhor Kopeev, and Mukhamedjan Tynyshpaev were taken. Moreover, in pre-colonial Kazakh steppes, land allocation followed tribal (*ru*) delineations, which were efficiently utilized for both winter and summer pasturage, exhibiting continuity across generations. Therefore, the so-called ‘imagined relatedness’ among Kazakhs through the knowledge of genealogy and its oral dissemination existed before the advent of modernity and is germane even today, as various Kazakh descent groups are actively engaged in actualizing their respective broader family trees to produce more

¹³³ Nathan Light. “Genealogy, History and Nation.” *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 39, No. 1, (2011): 35.

¹³⁴ Ibid, (2011): 38.

¹³⁵ Saulesh Yessenova. “Routes and Roots’ of Kazakh Identity: Urban Migration in Postsocialist Kazakhstan.” *The Russian Review*, Vol. 64, (2005): 663.

educated understanding of relatedness. With that being said, when each descent group pursues the refinement of their respective genealogical knowledge, they firstly intend to symbolize their standing within the *broad* genealogy of Kazakhs, which also leads to the argument that all Kazakh *ru* stem from one grand progenitor (*Ata*) that gave rise to the nation of Kazakhs. Secondly, the current activities of elaborating *shejire* is a peculiar zest of the Kazakh culture that does not result in cleavages within a society, but instead, it contributes to the collective awareness of Kazakhs.

Commemorative sites: *Soviet in Form, Kazakh in Content*

The idea of ‘relatedness’ is not reduced to finding shared links and kinship ties through references to broad genealogical knowledge only. In present circumstances, one of the contemporary means of reinforcing the notion of ‘imagined relatedness’ is via engagement in commemorative activities. In addition to revising genealogies to produce more structured and a comprehensive grasp of lineages for greater understanding, one of the undertakings of descent groups is the celebration of their heroic ancestral *batyrs* through remembrance in the public. If examinations of genealogies of various *ru* are implemented in more private settings and seem to be more tolerated by the state, the activities of remembrance are a-priori observable to the public sight that draws state’s alertness. The presence of heroic *batyrs* on the squares, in the boulevards and parks normally has a symbolic power to connect the current generation of people, especially the young, with their ancestors who had fought in the name of Kazakh independence. In the context of Kazakhstan, I think that the scope of the concept of ‘banal nationalism’¹³⁶ could be extended beyond the national flag or anthem by covering the monuments of historic Kazakh *batyrs* as well. It is generally known that *batyrs* are deemed as “an image of national culture and national spirit, while being also known for their diligence, mastery of war, leadership, who can sacrifice their selves for the sake of homeland.”¹³⁷ Therefore, firstly, the existence of such type

¹³⁶ Billig, Michael. *Banal Nationalism*. Sage, (1995).

¹³⁷ Kuralai Yernagambetova, “Қазақстанның көпшілік кеңістігіндегі батырлар мен хандар ескерткіші” (The Monuments of *Batyrs* and *Khans* in the Public Spaces of Kazakhstan). YouTube

of places reproduces the state figuratively on a daily basis, both as a symbol of past sacrifice and struggle, and as objects that educate people via inculcating respect for ancestral contribution and invigorating to protect the existing blessings, expressed via vast lands and independence. In addition, commemorative sites of batyrs are virtually omnipresent throughout Kazakhstan, similar to flags, emblems or other national features; therefore, as inventions of symbolic representations, they also have the ‘banal’ effect to procreate the nation-state recurrently.

Consequently, why do monuments and memorials play such an important role in processes of identification? How does power relate to them, and how do the local actors make their voices heard through the medium of public associations? What are the differences in means that state and local actors implement their commemorative agendas? Do their respective activities contradict each other in crafting and maintaining nation-building processes on the ground? These are the series of questions I scrutinize in this section prior to introducing and analyzing the findings from the data, collected in a couple of phases, namely, in summer of 2022 and in November-December of 2023.

It is generally argued that objects of memory, such as monuments and memorial complexes serve as mechanisms on the part of the state (*top-down*) and other non-state actors (*bottom-up*) to reproduce the nation the way they envision it. Scholars such as Verovšek¹³⁸ argue that “statements by public figures place certain events [and heroes] into the national consciousness while silencing or forgetting others.” The tangible character of monuments turns such objects into a visible and accessible site that not only stands there by itself, but also carries a set of messages via its agency. For instance, in her study of the rally grounds of the Nazi party in Nuremberg, Macdonald¹³⁹ contends that “landscapes and architecture have psychological and enduring social effects.” She further points out that such material constructions as buildings and

Lecture Series of Tselinny Center of Contemporary Culture, (2020). Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=02ESQQdkL6E&feature=emb_imp_woyt

¹³⁸ Verovšek, P.J. “Collective memory, politics, and the influence of the past: the politics of memory as a research paradigm.” *Politics Groups and Identities*, Vol. 4, No. 3, (2016): 1.

¹³⁹ Sharon Macdonald. “Words in Stone? Agency and Identity in a Nazi Landscape.” *Journal of Material Culture*, Vol. 11, No. 1-2, (2006): 106, 107.

memorials have a potential to turn into a heritage for future generations that in turn connect their present with such manifestations of the past to a certain degree. In a similar manner, an article by Bozoglu¹⁴⁰ scrutinizes a fascinating relationship between the Turkish President Erdogan's political party, AKP [*Adalet ve Kalkınma*] and its association for initiating the opening of the Panorama 1453 Museum (P1453) in Istanbul. In this work, the elements of neo-Ottomanism are displayed, in which “the selective account of the Ottoman past to power identity constructions among the citizenry in the present” as well as implying that the conqueror of the Constantinople, Mehmet II, “might function as a proxy figure for Erdogan.”¹⁴¹ In this sense, the formation of museums as that of P1453, a manifestation of *top-down* approach, plays a significant role in the processes of identification and illustration of power.

In the context of Kazakhstan, with regard to places of memory, including monuments of *batyrs*, mosques, museums and memorials of historical figures, it is noticeable that both *top-down* and *bottom-up* methods are present in the niche of memory, but more interestingly, non-state actors represented by public associations of descent groups reproduce the nation the same way as does state in their commemorative practices. Both state and non-state local actors resemble each other in erecting monuments and memorial complexes in honor of *batyrs*, in particular, the architectural design of sites, the materials used during the construction, the engraving of the monument specifying the *batyr*'s name and date of birth, the ribbon-cutting ceremony and the grand opening of the site with the participation of honorable figures (*statesmen, writers, veterans*) and performance of artists.

Despite the existence of plentiful memorial objects that pay tribute Kazakh warriors, I find it appropriate to provide an analysis of how an “average” monument looks like in terms of their characteristics. In this respect, we may observe the pervasive sites of commemoration of

¹⁴⁰ Gönül Bozoglu. “A great bliss to keep the sensation of conquest alive! The emotional politics of the Panorama 1453 Museum in Istanbul.” Chapter 4. In: *Representations of Self and Other*, edited by Chiara De Cesari and Ayhan Kaya (2020).

¹⁴¹ Bozoglu, Gönül. “A great bliss to keep the sensation of conquest alive! The emotional politics of the Panorama 1453 Museum in Istanbul.” Chapter 4. In: *Representations of Self and Other*, edited by Chiara De Cesari and Ayhan Kaya (2020): 93, 104.

batyrs (warriors), galloping their horses and holding their weapons, which is a standardized form of depicting heroes (warriors) in the public space. The warriors are commonly equipped with chainmails (Kazakh: *аймауыт, ақберен*), carrying either a long spear (Kazakh: *найза*) or a short sword (Kazakh: *қылыш*) and round shield, wearing a national headdress (Kazakh: *дулыға*) with protective nets. More interestingly, irrespective of people's attempts of accurately reimagining the body shape and facial features of *batyrs*, in reality, they all look identical. In addition, the galloping horses do not merely stand there as an inert complement to the *batyr*, but instead, horses are illustrated in action as vibrant and powerful entities, typically raising their feet, as if partaking in a battle. In his comparative analysis of Altai and Buriat epics with regard to the role of a hero and his horse, Dmitrienko¹⁴² highlights that there is a certain "close connection between a rider and his horse, implying that peoples of the steppe paid considerable attention to horse breeding." In this regard, the recipients of such monuments are expected to receive the following psychological and social effects. For instance, an object of cavalry indicates the cultural elements of Kazakhs, who used horses not only as a means of transportation, but also treated it as an integral part of warrior's equipment, almost as a sacred comrade, which, in general, is a part of the horsemanship culture. Besides, it is argued that "Central Eurasian pastoral nomads lived in the steppe zone, which was the home of the horse and the best pastureland for horses [and] they grew up with horses and on them,"¹⁴³ referring to the natural connection between a horse and a warrior. Secondly, Macdonald¹⁴⁴ argues that the erection of massive buildings similar to those in Nuremberg, was a part of an "ideology of dwarfing the individual, and subsuming individual identity to the collective project," implying that there is much agency on the part of those buildings, let alone its rigid material composition that conveys the symbolic idea of strength and endurance.

¹⁴² Dmitrienko, A. "A hero and his horse in the Altai and Buryat epic: behavioral stereotypes and values of the peoples." *Siberian Philological Journal*, No. 4, (2014): 84.

¹⁴³ Beckwith, Christopher I. *Empires of the Silk Road: A History of Central Eurasia from the Bronze Age to the Present*. Princeton University Press (2009): 322.

¹⁴⁴ Sharon Macdonald. "Words in Stone? Agency and Identity in a Nazi Landscape." *Journal of Material Culture*, Vol. 11, No. 1-2, (2006): 111.

Similarly, the monuments of various Kazakh *batyrs* of the pre-colonial era, who are typically celebrated for their extraordinary achievements in the fight against enemies of Kazakh people, usually constituted by Western Mongol tribes, are also predominantly made of granite. These objects also serve as *agents* to the current and future generations of Kazakhs by showing the ‘great’ might and grit of ancestral heroes that sacrificed their individual lives for the sake of greater good, that is, Kazakhs, saving their land and fighting for freedom. The ideas of land and freedom are constantly put forward almost as perennial values for Kazakhs by both state and local actors, which are imagined to a great extent as it is unclear what specific lands were saved back then and whether they are included in the contemporary territorial unit spatially, and what meaning the concept of ‘*fighting for freedom*’ entailed at that time. Apart from heroes, commonly known due to their struggles against Jungars and Kalmyks, some of the prominent Soviet Kazakh figures, such as B. Momyshuli, A. Moldagulova, and M. Mametova are equally distinguished. The memorialization of the latter two for their courage during the Second World War (Great Patriotic War) is, in fact, worth designating because the Kazakh state both underlines “the Kazakhstani heroes that contributed to the Soviet victory in WWII and highlights the rhetorical connection between Moldagulova, the Soviet sniper who died defending the Russian city of Pskov, and the sovereignty, and thus legitimacy of the Kazakhstani state.”¹⁴⁵ Hence, this way the Kazakhstani state diminishes the hegemony of Russia in its endeavor of turning the parade of the Victory Day in Russia as the ‘*national*’ holiday, while at the same time illustrating its brave sons and daughters that also fought for preserving their motherland.

However, as I have mentioned earlier, the state does not possess exclusive control over which events or figures that merit to be reminisced, and which to be forgotten, or at least, silenced. For instance, in some of the post-colonial cases, such as Namibia, the state has launched a number of memorials as that of Heroes Acre and Independence Memorial Museum, which puts at the forefront of its narrative the heroes that fought for the independence, which

¹⁴⁵ Kristoffer Michael Rees, “Recasting the Nation: Transforming Heroes of the Soviet Union into Symbols of Kazakhstani Patriotism.” *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 39, No. 4, (2020): 454.

“does not necessarily translate into popular enthusiasm” by the population.¹⁴⁶ Conversely, there are growing non-state actors in the form small communities that aim to make their voices heard, in particular, by “building memorials to commemorate their own unrecognized heroes on the part of descendants of victims of the German genocide and bringing their case into international courts.”¹⁴⁷ This struggle between state and non-state narratives shows that the meaning of ‘heroes’ may change over time. Unlike the Namibian example, non-state local actors in Kazakhstan by way of public associations of descent groups are heavily involved in distinguishing certain warriors that are overlooked or simply not recognized by the state, which essentially deserve the appropriate attention, from their perspectives, while *complementing* the state’s narrative of praising Kazakh national heroes that contributed to the formation of modern-day Kazakhstan.

Similar to the logic upheld by the Namibian rulers, the political elites of Kazakhstan often ignored the wrongdoings of the Soviet Union, especially, when it comes to the crimes against humanity, when forced sedentarization and collectivization of Kazakhs in 1930s with appropriation of their livestock and further artificial food scarcity, led to their mass starvation, later to genocide.¹⁴⁸ It was only in 2020, when the President of Kazakhstan, K.J. Tokayev, invited the Secretary of the State and gave a number of orders upon the celebration of the 30th anniversary of Kazakhstan, which had to include certain events in memory of the victims of the famine between 1932-1933.¹⁴⁹ Almost three decades later after the Independence, there were finally some steps made on the part of the state to regard the tragic event in the history of

¹⁴⁶ Zuern, Elke, and James M. Jasper. “Heroes and Victims in Divided Nationalism: The Case of Namibia.” *Journal of Nationalism, Memory and Language Politics*, Vol. 14, Issue 1, (2020): 17.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, (2020): 19.

¹⁴⁸ In reality, the official rhetoric of the Kazakhstani state is ambiguous, since the Speaker of the Senate of the Parliament of Kazakhstan, Maulen Ashimbayev, claimed that “the State would pay special attention to the anniversaries of the famine of 1920s and 1930s in the Kazakh steppes, but asked ‘not to politicize’ the issue,” meaning that the hunger has not still been called as a ‘genocide’ at the state level. *Radio Azattyq*, 2021.

¹⁴⁹ Kapital.kz. *Касым-Жомарт Токаев принял Крымбека Кушербаева*, <https://kapital.kz/gosudarstvo/90040/kasym-zhomart-tokayev-prinyal-krymbeka-kusherbayeva.html> (accessed April. 06, 2023)

Kazakhs more publicly, which the former President, N. Nazarbayev, tended to disregard. In this regard, Poole¹⁵⁰ relevantly presents the problem of memorialization, in which he illustrates how “removing unwelcome statues is one thing; their replacement, both then and now, is another matter,” suggesting the politicization and highly controversial nature of such enterprise. While the Namibian government preferred to overlook the events of German genocide vis-à-vis Namibians due to financial assistance they received from Germany,¹⁵¹ Kazakhstani statesmen were probably hesitant to aggravate their friendship and geopolitical cooperation with Russia, which shows the role of politics in commemorative matters. Moreover, as the Kazakh government displayed long years of reluctance to commemorate certain historical events that left a negative imprint in the memory of people as the famine of 1930s, together with the unwillingness to distinguish numerous descent-based warriors, I think such factors most likely pushed the non-state local actors to exercise their agency more dynamically.

It is commonly argued that the Kazakhstani government is inclined towards maintaining the ideas of civic nationhood and transnationalism.¹⁵² Such a decision was purposeful because “presenting an image of inclusive civic nationalism appeared to be important not only for relations with neighboring states that contain Kazakh diaspora, but also for the international community.”¹⁵³ However, a contrary perspective is provided by Waśkiel,¹⁵⁴ who examines Kazakhstan’s nation-branding activities on an international arena via using historical narrative and tradition, and one such instance was the celebration of the 550th Anniversary of the Kazakh Khanate, where “President Nazarbayev publicly opened the monument of Kerey and Janibek in

¹⁵⁰ Steve Poole. 2020. “The Instinct for hero worship works blindly’: English radical democrats and the problem of memorialization.” *Patterns of Prejudice*, Vol. 54, No. 5, (2020): 507.

¹⁵¹ Zuern, Elke, and James M. Jasper. “Heroes and Victims in Divided Nationalism: The Case of Namibia.” *Journal of Nationalism, Memory and Language Politics*, Vol. 14, Issue 1, (2020).

¹⁵² Marlene Laruelle. “The Three Discursive Paradigms of State Identity in Kazakhstan: Kazakhness, Kazakhstanness, and Transnationalism,” In: *Nationalism and Identity Construction in Central Asia: Dimensions, Dynamics, and Directions*, edited by Mariya Omelicheva, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, (2014).

¹⁵³ Alexander Diener, “National Territory and the Reconstruction of History in Kazakhstan.” *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, Vol. 43, No. 8, (2002): 644.

¹⁵⁴ Tomasz Waśkiel, “Historical Narrative and Tradition as Instruments of Creating the Image of the State on the International Arena: The Case of Kazakhstan.” *Historia i Polityka*, No. 30(37), (2019): 58.

Taraz and claimed that the Kazakh nation and the Kazakh state have a long history.” The formation of such memorial complex for historical figures as Kerey and Janibek, the founders of the Kazakh Khanate, was deliberately designed to demonstrate the historical significance and role of Kazakhs in this region. From the perspective of national-patriotic discourse in Kazakhstan, the manifestation of history seems to be “romantically imagined as an uninterrupted continuity from the Kazakh Khanate and its legendary warriors, the batyrs.”¹⁵⁵

Furthermore, in the case of the nation’s capital, Astana, some researchers pointed out that “statues representing Kazakhstan’s historical figures spread all over the city are almost exclusively connected with ethnic Kazakhs.”¹⁵⁶ Here, apart from emotive attachment to monuments and memorials, one may observe the utilization of sites as ‘tangible relics,’ which allows eternalizing champions of various causes for the ‘greater good’ of Kazakh people. On top of the state enterprise in its agenda of commemoration, we also see a growing trend of monument-erection in honor of *batyrs* that represent specific *ru* that are built by their respective descendants from the same lineage. Such plentiful examples include, but not limited to, the monuments of *Qapal batyr* in Shymkent, *Sirgeli Tileuke-Qarabatyr* on the highway from Shymkent to Turkistan city, *Baidibek batyr* monument in Taraz, erected by men from the ‘*Dulat*’ tribe, *Tileu batyr* monument in Aqtobe, constructed by the offspring of one of the Junior Horde tribes, and many others, that seemingly celebrate their respective sub-ethnic identities.

Moreover, by examining the politics of multiple identities, Schatz¹⁵⁷ provides other relevant examples as those of “the descendants of Toghybai batyr erecting an ‘interesting and unique monument’ in his honor in Semipalatinsk, while in Taldy-Korghan, a fund was established to build a monument to Eskeldi batyr, and in Aktobe, a funeral repast was held for

¹⁵⁵ Mehmet Volkan Kasikçi, “The Soviet and the Post-Soviet: Street Names and National Discourse in Almaty.” *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 71, No. 8, (2019): 1349.

¹⁵⁶ Jean-François Caron, The Contemporary Politics of Kazakhisation: The Case of Astana’s Urbanism. In: *Kazakhstan and the Soviet Legacy: Between Continuity and Rupture*. (eds.) Jean-François Caron. Palgrave Macmillan, (2019): 196.

¹⁵⁷ Edward Schatz, “The Politics of Multiple Identities: Lineage and Ethnicity in Kazakhstan.” *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 52, No. 3, (2000): 500.

Eset batyr of the Shekti tribe (Lesser Zhuz).” In this regard, one interesting characteristic of monuments that represent *batyrs*, initiated by local actors, is that there is a clear sign of the ‘*localization*’ of warriors, in which associations of descent groups install their sites in areas, where the respective heroes originally come from (*e.g. Eset Batyr - in the west; Qarasai Batyr - in the south; Qabanbay Batyr - in the east; Qulsary Batyr - in the north/center*), etc. Moreover, the concept of distinct ‘*localization*’ of historical figures within a specific descent group is evident. The commemoration of Sarke Batyr from Zhaghalbaily, for instance, is meticulously preserved in a geographically pertinent area, aligning the perpetuation of his memory with its historical roots. Conversely, the commemoration of Shamshi Qaldayaqov [from Zhaghalbaily] in Aqtobe faced criticism from the counterparts in South Kazakhstan, despite both groups belonging to the same descent group. This underscores the nuanced and regionally specific nature of commemorating historical figures within a shared descent group. A contestation emerges concerning the embodiment of historically significant figures, evident in actions such as the renaming of villages, as exemplified by the case of Shamshi. Additionally, commemoration of some figures, such as Tailaq Batyr, recognized as a ‘common’ warrior for a number of groups, experiences appropriation in various regions as Qyzylorda and Aqtobe, thus, illustrating divergent efforts by different actors to assert and influence the legacy of such historical persona.

It seems that various groups of Kazakh *ru* have a conceptual understanding of territorialization that encourages them to take into account regional peculiarities in implementing their activities of memorialization. Hence, it would be infeasible to see the monuments honoring figures from Adai or Zhaghalbaily of Junior Horde somewhere in the south, while the warriors from Arghyn or Naiman of Middle Horde secure themselves no spot in the west of Kazakhstan, and so forth.

Among myriad of memorial constructions, a correspondent, Rustam Maushev, draws our attention to a modest construction, established in honor of Kelmenbet batyr in Qyzylorda, who

belonged to the tribe of Shomekei of Junior Horde.¹⁵⁸ Similarly, in Mangystau area, in the West of Kazakhstan, one may encounter one of the sacred sites and mausoleums in honor of Adai Ata, who was a “well-known *batyr* that fought for the preservation of his soil and lived for 115 years, and is treated as the grand ancestor (tribal pride) of Alshyn tribe of Junior Horde, from which other numerous tribes have been developed.”¹⁵⁹ Although the creation of the Otpan Tau complex in honor of Adai Ata was facilitated by one of the well-known figures in the oil industry, Nasipkali Marabayev, an Adai by descent, the tradition of ‘*Amal Küni*’ carries a number of positive premises, one of which is “the call for Kazakh unity that is demonstrated when the torch is lit at the complex.”¹⁶⁰ In general, the celebration of *Amal Küni* (Kazakh: Амал күні) or *Körisu Küni* (Kazakh: Көрісу күні) involves people’s congratulation of each other on the successful arrival of spring, sharing of upright wishes and paying tribute to the older generation, which is public and open to any person. In current times, it is turned out that *Amal Küni* is celebrated predominantly in western areas of Kazakhstan, such as Aqtau, Atyrau, Aqtobe, Oral, while other regions either neglect this tradition or are showing little interest to it. Although the memorial compound of Otpan Tau was designated to eternalize the memory of Adai Ata, the founder of Adai descent group, the site is utilized as a venue to host festivals as that of *Amal Küni* that brings together various people, regardless of their descent background, and hence, calls for unity.

Furthermore, one of such monuments is given to tribute the honor of the Zhanqozha batyr, representative of Alimuly tribe of Junior Horde, who was known to have “fought against the injustices of Khiva and Kokand Khanates.”¹⁶¹ In turn, the sites of two warriors were erected from high-quality granite in Almaty region, distinguishing Suranshy and Sauryq batyrs, who

¹⁵⁸ Kyzylorda-news.kz, “Топ-5 памятников батырам в Кызылорде.” [*Top-5 memorials of batyrs in Kyzylorda*]. 2017, Retrieved from <https://oldru.kyzylorda-news.kz/news/lifnews/16644-top-5-pamyatnikov-batyram-v-kyzylorde.html>

¹⁵⁹ Lada.kz, “Сердце святого Мангистау” [*The Heart of Sacred Mangistau*], 2017, Retrieved from https://www.lada.kz/in_details/52940-serdce-svyatogo-mangistau.html

¹⁶⁰ Totaro, Maurizio. “Fire and Oil in Western Kazakhstan’s ‘Spiritual Renovation.’” *Open Democracy*. 2018. Retrieved from <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/fire-and-oil-in-western-kazakhstan/>

¹⁶¹ Kyzylorda-news.kz, “Топ-5 памятников батырам в Кызылорде.” [*Top-5 memorials of batyrs in Kyzylorda*], 2017, Retrieved from <https://oldru.kyzylorda-news.kz/news/lifnews/16644-top-5-pamyatnikov-batyram-v-kyzylorde.html>

were the progenies of the Shapyrashty tribe of the Great Horde, the well-known representative of which is the First President of Kazakhstan, N. Nazarbayev, who grew up in Almaty region.¹⁶² Although such enterprises could be criticized as ‘backward’ in Marxist-Leninist terms due to its allegedly primitive tribalist features, I argue that the existence of such alternative voices in Kazakhstan displays both the *agency* of local actors and the presence of *local agenda* in regions, although as a whole, it complements the grand narrative of the state on promoting *national Kazakh heroes*. Thus, investigating the growing strand of monuments and memorial complexes that praise specific batyrs in the context of Kazakhstan opens interesting research avenues with regard to the processes of identification. Inquiries of why there is a need to erect such memorials, how resources are collected for their embodiment, whether reinforcing one’s identity based on descent group (*ru*) is an integral component of being ‘Kazakh’ or rather an attempt to offset the identity vacuum, caused by state’s ambiguous identity politics, all worth exploration in the course of this dissertation work.

One of the possible adverse effects of commemorative practices both from the state and local non-state actors in Kazakhstan is the misuse of monuments for personal benefit, driven by the lack of genuine basis for remembrance. The domestic media is occasionally filled with scandalous news regarding the constructions of statues, one of which, for instance, was the monument in Almaty region, named as *‘Mangilik El’ (national idea)*, for the establishment of which “21 million tenge was allocated from the regional budget, although no authorized permission was provided for doing so.”¹⁶³ Aside from that, another scandal occurred, when the monument, honoring the purported *‘Taitai Batyr,’* unfamiliar to people, in *Bayganin* district of Aqtobe region was to receive the funding of 43 million tenge, while the local inhabitants have never heard of such *batyr’s* existence, which ostensibly spent his lifetime around that living

¹⁶² Zakon.kz, “В Алматинской области торжественно открылся памятник двум прославленным батырам.” [Two Memorials in Honor of Two Glorious Heroes were opened in Almaty region]. 2013, Retrieved from <https://www.zakon.kz/4584759-v-almatinskoyj-oblasti-torzhestvenno.html>

¹⁶³ Lada.kz, “В Алматинской области новый скандал с памятником.” [A New Scandal with Monument in Almaty region]. 2015, Retrieved from https://www.lada.kz/another_news/25868-v-almatinskoy-oblasti-novyy-skandal-s-pamyatnikom.html

area.¹⁶⁴ Furthermore, one of the granite-made memorials in *Qarabalyk* district of Qostanay region, located on an international highway, was demolished due to the fact that it was built to commemorate some unidentified batyr.¹⁶⁵

Likewise, an author of Internet newspaper, *Ratel*, Dauren Abdramanov, raised an issue, namely, the fact that Kazakhs are growingly “confusing the notion of knowing one’s belonging to a certain tribe and leading a life, based on solely clan-related relations, thus, by alienating themselves from those that do not come from the same bloodline.”¹⁶⁶ Moreover, he underlines that the monument of Qapal batyr was set near the railway station in Shymkent by those, “who are the descendants of Qapal batyr’s tribe, and the batyr’s site is appreciated and respected by themselves only; on the contrary, the memorials of Abay, Amangeldi, Shoqan [Walikhanov] in Almaty are the objects of pride of all Kazakhs, and therefore not only the representatives of [descent groups] as Tabyqty, Kipchak and Tore visited and honored them, respectively.”¹⁶⁷ At first blush, it may seem like members of various descent groups praise only their ancestral warriors, while ignoring batyrs from other *ru*, but, in fact, their rhetoric conveys ‘national’ sentiments, implying that each respective batyr is celebrated as ‘Kazakh national hero’ or ‘national state defender’ because of his contribution for the common Kazakh cause and its formation, the details of which are discussed in the following subsection on data analysis. Secondly, as certain batyrs that are unacquainted to the general public (e.g. Sarke, Aqpan) are not noticed by the state, that is the very reason why public associations of descent groups are

¹⁶⁴ Diapazon.kz, “Памятник неизвестному батыру за 43 млн тенге хотят установить в Актюбинской области.” [*They want to build a monument to an unknown batyr worth of 43 million tenge in Aktobe region*], 2020: Retrieved from <https://diapazon.kz/news/104792-pamyatnik-neizvestnomu-batiru-za-43-mln-tenge-hotyat-ustanovit-v-aktyubinskoi-oblasti>

¹⁶⁵ Nasha Gazeta.kz, “Гранитный постамент, бронзовый батыр: снесенную в Карабальке статую заменит новая.” [*A Granite Pedestal, A Bronze Hero: Demolished Statue in Karabalyk will be replaced by new one*], 2018, Retrieved from <https://www.ng.kz/modules/news/article.php?storyid=32205>

¹⁶⁶ Ratel.kz, “Раньше род был как одна семья, а сегодня это подобие ОПГ.” [*Clans once were as one family, but today, it resembles an organized crime*], 2017, Retrieved from https://ratel.kz/raw/ranshe_rod_byl_kak_odna_semja_a_segodnja_eto_podobie_opg?page=2

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, “Раньше род был как одна семья, а сегодня это подобие ОПГ.” [*Clans once were as one family, but today, it resembles an organized crime*], 2017, Retrieved from https://ratel.kz/raw/ranshe_rod_byl_kak_odna_semja_a_segodnja_eto_podobie_opg?page=2

engaged in popularizing their *'equally significant'* warriors, which, according to them, should not be necessarily considered as a sign of tribalism. Therefore, the *agency* of local actors and the presence of *local agenda* in regions are clearly observed, which are compatible with the grand narrative of the state on promoting Kazakh national heroes.

Likewise, on a highway, connecting Shayan and Sholakqorgan villages [South Kazakhstan region], “the statue of Baidibek batyr was erected by men of the ‘Dulat’ tribe, because Baidybek batyr was from the Dulat bloodline himself.”¹⁶⁸ Also, the offspring of one of the tribes of Junior Horde have “placed two memorials in honor of Tileu batyr and his son, Zholdyaiyaq, and only they attend the site, while others share certain sentiments as following: ‘well-done, look what a great monument they have positioned to pay respects to their ancestors.’”¹⁶⁹ In this regard, Bulat Sharipov, one of the journalists of Pavlodar online news sources, raises the concern that monuments and memorials should not be “limited to their formal openings as such, but also their existence find some genuine reflection in the daily lives of every Kazakhstani citizen.”¹⁷⁰ However, in reality, in order for monumental sites to impact the daily lives of ordinary people, I believe they must be settled within reach and in visible areas of cities or towns, which is not the case for numerous monuments of *batyrs* that are physically placed beyond the city, for instance, on highways (Baidibek Batyr), distant areas of regions (Sarke Batyr, Qanly monument) and in villages (Qulsary Batyr) sometimes difficult to reach due to poor transportation infrastructure and remoteness. Secondly, it is vital to take into account the financial aspect in examining practices of memory because the fact that some public associations of descent groups are building sites of remembrance in honor of their ancestors is not *necessarily*

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, “Раньше род был как одна семья, а сегодня это подобие ОПГ.” [*Clans once were as one family, but today, it resembles an organized crime*], 2017, Retrieved from https://ratel.kz/raw/ranshe_rod_byl_kak_odna_semja_a_segodnja_eto_podobie_opg_?page=2

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, “Раньше род был как одна семья, а сегодня это подобие ОПГ.” [*Clans once were as one family, but today, it resembles an organized crime*], 2017, Retrieved from https://ratel.kz/raw/ranshe_rod_byl_kak_odna_semja_a_segodnja_eto_podobie_opg_?page=2

¹⁷⁰ Pavon.kz, “Одни памятники ставим, другие разрушаем.” [*Some monuments are built, while others are demolished*], 2014, Retrieved from <https://pavon.kz/post/view/34300/see422500?cpage=1&reply=422542>

due to their ‘tribalist’ aspirations, but rather there is a direct relation “between their activities and financial abilities.”¹⁷¹ The specifics of funding to erect memorial complexes via attracting personal sponsorship or collective fundraising, as an association, will be covered in the following subsection as well.

Data Collection and Analysis.

The collection of qualitative data took place in late July and August of 2022, when I conducted field-visits to a number of cities and regions, namely, Taraz, Shymkent, Turkestan region, Almaty, Almaty region, Aqtobe and Aqtobe region, Petropavlovsk and North Kazakhstan region to meet with my interviewees and visit the actual sites of *batyrs*. The participants represent diverse descent groups (*ru*) from the Great Horde, Middle Horde, and Junior Horde, such as Shegir, Qanly, Atyghai, Besterek and Zhaghalbaily. One of the prominent works on the social organization of Kazakhs by Hudson, neatly summarized the cornerstone of “Kazak social structure by asserting that it consisted of a large number of separate groups each claiming descent from its founder and bearing his name and these groups considered themselves as related to, but independent of, other groups from which their ancestor had come.”¹⁷² This suggests that although the interviewees each come from a separate lineage of the aforementioned Kazakh *Ru*, they nonetheless coalesce around their apical ancestor (*e.g. Zhaghalbaily, Qanly*) from which they claim descent.

The bulk of the data for this dissertation comes from discursive and tangible primary materials. A series of case studies, such as the monument of Aqpan *Batyr* from Shegir tribe located in city-center of Shymkent, Qulsari *Batyr* from Atyghai tribe in North Kazakhstan region (near Petropavlovsk), memorial of Qanly tribe in Qazyghurt area of Turkestan region, monument in honor of Sarke *Batyr* in Aqtobe region, and first ever site of Besterek tribe that is planned to

¹⁷¹ Kulshat Medeuova, “The Post-Soviet Memoryscape in Kazakhstan,” YouTube video, 1:34:52, September 22, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sVPGiLBCFQ>

¹⁷² Hudson, Alfred. Kazak Social Structure. *Human Relations Area Files Press*, (1938): 23.

be completed in 2024, was conducted that focused on depth rather than breadth of the issues under investigation.

I looked for cases that lend themselves for solid analysis, which met the following criteria. Accessibility was a key criterion. The amount of monuments and memorial complexes in various areas of Kazakhstan is abundant, but not every single of them provides sufficient information on stakeholders that contributed to their erections. In general, relatively new sites of commemoration possess scannable QR (quick-response) codes either on the wall of the site or provide a supplementary small board with such code next to the site (e.g. Sarke Batyr). In their turn, comparatively old monuments generally provide only a brief description of the site with small signboards, attached onto the walls. In order to obtain relevant information regarding the initiators of the commemorative object, I had to research both Kazakh- and Russian-based online mass media that illuminated the ceremonial openings of the sites, which occasionally comprised the concrete full name of the sponsor or responsible organization, but some merely addressed the initiators as “*grateful descendants of the batyr*” without any references. Certain digital media articles pointed out sponsors of the monuments directly, which moderately facilitated the process of communicating with the benefactor via his company or organization and consequently reaching out to the supporters of their public associations (e.g. *Amangos Toleuov, a prominent entrepreneur and farmer in Aqtobe region, sponsor of Sarke Batyr’s monument*).

While regional differences (*south vs. north*) were accounted for in selecting cases, it is important to note that they did not definitely have to display the typicality between them. If a case study from the northern region were unique, such as the monument of Qulsari batyr¹⁷³ in Petropavlovsk, it would be inquiring to fathom why such examples were not happening in other regions as well. In other words, the extraordinariness of a site is an interesting indicative that I

¹⁷³ The uniqueness of this commemorative site is due to its visual shape that looks unlike other existing monuments in honor of *batyrs*, in particular, there is no prototype of a warrior, galloping on a horse, holding a battle stick. Instead, we observe the site that resembles a burial chamber of the warrior, which is even more accentuated in the title of the site, “Qulsary Awlie (Saint).” The figure is praised both as a warrior and a saint.

took into account when looking for cases. Examining the atypical instance sheds light on the characteristics and implications of typical cases. An exploration into the proliferation of descent-based monuments and commemorative sites throughout Kazakshtan offers insights into the broader landscape of activities, from which I endeavored to identify the most compelling case studies for analysis. After picking the research sites, I conducted semi-structured interviews with the founders of ‘tribal’ monuments in honor of batyrs and working members of descent-group organizations that are devoted to organizing events of their *ru* consistently. Although I planned to utilize participant-observation as one of my methods to collect additional data by partaking in tribal councils (*qurultai*) and formal/informal gatherings, there was no chance to do so. The structuring of the interviews as semi-structured has been beneficial, because the participants shared their opinions and beliefs not only about their descent groups, reasons for participating in tribal events on a consistent basis, or endeavors to research their tribal warriors and *ru* history, but also touched upon various socio-political topics, such as the issues of ideology, ‘tribal’ favoritism, ideological and political dominance of the Nazarbayev family’s Shapyrashty descent group for decades, matters of public school curriculum and decolonization, distortion of history by local historians, etc.

West Kazakhstan: The Case of the Zhaghalbaily Descent Group

One of the case selections is situated in the region of Aqtobe, on the west of Kazakhstan. There is a monument, erected in honor of Sarke Batyr, who comes from Zhaghalbaily tribe of *Jetiru* in the composition of the Junior Horde, placed in the village of *Qosestek*, about 75 kilometers away from the city of Aqtobe from the one side, and 75 kilometers away from Orsk city of Orenburg region (Russia), from the other. The personality of Sarke Batyr was not well known beyond Aqtobe region and people of Zhaghalbaily, and required popularization among the general public. Then, one of the prominent Area Studies scholars in the Aqtobe region, Bayanghali Qultaev, who is a fellow Zhaghalbaily, was responsible for conducting the fundamental research studies to discover some historical evidences about Sarke, starting from

2006, via collecting obtainable documents and records from libraries and archives of Almaty, Orenburg, Orsk, and Saint-Petersburg cities. In turn, one of key reasons why Sarke Batyr and his troops are renowned is because they held the so-called ‘northern route’ along the borders of the Junior Horde (western areas of modern Kazakhstan) on strong lock, which was “the most convenient pathway for the invasion of Jungars to Kazakh lands,” according to Bayanghali, though he did not provide any sources for that. This idea of Sarke Batyr and his soldiers fighting not only on behalf of the people of Zhaghalbaily or related descent groups of the Junior Horde, but keeping the most despised enemies, Jungars, from advancing further to Kazakh steppes, conveys the principal message that Sarke safeguarded Kazakhs of other *ru* from various geographic regions inclusive, instead of his sole descent group or relatives. Through such assertions, the people of Zhaghalbaily intend to instill the contribution of Sarke Batyr in the minds of people for his protection of Kazakhs, and thus the celebration of his achievements should matter not only to Zhaghalbaily, but rather become an all-Kazakh pride.



Figure №2. Personal visit to the monumental site of Sarke Batyr. Aqtobe region, 2022.

Bayanghali's research commenced by his visit to Bashkortostan's capital, Ufa, to meet with an elderly local academician of history, who served as a starting point for Bayanghali's further study. He notes that similar to Kazakhs, Bashkir people also have *ru*-based affiliations and the genealogical book, written in 1956, which remains concealed from the Russian authorities both under the Soviet period and to this day. The Bashkir genealogical book contains tribe names, quite similar to Kazakh ones, such as *Tabyn* (Kazakh: Табын), *Yaghalbaily* (Kazakh: Жағалбайлы), *Tamian* (Kazakh: Тама), and *Kipsiak* (Kazakh: Қыпшақ). Despite the linguistic differences in spelling and pronunciation, the root name of tribes (*ru*) is quite comparable. It is puzzling to provide an explicit reason for this semantic overlap of Kazakh and Bashkir tribal names, but Bizhanova¹⁷⁴ suggests that “many Bashkir-Kazakh correspondences date back to the Kipchak era ... and the process of Turkization of the Bashkir people was influenced by tribes from the Aral Sea region and Central Asia and their migration to Bashkiria.” Also, A.P. Chuloshnikov, in his book, “*Восстание 1755 г. в Башкирии*”, published in 1940 under the auspices of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, describes the historical relationship between Kazakhs and Bashkir at the time. In particular, an excerpt of the chapter III on the general course of the rebellion in 1755 and its failures, it says the following:

“после 8-суточного перехода и днем и ночью, башкирские повстанцы остановились в это время в расположении кочевий казахского старшины Джагалбайлинского рода Серки батыря, который находился в ведомстве ханского брата султана Айчувака. Здесь они были встречены без всякой враждебности местными казахами и “не по одиначкам разобраны, но токмо посемейно разделены, и не яко пленники, но яко гости.” р. 93.

The aforementioned quote illustrates that the arrival of Bashkir rebels and their families was not only met with hospitality on the part of Kazakhs of Junior Horde, namely, Zhaghalbaily people, but the leaders such as Sarke let them group in pairs or assembly of families so that they

¹⁷⁴ M. Bizhanova, “Bashkir-Kazakh Relations in the 18th century.” *Bulletin of Bashkir University*, No. 4, (2006): 146-147.

do not get lost in an unfamiliar area. Thus, such initiative of Sarke batyr allowed Bashkir men to be grouped with their wives in Kazakh steppes. During an interview with Bayanghali, he noted how the Bashkir academician in Ufa referred to the former designation of Bashkir people as “*Estek*” by the Kazakhs in the past. Therefore, this was the main reason why the Zhaghalbaily members of Aqtobe managed to name the village as *Qosestek* (in Kazakh: *a pair of Bashkirs*), located in the Qarghaly (former Lenin) county of Aqtobe region. Not far from the village of *Qosestek*, fellow Zhaghalbaily people, the representatives of which came from all around Aqtobe region and Qazaqstan, have eternalized the monument of Sarke batyr in September of 2019. The monument was established in the framework of “*the year of Sarke batyr*,” celebrated the whole year in 2019 in the framework of Qarghaly county of Aqtobe region¹⁷⁵, complemented with the organization of a conference, poetic competition (Kazakh: *айтыс*), establishment of 9 yurts for reception of guests, the wrestling tournament, and other gatherings. It is worth noting that unlike numerous other descent groups that tribute the memory of their batyrs within the city boundaries (e.g. Eset Batyr in Aqtobe), the Zhaghalbaily fellows adhered to pay homage to Sarke’s historical heritage, where his accomplishments took place. While the monuments within the borders of city or town administration possess the faculty of being more observable and comparatively popular, it requires some preliminary preparation to seek the memorial site as that of Sarke and be able to reach there.

It is interesting to note that such scientific conferences are organized on a regular basis that serve as a boosting mechanism for any respective monument via popularizing it to the public, and displaying the “scientific” grounding by the participation of scholars in conferences,

¹⁷⁵ A scientific and practical conference was held with the participation of prominent domestic public figures and scientists, who shared the results of research on the life of the famous Kazakh batyr. Forum participants watched a documentary video about Sarke. It was also noted that in the Republican edition – the two-volume “Qasietti Kazakstan” [Sacred Kazakhstan], published last year, one of the materials is dedicated to Sarke batyr. In the yurt camp, a memorial meal repast was given in memory of Sarke batyr. National sports games, regional *aitys* of akyns [poets] were held in Qosestek (Baigurinov, 2019, in *Kazpravda*).

and completing the gathering by arranging traditional *kokpar*¹⁷⁶ games with substantial monetary rewards. However, when it comes to the design of the monument *per se*, the reimagination of Sarke *batyr*'s appearance was realized without much reliance on scientific facts, but rather based on the oral narratives of *aqsaqals* of Zhaghalbaily, who have heard about Sarke from their fathers and grandfathers. In interviews with Qayirghali and Bakhyt from Zhaghalbaily, they mentioned about the tasks they set before the sculptor so that he reproduces the look of the warrior of not just any prototypical Kazakh, but someone who, more or less, resembles Sarke, based on their compilation of descriptions of Sarke *batyr*.¹⁷⁷ The endeavor of tribal seniors in recovering the image of their ancestor, based on an educated guess, conveys a message about the absence of formality that leads to the construction of a monument for the sake of its mere existence in the public space, as a sign of pride. As a result, the monument of Sarke *batyr* is depicted to pull the reins of the horse firmly as if stopping it at a gallop. Moreover, the program of celebrations in the framework of the conference in honor of Sarke *Batyr* included “a large exhibition of around 20 paintings, dedicated to the hero's appearance, made by students and teachers of the local art school.”¹⁷⁸ Despite the various efforts to reproduce (reimagine) the physiognomy of Sarke, what we actually observe on the monument is a prototypical Kazakh male's traits, quite similar to dozens of other monuments in Kazakhstan. Apart from the commemorative site itself, there are also forty-nine-verse long heroic epos and a short song, written in honor of Sarke *batyr* by fellow Zhaghalbaily offspring. A combination of memorial site, portraits, songs, epos and research conferences is utilized as various means of both eternalizing the memory about the *batyr* and reimagining his historic role from the bottom up.

¹⁷⁶ Kazakh national sporting game, in which two rival teams fight for a headless goat carcass on a horseback.

¹⁷⁷ Although the people of Zhaghalbaily may have tried to reconstruct the visual appearance of Sarke *Batyr* as precise as possible, what we ultimately observe is that Sarke's face on the monument is very typical, as there is no great difference from Qabanbay *batyr*'s or Zhalantos *batyr*'s monument. In fact, it is an imagined 'face' of the masculine Kazakh male in his 30s and 40s with a beard.

¹⁷⁸ Kazpravda.kz, “В память о батыре.” [*In Memory of the Batyr*]. 2019, Retrieved from <https://kazpravda.kz/n/v-pamyat-o-batyre/>



Figure №3. The front cover of the CD disc of the Scientific and Theoretical Conference, held by the Zhaghalbaily of Kazakhstan. Astana, 2009.

During my interview with the men of Zhaghalbaily, an *aqsaqal* from Aqtobe, Bakhyt, kindly presented to me the CD disc of the rare video that features people from Zhaghalbaily that had gathered for the first time on a national scale in the format of a scientific-theoretical conference, held in Astana in 2009. Watching the video documentary of the conference allowed me to immerse myself as a researcher more profoundly into the activities of Zhaghalbaily descent group and culture of those people, which brought some new-fangled comprehension that I did not achieve in the course of interviews. The video opens up with a picture of numerous horses and a quote, stating “*Жағалбайлы жылқысын көптігінен баға алмайды,*” meaning that Zhaghalbaily cannot herd its horses due to their abundance. This way, I believe, the creator of the video aspired to show interesting historical records about the Zhaghalbaily descent group, pointing out their wealth, ‘high’ status and thus special role in the composition of Kazakhs. Two days in a row, from 6th to 7th December in 2009, the “Zhayiq-Astana” Public Association’s press conference took place. While examining the content of the video, I observed dozens of

participants, primarily men, in their 40s up to the elderly, who took their seats in the conference hall, listening to the moderator and presenters. Since this *ru*-based gathering served as a first kick-off meeting for all Zhaghalbaily, many of who did not know each other beforehand, plenty of individuals shared their thoughts, ideas, and concerns one by one. Interestingly, despite the inhibition on collection and dissemination of genealogical knowledge by Kazakhs in the Soviet period, “information about ancestors continued to be passed on in families, and enthusiasts continued to work on fixing the pedigree, that is, they recorded *shezhire* from old people, restored family ties lost during the famine among the descendants of the *ru* scattered across different regions, collected various information about them.”¹⁷⁹ The persistence of such practice of enhancing the collective knowledge and bringing together the geographically scattered fellow kins is still visible, as some of the guests, who are also Zhaghalbaily by descent, arrived from two areas of Russia, such as Orenburg and Chelyabinsk, and few came from Mongolia. Other fellows from Uzbekistan were also invited, as stated by the speaker of the conference, but they could not arrive. It is evident that the organizers of the assembly attempted to bring together geographically dispersed members of Zhaghalbaily, including kins in remote parts, since it was their first ever meeting at such scale that would enable understanding the status quo of their *ru*.

The moderator of the conference, Bauirzhan, introduced the organizing committee of the Association, namely, the President of Association, Muratkhan Kenbayev, Chairman of the Council of Association, Qaidar Mendikulov, Chairman of Revision Committee, Mereke Isakov, Deputy Chairman of Council of Association, Sabyr Qusainov, and Executive Secretary of Association, Oral Artykbayev. After the organizing committee was presented, the President of Association, Kenbaev, gave a speech publicly stating the main goal of the Association, which apparently ‘aroused due to the prohibition in the Soviet era on the profound investigation of the rich history and culture of Kazakhstan.’ As a means of preserving the Kazakh tradition of

¹⁷⁹ Kulshat Medeuova, and Ermaganbetova Kuralai, M. Kikimbaev, D. Mel’nikov, Z. Naurazbaeva, A. Ramazanova, U. Sandybaeva, D. Tolgambaeva, and A. Tlepbergen. “Praktiki i mesta pamiati v Kazakhstane (strukturno-tipologicheskii obzor).” Astana, Kazakhstan: TOO Master Po, (2016): 39.

reminiscing one's genealogy and its transfer to future generations, the Zhaghalbaily aimed to *systematize the genealogy* of their descent group that has been parceled, and unite the relatives of Zhaghalbaily, who have been spread around Central Asia. For instance, one of the participants stood up and said the following:

“The opening of the public association makes me happy. Our Zhaghalbaily ancestor has experienced countless hardships from Russians, Jungars, and many other enemies. As a result, his offspring have been divided into many different areas. My own ancestors came to these areas in the 18th century, they are called as “On Ata,” but I know nothing else about them. I’ve been dreaming about my relatives, tribesmen for years. Today’s conference united us. I want to thank our brother Muratkhan. If we wish to find the right place for our tribe, all of us must serve.”

Some of the goals on the agenda of the organization, according to the President, were to launch subdivisions (branches) of the association in each *oblast* of Kazakhstan, support young and talented individuals as well as organize expeditions to historical places and archives. In terms of the realization of the “Zhayiq-Astana” Association’s objectives, I learned that the subdivisions of the associations were opened and remain active only in two regions, namely, Astana and Aqtobe. There is also no specific funding on their behalf to ensure financial help to talented young people, as was intended initially.

After collecting valuable sources on the history of Zhaghalbaily, they planned to place the collected data on a relevant website in an electronic format in order to make it accessible to all people interested, which was not accomplished at all. Also, the organization aimed to revise the genealogy of Zhaghalbaily, which they find as a challenging endeavor. Moreover, the celebration of the 500th anniversary of *Qyz Zhibek* and *Tolegen* [from Zhaghalbaily], the ancient epic of Kazakhs, as well as the commemoration of Shamshi Qaldayaqov [from Zhaghalbaily], a well-known Kazakh composer, were on the agenda of the association. As of today, it is known that UNESCO has celebrated the 500th anniversary of the pearl of Kazakh folklore, folk legend “Qyz Zhibek,” in 2009. At the same time, famous composer Qaldayaqov from the Zhaghalbaily tribe was commemorated by his fellows of descent group, namely, the village formerly known as

Aleksandrovka (Александровка) until 2007, was renamed as ‘Shamshi Qaldayaqov Village’ (*Шәмши Қалдаяқов ауылы*), located in *Qargaly* county of Aqtobe region. Moreover, one of the active members of Zhayiq-Astana Association, my interviewee, Qayirghali Arystangaliyev, who works as an external adviser on housing and communal services to the mayor of Aqtobe city, installed the bust in honor of Shamshi, set up a stage for public performance and constructed the mosque for village residents at his own expense. During our interview, Qayirghali shared an interesting story related to his initiative on naming the village after Qaldayaqov:

“I received a phone call from some Zhaghalbaily people from Turkistan region, where Shamshi was actually born, in the village of Shauildir. They were not happy with my endeavor, thinking that I was allegedly trying to ‘hog the blanket’ by popularizing this village and making it look like Shamshi was from these areas of Aqtobe, instead of Shauildir. I responded that Shamshi was indeed born in Shauildir, but his father and ancestors were from Aqtobe, that is the reason why I found it reasonable to rename the former Russian-named village in honor of our great Shamshi.”

Once again, I observe the idea of clear ‘localization’ of historical figures even within a particular descent group, whereby the memory about Sarke was properly eternalized in a geographically suitable area, while the commemoration of Shamshi in Aqtobe was met with criticism by fellows from South Kazakhstan, though the two groups of people belonged to the same descent group. Also, it perfectly coincided that during my fieldwork activities in Aqtobe region in mid-August 2022, a few seniors from Zhaghalbaily *ru* invited me to the public event, called as “*Шалқиды әлі Шәмшінің әні*” (The Music of Shamshi will still Triumph), celebrated on 15th of August, his birthday, in the eponymous village of Shamshi Qaldayaqov. The event was directed by a couple of presenters, with poets and singers performing by singing the songs of Shamshi, as well as the participation of his close comrade and colleague, who has shared his memoirs on Shamshi, due to his close interaction with him for many years. As a whole, the interview with Qaryighali leads to the conclusion that there is a contestation over the

embodiment of historically valuable personas, manifested whether in renaming the village, as we notice through the example of Shamshi, or commemoration of a ‘common’ warrior as that of Tailaq Batyr, whose legacy is being appropriated in different regions such as Kyzylorda and Aqtobe, by different actors.¹⁸⁰

As far as the content of the CD disc is concerned, one of the key presenters from Qostanai, Kuanyshbai Ormanov Torebekuli, researcher of Kazakh History, journalist and allegedly founder of the Kazakh radio, gave his speech. He made an important disclaimer by announcing that their association does not pursue any political goals or have intentions to launch a political party. Rather, they aimed to accumulate the genealogy of Zhaghalbaily *ru* and propagate tribal *batyrs* and history in each region, by respective delegates.

“If we recall the past, Kazakhs used opportunities to prosper and advance, but also went through plenty of hardships. Over the last hundred years it was known that Kazakh tribes fought or had troubles with each other (Kazakh: ырласуы). When non-Kazakh people were appointed to rule over Kazakhstan, mentioning of relatives, ancestors, and homeland in public places became a taboo. The young segment of the population began to forget their grandfathers, tribal affiliations. In such circumstances, it was difficult to answer a question about our ancestors, or the lands they settled on historically, etc. Our ancestors paid great attention to such values as mind purity and spiritual enrichment of the youth. If young Kazakhs grow without knowing their origins, it adds more danger to the current hard times. There are people among us that find the knowledge about tribal belonging, one’s ancestors, to be threatening. But, they do not know that the absence of such knowledge would make Kazakhs as mangurts.¹⁸¹ Thus, by losing values that make Kazakhs as such, to advance national awareness, to turn the sources about batyrs, bi [advisor], and statesmen into national treasure, to write genealogies, even in the form of familial genealogies for each family, and to enhance national status via such publicity, we want to pay special attention to these issues. The importance of genealogy answers for a variety of questions, asked by each new generation about their past, questions on identity, lands their grandfathers settled on, and their batyrs, poets, zhyrau, etc. We did not even have the written version of genealogy that would have been passed from one generation to another. The cream of our

¹⁸⁰ Aiqyn.kz, “Тайлақ батырдың тегі қандай?” [What are the roots of Tailaq Batyr?]. 2019, Retrieved from <https://aikyn.kz/6090/6600-taylaq>

¹⁸¹ A term, coined by Chinghiz Aitmatov, in his novel “The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years,” which refers to an individual that has lost links with his past, ancestors, tribal belonging, historical and national roots.

society, Abay, Walikhanov, Ybyrai, and Shakarim contributed in publishing and distributing the first ever genealogy of Kazakhs, although Kazakh people were living under the large Russian state at the time. It would be proper if we look for answers about the offspring of Zhaghalbaily, one known branch of Junior Horde, who the Zhaghalbaily people were, what lands they lived on, by discussing and coming to a single opinion. It has been about 20 years since Kazakhstan gained its independence. In such calm and good times, the Kazakh youth is having difficulty to answer the question about their past. Our contemporary agenda is to write the genealogy of Zhaghalbaily tribe, by accumulating information about every single Zhaghalbaily person, living in our country, and to leave it as a legacy for future generations, then we may claim that our work has paid off.”

In addition, Chairman of Revision Committee, Mereke Iskakov, not only shared his experience living in Kokshetau region, where he lacked information about other Zhaghalbaily people from the related *Malatau* branch, but also urged to have their newly formed association’s divisions opened in each region of the country, by finding and uniting each Zhaghalbaily family, by allocating *1000 tenge* as a due fee and transferring it to the central headquarter [Astana], in order to spend them on fulfilling their agenda, such as assisting the talented youth in their creative projects or sponsoring their tuition fees, etc. In the course of interviews with fellow Zhaghalbaily, it turned out that the due fees were not quite fulfilled, which means that some of the goals such as helping the youth remained on paper only.

After the opening session of the conference was over, the actual scientific-theoretical conference, with the speakers prepared to deliver speeches, began by implementing the ritual as follows: *“before we start our conference, let us make a prayer in honor of our ancestors. Let our gathering, conference, and council be full of blessings.”*

Fellow researcher from Zhaghalbaily, Kuanyshbai Ormanov, was the first to deliver his research findings in the framework of his individual investigation in the study of Zhaghalbaily. His report was extensive in length and occasionally unstructured, but some of the interesting and significant points were as follows:

“My 30-years long investigation of Zhaghalbaily history, though it is not included in the scientific circulation, I believe our ancestry has derived from Khion. Khiadet then moved to

Baikal, Altai, and later to Zhetisu [Almaty] areas. The state of Ephthalites has been divided into two. We were a part of Abulkhair's state, not in the Kazakh Khanate. After we got out of it, some were included into Kazakh Khanate, others were not, and then many Zhaghalbaily traveled to current Astrakhan [Russia]. Zhaghalbaily consists of 12 grandfathers. There are two genealogical versions of our tribe: the genealogy from Aqtobe claims that we derive from Shegen, while the one based in Qostanai – from Myrza. Moreover, the Zhaghalbaily are also found among Bashkir, Tatars, Crimeans, Astrakhan Tatars, and Noghays from Caucasia, Uzbekistan. The Zhetiru [a group of seven tribes in the Junior Horde] then was placed on the Syr River. During Tauke Khan's rule, his main religious leader (main haziret), Shegen Baba (Sherbuga), main person of Alash from Kereit tribe, united the scattered and wandering Zhaghalbaily along Zhayiq River. The Khantau area, in modern Chelyaba region [Russia], was a place Zhaghalbaily placed their flag at. The Zhaghalbaily occupied areas spreading from Khantau to Zhayiq, about 1000 kilometers... Yrys, our wealthy ancestor, has decided to stay in Samarqand. Malatau took Yrys' only left son to Zhayiq, called Bozbet. Also, Malatau is our second great grandfather after Shegen." I believe it is reasonable that the Zhaghalbaily primarily sought to rewrite and update their grand genealogy because there were more than two popular versions of it, which needed to be systematized so that they have the most accurate data on the history of their descent group, exempt from major errors or distortions. Besides, the collective treasury of their association prioritized the research of their genealogical history, since it was costly money- and time-wise to hire an expert in genealogy in order to conduct necessary examinations that generally take a while.

Furthermore, followed by the first speaker, Ersynai Primbetova Omirgaliqzy, docent of historical sciences from Almaty, herself a Zhaghalbaily by *ru*, contributor to the two-volume book on Zhaghalbaily, shared interesting facts about the publication of the research work, which was implemented as a result of inspecting one hundred and twenty books, some of which being

exceptional and brought to the Alash Research Center of Tribes from other cities, such as Moscow, Kazan, etc. She said the following:

“One who writes a book [on a tribe] for the first time, goes through much hardship, and it is a burden to write about the history of the whole people. The Zhaghalbaily people were known to be ginger and blue-eyed, according to Russian sources. The history of Zhaghalbaily originated in the Sayan-Altai Mountains. One tendency today in Kazakhstan is that every person looks for its genealogy, not history. But we have to show them the history. The term or ethnonym of Zhaghalbaily history derives from the word Yaghal (Ягал), according to Chinese sources, as Li Zi Fu, meaning ‘Zhaghal’ or ‘Aga.’ The term revolves around horses, meaning ‘ala,’ that is, striped horse color. And, “Bai” (баӱ) refers to the abundance of horses, while “Ly” (лы) serves as an auxiliary word, added by people themselves later. In sum, we have the widespread saying as follows: ‘Zhaghalbaily cannot herd its horses due to its abundance.’ Herding around 1000 horses and 2000 sheep was considered as rich, while containing 100 horses and 500 sheep as poor, by the standards of Zhaghal at the time. As for the limitations, my research work could not cover anything about batyrs and other personalities of the tribe or the genealogy, as it only covered the history of tribe” – she concluded. It is interesting how the researcher from Zhaghalbaily puts an emphasis on the investigation of their history as a descent group, in which the etymology of the very word ‘Zhaghalbaily’ has connections to a horse, its color and abundance, however, the so-called apical ancestor, ‘Zhaghalbaily,’ turns out not to be related to any historical person, real or imagined. Hence, the elements of the imagination of identity and identity construction are clear, but it remains puzzling how they placed ‘Zhaghalbaily’ at the core of their genealogy and derive descendants from him, for centuries, if the core ancestor himself is ‘imagined.’

Right after the speech on the history of tribe by Primbetova, I came across the discourse by Bayanghali from Aqtobe, one of my interviewees, who proudly reported about opening of the first ever branch of ‘Zhayiq-Astana’ Public Association in Aqtobe, supervised by Bakhyt as the

First Chairman of regional Aqtobe quarter, who also turned out to be the interviewee in my research subsequently. Bayanghali mentioned that Tailaq *batyr's* [allegedly from Zhaghalbaily tribe] history was studied by his fellows and sent to Astana for onomastic review, but it was never approved by the state several times¹⁸². He also mentioned about Berkinbaev Aryngazy, one of the participants of the conference, who was celebrated for arranging meal repasts in honor of Zhaghalbaily ancestors' spirits, sponsoring the publication of books and feasts on his own. According to Bayanghali, some historians wrote that '*Abylai Khan allegedly gave some type of order to Tailaq batyr, while the latter was already not alive,*' raising the issue of the distortion of history and urging people, including his tribesmen, to search for the most accurate dates of birth and death of a given person in order to ensure objective information. Another *aqsaqal* of the conference, an elderly Abdighali Qaimuldin, argued that such gatherings are *not* manifestations of tribalism or nationalism, but it is rather about studying some realities and sharing them for the present and future generations, which illustrates the move from the so-called 'tribal' towards 'national' as people are genuinely studying their past, without necessarily alienating themselves from the rest of the Kazakh society. As information, he briefly communicated about the existence of 150 homes of Zhaghalbaily people, living in *Bayan Ölke* [Bayan-Ölgii Province] of Mongolia, who happen to call themselves as 'Zhaghalbai,' seventy of which have already been relocated to Kazakhstan in 1992. I suppose that such details were provided by the fellow tribesmen with an aim of sharing their knowledge about the existing Zhaghalbaily people within and beyond Kazakhstan, since it was the first-ever nationwide gathering of people from this tribe, where each member wished to contribute to the collective wisdom.

Overall, the people of Zhaghalbaily in Kazakhstan are interested in researching the history and genealogical tree of their descent group. As a way of illustrating their seemingly

¹⁸² The reasons behind state's rejection were not disclosed, but, according to Berikbai Sagyndyquli, Doctor of Philology, Professor at Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, "who would not want to consider a saint, who has a high reputation and become a legend, known to all Kazakhs, as his ancestor? For this reason, the Zhaghalbaily tribe claimed that Tailaq Batyr came from their clan, while the Kereyit tribe wrote in the Qyzylorda regional encyclopedia "Syr Eli" that "Tailaq Batyr came from the Kereyit tribe." In: "*Aiqyn*" Newspaper, 2019.

primordial existence along the Ural River and on western parts of Kazakhstan, they refer to the historical relationships with Bashkir people and the provided assistance to the latter in their struggle against the Tsarist Russia in the mid-eighteenth century. Besides, initiatives taken to popularize and raise awareness of the figures from Zhaghalbaily that present historical value such as Sarke Batyr and Shamshi Qaldayaqov are commemorated in a hybrid form of Kazakh and Soviet celebrations that combines the organization of scientific-theoretical conferences, installation of monuments or busts with sporting events as *kokpar* and serving of yurts for gatherings and meal repasts. It is clearly seen that nation-building processes on the ground that blend well with state's vision are taking place, when there is no coincidence that Sarke Batyr's monument hovers symbolically on the highway near Russian borders (Orenburg) and former Russian-named village of Aleksandrovka has been renamed after Kazakh composer of Zhaghalbaily background, Shamshi Qaldayaqov. Thus, by openly stating the public association's goals that pursue the 'restoration' of their past, the Zhaghailbaily indeed reimagine some of the historical records regarding the lineage and history of their ancestors, expressed in systematization of the genealogical records and rediscovering *batyrs'* achievements, while withstanding the likely sentiments or accusations of tribalism.

South Kazakhstan: The Case of the Qanly Descent Group

Similarly to Zhaghalbaily people's attempt to investigate their tribal past via implementing research and archival work, members of the Qanly *ru* of Senior Horde also draw significant attention to examining their past. Despite their inclusion into the composition of the Senior Horde of Kazakhs, they also consider themselves to be the descendants of the historical 'Kangui State.' Scholars emphasize that "there are people of Qanly in the Senior Horde that are no less ancient than the Usuns [Uisun *ru*], the first indications of which appear in Chinese sources already in the II century BC."¹⁸³ We also know quite a bit that Qanly tribe was known

¹⁸³ Vostrov, Venyamin, and Sabit Mukanov. Родоплеменной состав и расселение казахов (конец XIX-начало XX в.). [*The Tribal Composition and Settlement of Kazakhs (late XIX – early XX centuries)*]. Academy of Sciences of Kazakh SSR, (1968): 64.

for its skilled warriors, namely, “the main body of the army of Seljuks, who have conquered Mawarannahr and West Asia in the 11th century, were constituted by Qanly; tens of thousands of Qanly served in the army of Muhammad II of Khwarezm; and also in their endeavors to seize Europe, Huns, Kipchaks, Pechenegs and Cumans took with themselves the warriors of Qanly.”¹⁸⁴ While “the tribal union of Qanly reached a significant power and they fought against the Sogdians, but similar to Usuns [Uisun], they represented an unstable tribal association that later lost its former power in the Ephthalites, and joined the composition of the Western Turkic Khanate and consequent political unions, formed on the territory of Kazakhstan in VIII-XIII centuries.”¹⁸⁵ The contemporary Qanly people in Kazakhstan are not only interested in investing resources to discover the tribal warriors (*batyrs*), but also learn more about their ancestors, the forefathers of the ancient Qanly (*Qangui/Kangar*) state.¹⁸⁶ The descendants of the Qanly descent group today occupy predominantly the southern parts of Kazakhstan, mainly the Zhambyl (*Zhualy area*) and Turkestan (*Qazyghurt area*) regions. Their existence on these territories is not fortuitous because “some part of Qanly were left and resided in Kazakhstan and Central Asia from deep ancient times, which is visible by the presence of 40 thousand soldiers of Qanly and Persians in Samarkand before the invasion of Mongols in the 13th century.”¹⁸⁷ Their endeavor in examining the historical past is reinforced thanks to Kazakhstani archeologist, Doctor of Historical Sciences, Alexander N. Podushkin, who dedicated his whole scholarly life studying the ancient state of Kangui (of Qanly, per modern-day members of Kazakh Qanly)¹⁸⁸ that existed

¹⁸⁴ Amanzholov, Sarsen. Вопросы Диалектологии и Истории Казахского Языка. [*The Issues of Dialectology and History of Kazakh Language*]. Abay Alma-Ata State Pedagogical Institute, (1959): 70.

¹⁸⁵ Vostrov, Venyamin, and Sabit Mukanov. Родоплеменной состав и расселение казахов (конец XIX-начало XX в.). [*The Tribal Composition and Settlement of Kazakhs (late XIX – early XX centuries)*]. Academy of Sciences of Kazakh SSR, (1968): 32.

¹⁸⁶ On the one hand, members of Qanly descent group promote the belief that they are the descendants of the Qangui State, on the other, they believe that the ancient Qanly were one of many that laid the cornerstone for the establishment of contemporary Kazakhs. In other words, by researching about their past history, they aim to show the contribution of their tribal ancestors in the development of Kazakh civilization.

¹⁸⁷ Amanzholov, Sarsen. Вопросы Диалектологии и Истории Казахского Языка. [*The Issues of Dialectology and History of Kazakh Language*]. Abay Alma-Ata State Pedagogical Institute, (1959): 72.

¹⁸⁸ It is interesting that several research articles, written by A. Podushkin, such as Podushkin (2016) and Podushkin (2018), regarding the investigation of the ancient Kangui State, I did not come across any

on the territory of modern day southern parts of Kazakhstan. Moreover, interviews with Qanly tribesmen in Almaty, Almaty region (*Shelek village*) and Taraz city revealed that they allocate financial resources to Podushkin, on an annual basis.



Figure №4. Personal visit to the memorial site of Qanly. Qazyghurt county, Turkestan region, 2022.

For instance, one of the former chairmen of Qanly *ru*'s association in Kazakhstan and current activist, Yeleussiz, told me the following:

“We allocated one and a half million tenge to Podushkin last year for his research enterprise. He conducts scientific work at the archeological site that he recently discovered, called as the settlement of Kultobe, with the help of his students and other senior archeologists. The money is not just given, he will have to provide us later with a report of what he has done.”

On December 10, 2023 I arranged an interview with Dr. Podushkin in Shymkent, where he works at the South Kazakhstan State Pedagogical University, to have a glimpse of his perspectives on the activities of descent-based public associations and issues regarding the scientific investigations of *ru* and their histories. More specifically, I was interested in understanding the connection, if any, between the modern Qanly people in Kazakhstan and the ancient state of Kangui, as claimed by the former. In this regard, the relationship between the

textual references that indicate the relations between the ancient Kangui state and people of Qanly descent group that live in Kazakhstan.

two turned out to be indirect for a couple of reasons. Firstly, the Iranian-speaking people constituted the ancient Kangui State. For instance, the ceramic products, found as a result of archeological excavations in southern Kazakhstan, had scripts in proto-Sogdian language, written in an Aramaic alphabet, read in order from right to left, one of the ancient Eastern Iranian dialects, which was decrypted and read by Professor Sims-Williams. In general, the research interest in Qanly was driven by the idea that Qanly, by definition, which is agreed by numerous other *ru*, is one of the most elite and ancient descent groups. Professor Podushkin has a working opinion of an ethnologist, who argues that modern Qanly are the *Turkicized* descendants of the ancient Kangui State, which Podushkin strives to illuminate from the archeological perspective. Similarly, Vostrov and Mukanov point out that “it would be incorrect to not observe the ethnic continuity of ancient Kangui and Qanly and we suppose that we are dealing with ancient and numerous people of Kangui (20 thousand families), who were the ethnic basis of Qanly of more recent times,”¹⁸⁹ but the assumption is yet to be proven. The attempts to tie the knots between Kangui State and modern Qanly *ru* is sophisticated by one important detail in scientific-practical terms that does not fit into their assumption because, based on archeological sources, several centuries have fallen out that could connect this thread. In particular, Dr. Podushkin argues as follows:

“Archeology is a subject/domain science and it is challenging to make any social, ethnic inferences. Kangui State ended its existence as a centralized state in the 4th century of our era (AC), and existed from the 2nd century BC up to the 4th century of AC, that is, six centuries. From the 4th century up to the early 8th centuries, the Turks appear here in this area. Thus, 4 centuries fall out, from 4th to 8th centuries and it is hard to explain and connect the Qanly and Kangui archaeologically. My task is to do so. I said to Qanly people to keep in mind and recall that they could be the successors of the great Kangui that had a civilization, literary culture, etc. Also, legend-making or myth-making is a normal phenomenon and it is one of the ethnic signs of nomadic communities (like the Kyrgyz Manas). Therefore, if I fill in this niche, it would be a great achievement. It must be done conscientiously, without false data, distortions, by reserving one’s name and honor as a scientist. When some influential people asked me to form a scientific grounding for Noah’s Ark here in Qazyghurt [South Kazakhstan] for great personal advantages, I valued my name as a scientist and I said that I was not ready for such transformations of myth-making onto scientific track. When they offered Kemal Akishev [prominent Kazakh archeologist]

¹⁸⁹ Vostrov, Venyamin, and Sabit Mukanov. Родоплеменной состав и расселение казахов (конец XIX-начало XX в.). [The Tribal Composition and Settlement of Kazakhs (late XIX – early XX centuries)]. Academy of Sciences of Kazakh SSR, (1968): 34.

to Turkicize the Golden Man in return for a great personal monument, he said the same thing [refused]. Some people even say, based on their tribal tamga (symbol) have elements of a circle and a cross, which were the equivalent of a of sun in ancient times, and those whose tamga, where the cross goes beyond the circle, make it allegedly look like a steering wheel, concluding that Noah was ostensibly their ancestor, that possessed the Ark and came to Qazyghurt. That is how some distort history and try to transcend themselves over other Kazakhs.”

A number of other insights I came across in the course of our discussion with Dr. Podushkin were worth revealing, as he pointed out both the advantages and risky aspects of such ongoing social processes in the Kazakh polity. He himself noted that the research puzzle of this dissertation work is important and topical at the same time, since he believes that it is associated with the future of Kazakhstan as a single, unitary state because existing tribal structures are supposedly focused in every Kazakh male, on a genetic level, and such roots go back to profound ancient times, when the ancestors of Kazakhs were poly-ethnic people. He further argued that 30 ancient peoples played their role in the formation of modern Kazakhs, which were predominantly nomads, whose main social arrangement was a tribal system that had its peculiarity, a clear-cut hierarchy on the basis of descent (elite/non-elite), principle of subordination (senior/junior), and taking into account that most of the nomadic communities were militarized units, then, such structure, according to him, helped them survive and become established in the vast of Eurasia.

Therefore, such historical realities are one of the reasons why such a tribal (*ru*) system is so deeply inserted in the genetics and memory of Kazakhs, as they first determine their ethnic identity vis-à-vis tribe, clan, gente, sub-gente. The prevailing academic discourse unequivocally states that “Soviet authorities boasted of their success in defeating tribalism, declaring victory on numerous occasions during the Soviet era.”¹⁹⁰ Podushkin refers to the nomadic Kazakhs’ ‘ethnic’ self-consciousness that is sustainable to an extent that no one could eliminate it, even the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, Podushkin emphasized one crucial aspect, especially in the political

¹⁹⁰ Khazanov, Anatoly M. After the USSR: Ethnicity, Nationalism, and Politics in the Commonwealth of Independent States. *The University of Wisconsin Press*, (1995): 125.

domain, which is tribalism, that is, the breakdown of the state on an ethnic basis, which is feasible, when people put their ethnic identity on the basis of tribe, while placing the nationwide, common identification as ‘Qazaq,’ hence, giving a smaller emphasis. However, according to Podushkin, such reality is a given, or how he depicted it as ‘*no one is guilty here,*’ and it is suggested to fix this tendency clearly, since it is getting manifested in the modern world whether in industrial relations, political domain, and even in the religious field. Interestingly, I found some repetitive pattern in one of Podushkin’s observations with regard to practices of some tribe members in a given *Juz* (Horde) to go to mosques based on the principle of tribe relations. Such a statement echoed the discourse of Abzal Imam from ‘Tasken Zhaghalbaily Mosque,’ who paid attention to such tendencies in *Qaitpas* neighborhood in Shymkent. Moreover, the complexity of the phenomenon was spotted at the household level, when people of different *ru* whether Qonyrat of Middle Horde or Tama of Junior Horde in the same locality go to different convenience stores to buy groceries. I think that relationships that shape people’s decisions regarding mosque-visiting or buying groceries from a specific store on the basis of one’s tribe is largely an exception, prevailing around the cradle of Kazakh lands, Shymkent area. The so-called historical precedent of such tribal matter, according to Podushkin, is that the three *Juz* were unique ethno-territorial units, who were in conflict with each other for centuries, over territorial issues, ‘*barymta,*’ the raiders of which were celebrated as ‘heroes,’ that actually eradicated the whole encampments with their activities. In this regard, in his analysis of the ancient dialects of tribes and their histories, Amanzholov makes an interesting argument that “many of the tribes [were and] are present in more than one Horde, and the division into *Juz* did not take place on the grounds of kinship, but rather due to their territorial location, that is, in commonality of economic interests.”¹⁹¹

¹⁹¹ Amanzholov, Sarsen. Вопросы Диалектологии и Истории Казахского Языка. [*The Issues of Dialectology and History of Kazakh Language*]. Abay Alma-Ata State Pedagogical Institute, (1959): 17.

Furthermore, Dr. Podushkin shared the following insight: *“I talk with a lot of people from different tribes, including Dulat, Botbai, Zhanys, Qanly, Shanyshqyly, Qonyrat and others, and they position themselves clearly. The tendency of ru as a factor is strongly expressed here in the South [of Kazakhstan]. The first thing they ask you here is your tribal background and then only decide what to do, that is, whether they can trust you, provide you a job or not, etc. Southern Kazakhstan is the most Kazakh-populated area, titular people in the whole country; thus, the competition is high, even for water, hydrological, climatic, soil-based matters. Consequently, such things are fixed, but no one will openly say anything to you. Unfortunately, this pattern is more expressed among the elite of Kazakhstan as well. What are the risks? I remember that in the 1990s, some Adai [ru] people such as Abish Kekilbaev, Kazakh statesman, stated that allegedly ‘oil is ours, Adai’s property, not all-Kazakh,’ which was clearly a sign of tribalism. Such statements were made on a high level. It is the same as rocking the boat of a united, multi-ethnic Kazakhstan. Moreover, on the sidelines, some influential people talked that N. Nazarbayev comes from a non-noble tribe of Shapyrashty by the standards of the Senior Horde, and thus people said he had no rights to rule over Kazakhstan. I want to note that this tendency should be controlled on the state level. If politics and criminals are synthesized on the basis of tribe or tribal relations, then, the danger is quite real. We should keep that in mind.”*

Despite the existence of some drawbacks related to the continuing ‘tribal’ system among Kazakhs, Podushkin indicated the bright side of this phenomenon as well. From his personal experience, Professor Podushkin had an opportunity to participate in one of the several Qurultais [grand assemblies] of the Qanly group, where they had invited members of other Kazakh *ru* to their assembly, which was seen as a *positive* aspect for him. In particular, there were members of Dulat, Qonyrat and some others, who were not mere participants, but rather treated as honorable guests, who were put on *shapans* [Kazakh male national dress] as a sign of respect. He thinks that although such observations are more of exception rather than a rule, it is nevertheless a sign of maturity of some descent groups as Qanly that objectively create a room for hope for potential

harmony between various Kazakh *ru*. The basis for his cautious treatment of the question under study is because tribes, according to Podushkin, have their own structures, write their own histories, which, in practice, are contrasted with other tribes. On the other side, the idea of mutual respect or at least non-adversarial relations between various *ru* is also confirmed in the discourse of Mombek, a member of Shegir *ru*, who argued that descent groups in Kazakhstan do not engage in physical conflicts against each other, thereby avoiding the emergence of what are commonly referred to as ‘tribal’ conflicts. If we take into account the historical records, “except for the land disputes (Kazakh: *Жер дауы*) over pastures and watering places and widow law (Kazakh: *Жесір дауы*), regulating the property and personal rights of widows and orphans, Kazakh Juzs and tribes never fought among themselves.”¹⁹²

From my fieldwork findings, one of the general patterns is clear, where comparable to those of Zhaghalbaily and Shegir, fellow members of the Qanly *ru* resonate with them in their determination to have certain scientific grounding before formulating any public statements over their ancestral achievements and territorial claims in modern Kazakhstan. But, unlike other tribes, people of Qanly in Kazakhstan have long established the monument with a dome, as a tribute to their *ru*, called as “*Қаңлы*.” I visited their monument in August of 2022, which is located in the Qazyghurt village of Turkistan region, on a highway connecting the city of Shymkent with Turkistan. The site is relatively massive, with 4.5 hectares of land in terms of area, situated about 63 kilometers away from Shymkent. The construction of the ancestral site began in 1999 and lasted for 3 years, with a grand celebration in 2002, along with considerable ritual of *as* (memorial service to ancestral spirits) and 2-days long *kokpar* games. The monument is 29 meters in height, 3 meters in width and 3 meters in depth. I also had a chance to meet with the caretaker (*шырақшы*) of the memorial site during my visit, an 83-years old Baidilda,

¹⁹² Smagulov, Orazak. Деление казахов на жузы и роды – система административного управления защита от кровосмешения. [Division of Kazakhs into Zhuzes and Tribes – a system of administrative management and protection against inbreeding]. Original publication January 13, 2015. <https://365info.kz/2015/01/delenie-kazaxov-na-zhuzy-i-rody-sistema-administrativnogo-upravleniya-i-zashhita-ot-krovosmesheniya-berdaly-ospan> (accessed April 10, 2024).

member of Qara Qanly, a lineage within Qanly, who has been preserving the area for over 23 years with his family. Baidilda was enthusiastic and kindly offered to show me around the site, explaining the details of construction and a brief history of gradual expansion of the site over time. At the end, we entered the main site, the heart of the memorial complex, where he conducted a prayer in honor of ancestral spirits.



Figure №5. The front and back sides of the CD disc of the documentary about the Qanly. The runtime of the film is 58 minutes. 2021.

One of the interviewees from the Qanly descent group in Almaty offered me a 58-minutes long video, preserved in CD disc as that of Zhaghalbaily, produced by International Turkic World TV Studio in 2021. The narrator commences with an introductory statement, quoting Nursultan Nazarbayev as follows:

“Қазақстан жеріндегі мемлекеттер, олардың болашақ қазақ ұлтымен сабақтас­тығы деген мәселелер әлі терең зерттелмей келеді. Сақтардың, Ғұндардың, Үйсіндердің, Қаңлылардың мемлекеттері, Батыс түрік, Түргеш, Қарлұқ, Қимақ, Оғыз қағанаттары, Дешти-Қыпшақ, Алтын Орда, Жошы ұлысы, Қазақ хандығы... Осылардың әрқайсысына арнаулы монографиялар жазылса да артықтығы жоқ. Н. Назарбаев.”

The keyword here is the reference to Qanly and its history as a state that has not still been studied, in particular, the continuity of Kazakhstan with such ancient states that existed on the contemporary territory of Kazakhstan. It is interesting to note that there is a song about Qanly, written and sang in Kazakh, with the motto word, “Baiterek” (their battle cry), that plays in the background and narrates the 25-century-old history of the ‘state of Kangui’ that allegedly brought to life such great individuals as Al-Farabi, the queen of women, Tūrkan Hatun, and many others. Moreover, fragments of people visiting the site on the background, while the narrator marking “*if you want to understand the roots of Kazakhs, you better know about Qanly,*” can be observed.

The “*Baidibek-Keldibek*” Public Association contributed to the production of such documentary video by recording interviews with some Kazakh historians, such as Abduali Qaidar, Alexander Podushkin, Talas Omarbekov and certain fellows of the descent group by inquiring them regarding the fundamental questions about the Qanly State, who were known to be nomadic people, neighboring with Uisun people, that resided on lands, spread from Balqash Lake to Syrdarya River, based on sources of Chinese historians.

In this video, one of the historians of Kazakhstan, Doctor of Historical Sciences, Professor Talas Omarbekov, argues that “*Qanly has historically occupied two regions, the main of which was the strong one, on the river of Syrdarya to Ulytau, east of Aral area. From the north of today’s Turkistan [Otyrar], there was the capital of Qanly state, known as Lankok (winter capital), while the summer capital was located around Ulytau. The Qanly state had five administrative areas, the western part extending towards Samarqand, the name of which has an ending as “qan” in the word, which was even called as Qan at the time. Also, the migration of nomadic Qanly was not only vertical, but also horizontal, therefore, they moved to the east, and then moved back to west along with Kipchaks. There is a mountain of Otken, formerly known as Qangai, currently located in today’s Orkhon, where 12 tribes of Qanly lived.*” Echoing with the statements of the narrator, Omarbekov continues his interview by asserting that “*Bukhara,*

Khorezm, Urgench, Samarqand and three other cities used to be of Qanly at the time. The Qanly people were culturally developed and had their literary. They also had the culture of building cities, melting of metal or bronze, and metallurgy as one of their main activities. The well-known Al-Farabi grew up in the Qanly-occupied area, though we call him as Kipchak, as a generalization. In my opinion, he was a person from Qanly family. In addition, Qanly people invented the “arba,” which is the contemporary automobiles we have. All of these elements show their business skills, capability to build cities, knowledge hunger, etc.” A distinct feature of the documentary of Qanly is that we observe a number of non-Qanly participants that have probably been engaged given their expertise in matters related to the ancient Kangui State, including Talas Omarbekov and Aleksandr Podushkin, whose discourse and presence as scholars and outsiders legitimize the beliefs about Qanly. Although the contributors of the documentary interweave the ancient Kangui with modern Qanly descent group, they do not quite provide the scholarly basis for such (ethnic) continuity.

Another interviewee in the video, Alexander Podushkin, a prominent archeologist, stated the following:

I work on archeology, history, and culture of the late Iron Age of South Kazakhstan, 4th century BC, which is related with the understudied state of Kangui. There are nuances in terminology: the authentic sounding of the state entity is ‘Kanzuigo,’ based on Chinese sources. Nikita Bichurin adapted the names known in phonetics of Chinese to the notions or traditions of sound in European peoples. Thus, the word “Kanguï” appeared (“cz” was changed to “g”). It is obvious that the Kanguï are the ancestors of contemporary Kazakhs. In turn, Kazakhs understand their ethnicity via their belonging to the tribal system. The chain is as follows: the old state of Kangui is coupled with one of the robust tribes from Senior Horde, that is, Qanly. The latter has the right to aspire to be the descendants of Kandzui more than any other tribe. Interestingly, writing was present among the Qanly, which not only shows the highest indicator of civilization, but also serves as an attribute of the state, according to his research work, delivered in Paris in June of 2007. I believe that any state ideology must be grounded on the principle of historicism, and respect to the cultural traditions of ancestors.

As a continuation of Podushkin’s point on profound history of Qanly and its territorial existence in modern Kazakhstan, Bakhytzhan Sovetuli, writer and member of Kazakhstan Union of Writers, has also insisted that one of the founders of the ancient Taraz city in Kazakhstan, is Shoje bi from Qanly tribe. In addition, the narrator of the video indicated that such warriors from the Qanly descent group as *Sarybuqa, Qulan, Shirek, Ukibai, and Baidaulet* took part and became known for their courage in the *Orbulaq* battle against the Jungars.

Taking into account the aforementioned excerpts by Podushkin and representatives of the Qanly descent group, I observe some discrepancy between the rhetoric of Podushkin as a scholar and the application of his ideas and findings about the ancient state of Kangui by the contemporary Qanly people to their own cause. In particular, Podushkin strives to corroborate the idea that the Kangui were the ancestors of Kazakhs, given his archeological excavations and findings on modern-day Kazakhstan, specifically on the southern parts of it, that is, the settlement of ‘Kultobe’ in Ordabasy county of Turkestan region. The scientific achievement, as a result of excavations, was the finding of a unique ‘Kangui script’ on ceramic bricks, the decoding of which was later implemented by a British scholar, Nicholas Sims-Williams,¹⁹³ who specializes in the study of the Sogdian language.

On the other hand, members of the Qanly descent group, based on their own reasoning, perhaps due to the fact that the word ‘Qanly’ (*people*) and ‘Kangui’ (*ancient state*) are similar-sounding words in Kazakh language, promote the notion that they are the offspring of the ancient Kangui State, whose historical existence and developed civilization on the lands of modern Kazakhstan display their so-called civilizational ‘input’ in the ‘continuity’ of Kazakhstan. Nevertheless, it remains unclear how the research activities of Podushkin resonate with how the Qanly people understand (or represent) themselves, and why their respective public association allocates financial resources to the scholar annually. If other descent groups, such as Zhaghalbaily, Besterek or Shegir, praise the legendary accomplishments of their respective warriors and therefore show their significance in the ‘making of’ Kazakhs, it appears that as if the Qanly people go deeper in history and attempt to draw relational lines with a historic Kangui state in order to exhibit that *their* ‘imagined’ ancestors stood at the roots of the civilization that is currently known as independent Kazakhstan.

Secondly, the booklets and leaflets, crafted by the Qanly people for informational purposes, list certain names of warriors, such as *Sarybuqa*, *Qulan*, *Shirek*, *Ukibai*, and *Baidaulet*

¹⁹³ Kazpravda, 2021. “История, которой следует гордиться” [The History to be Proud Of]. Accessed online <https://kazpravda.kz/n/istoriya-kotoroy-sleduet-gorditsya/>

that come from Qanly, who clearly have Kazakh names, far from the Kangui or proto-Sogdian language. Thus, it appears that there are ongoing attempts to ‘imagine’ or ‘reimagine’ ancestors from the past and to link themselves with an ancient state as Kangui to show a long and rich history *and/or* consistency as a descent group.

Furthermore, Abduali Qaidar, academician of the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Kazakhstan, mentions one historical source that marks on the fact that “Qanly emperor gave his daughter to the Chinese emperor and gave 1000 horses as dowry (*qalyn mal*). In the movie about Genghis Khan, the soldiers of the latter supposedly fought against the forces of Türkan Hatun, the daughter of Qanly. In turn, the word “*Qan*” means a river, meaning that people that inhabit along the river.” Referencing to the etymological clarification by Qaidar, Nurtileu Imangaliyev, an honorable statesman and journalist of Kazakhstan, talks about the presence of plenty of objects such as rivers, lakes, mountains and villages, named as “Qanly” in



Figure №6. The cover of the book “101 Great Figures of Qanly.” Almaty, 2016.

modern-day Republic of Sakha (Yakutia). However, when I searched for the authenticity of such claims, I came across some interesting objects in Yakutia that seem to possess a comparable sounding, namely, a short mountain range of the Aldan Highland, called West Yangi (Западные Янги) as ‘Kangli,’ one of the largest lakes, named as Khanga (Ханга) as ‘Kangar/Kangli’ as well as a few rivers such as Khanchali (Ханчали) as ‘Kankali’ or ‘Qanly,’ Kunui (Кюнуй) as ‘Kangu,’ or East Khandyga (Восточная Хандыга) as ‘Eastern Qanly.’ It is appealing to believe that there is a connection some due to semantic similarities, unfortunately, no sources are available that may explain the etymological history of those Yakutian rivers, lakes or mountains. Nor Nurtileu of Qanly ensures concrete details of his statement with reliable references on the actual relationship between them. Thus, such romanticization of alleged Qanly-related natural objects on the territories of modern nations as Sakha (Yakutia) is perhaps an attempt for seeking the symbolic power, proof of territorial inhabitation and the continuity of such an antique Turkic people as Qanly, who lived in Eurasia.

Another journalist, Ardak Berkimbaev, adds that *“after the Hun state’s division into South and North, the Chinese empire made new military raids that led to the dissolution of Hun state. While the Southern part was completely left under the Chinese empire, the Northern counterparts became parts with the Qanly state, their neighbor. Fearing their joint power, the Chinese empire tried its best to not let their unity occur. Thus, the main forces of northern Huns were destroyed due to the Chinese reluctance to let them join Qanly. We must take some lessons from such historical facts.”* This excerpt can be assessed as a reference to the great might of the ancient Kangu and how the Chinese empire perceived them as a threat, which reverberates a lot with the popular notion among Kazakhs that ancient China has built the Great Wall because they supposedly feared the Turks. In other words, the endeavor of advancing such ideas is practiced in order to establish the symbolic power of ancestors by reimagining their past.

Finally, the video also illustrates the printed intellectual works about Qanly, including such books as *“101 scientists of Qanly. Qanly Studies investigations,” “Qanly state – foundation*

of the Qazaq state” (2015, Almaty) and “*The great grandfather of the three hordes is Qanly*,” written by Bekbolat Tasbolatuly in 2016 (Almaty); “*History of Qanly is the basis of Qazaq history*” by Bekbolat Tasbolatuly (Almaty, 2017), “*From Qanly and Schumer up to current days*” by Kamil Orozbekov (*Кандылар же Шумерден бүгүнкү күнгө чейин*, in Kyrgyz) and “*Qondyger Qanly*” (Қондыгер-Қаңлы) by Talasbek Asemqulov.

The fact that Qanly people are illuminating the historic achievements of their ancestors, exemplified via territorial presence in the modern Kazakhstan, great personalities as that of Al-Farabi or one of the ‘founders’ of the ancient Taraz city in Kazakhstan, Shoje Bi, that comes from Qanly *ru*, and other signs of human advancement, stays in line with my argument that ‘tribal’ activists are essentially trying to integrate their descent groups with the ‘national,’ to show that their respective *ru* is important because of their contribution in the making of Kazakhs. Even the titles of books, produced by the Qanly, strongly link the ancient Qanly State with Kazakhs, the former serving as the nomadic ancestors who occupied the lands, including modern Kazakhstan, which is also highlighted by the First President of Kazakhstan, N. Nazarbayev. Moreover, the case of the Qanly also exhibits the idea of the *continuity* of Kazakhstan and its contemporary geographic territory with such ancient states as Qanly or Uisun. That is the reason why, perhaps, the song about the Qanly conveys a significant message, and in particular, “*if you want to understand the roots of Kazakhs, you better know about Qanly.*”

To conclude, it remains consistent that the past possesses the faculty to contribute to the question of identity for all the descent groups under study, so does it for the Qanly. The materialization of their endeavors as one of major Kazakh *ru* is observable through the memorial complex in Qazyghurt area of current Turkestan region, established in 2009. The reproduction of the historical knowledge about Qanly took place via generation of informative CD discs¹⁹⁴, a variety of books, brochures and holding of regular meetings, where they discuss topical issues

¹⁹⁴ Since the first attempts of organizing assemblies and reproducing knowledge regarding descent groups started from the early 2000s, CD discs were the most advanced means of recording and disseminating information at the disposal of people at the time. Currently, there is a technological capability of creating YouTube videos or podcasts by descent groups, but I have no information on that.

and form their agenda. At the same time, what stands out in the case of Qanly people, in comparison with others like Atyghai or Zhaghalbaily that celebrate specific *batyrs* on the monuments, is that the central point of their commemorative attraction revolves around the ‘Qanly’ memorial site, attaching great importance to the name of the whole descent group. In addition, their source of identification seems to be much more profound, in which the contemporary Qanly trace the genesis of their descent back to the ancient state of Qanly or Kangui. Moreover, they imagine themselves to be the descendants of a number of prominent historical individuals, such as the philosopher Abu Nasr al-Farabi or Turkan (Terkan) Hatun, the ruler of Khorezm, who are said to come from Qanly. The ‘search of the past’ began with local linguist and Turkologist, Abduali Qaidar in early 2000s and is continued by Aleksandr Podushkin, local archeologist, to whom an annual financial support is allocated to investigate the past of Qanly, who had already made some scientific progress after finding numerous archeological remains in the south of Kazakhstan that are argued to belong to the ancient Qanly era.

South Kazakhstan: The Case of the Shegir Descent Group

Meanwhile, in the southern part of Kazakhstan, Shymkent city, there is a monument in honor of Aqpan Batyr, located in the downtown area, at the intersection of Zhibek Zholy and the eponymous streets of Aqpan. Similarly to other cases of commemoration, Aqpan Batyr’s historical tribute as a warrior that liberated Kazakhs from external enemies as Khanate of Kokand and fought against the Jungars, was also celebrated by his direct tribal (*ru*) descendants, who happen to be affluent enough to allocate financial resources. Aqpan batyr comes from the Shegir *ru* of Dulat from the Senior Horde. One of such prominent representatives of Shegir, who took responsibility to erect a monument to Aqpan *batyr* is Aset Qayipbekov, Turkistan regional deputy of Maslikhat (local representative body), the founder of the “City Stroy” construction company, and a fellow of Shegir *ru*. The expenditures of the construction of the monument

amounted to 30 million tenge,¹⁹⁵ which by the exchange rate of Kazakh tenge to United States Dollars as of 2012 constituted around 200 thousand dollars. Although Qayipbekov operates as a sponsor of the object, the research over the achievements of Aqpan *batyr* has been implemented by Mombek Abdiakimuly, historian, *shejire* specialist, and writer of historical novels, who not only wrote the updated version of Shegir genealogy, but also published the book “*Көне қала Шымкент*” (Ancient Shymkent) that discusses the two millennia old history of Shymkent city. This book has a section on the intervention of Kokand Khanate, “*Қоқан хандығының басқыншылығы,*” where the author narrates the historic accomplishments of *batyrs* such as Aqpan, Tailaq, Nazar and some others in their liberating movement of Kazakhs from the Kokand occupation.

“Қоқандықтар Шымқаланы басып алғанына алты жыл өткенде, нақтысы, Өгем мен Алатау қойнауларында тығылып, олармен партизандық соғыс жүргізіп жүрген Ақпан, Тайлақ, Назар батырла 1815 жылдың қыркүйек айында қатарларына 400 жүздеі сарбаз топтап, Майлықентте орныққан қоқандықтарды талқандайды да, түн ішінде Сайрамға жетіп, мұндағы алаңсыз жатқан әсерді тарпа бас салады” (2021, р. 62), - writes Mombek.



Figure №7. Personal visit to the monument of Aqpan Batyr. Shymkent city, 2022.

¹⁹⁵ Kazinform.kz, “Шымкентте Ақпан батырға ескерткіш орнатылды.” [The Monument in honor of Aqpan Batyr was Erected in Shymkent]. 2012, Retrieved from https://kaz.inform.kz/news/shymkentte-akpan-batyrga-eskertkish-ornatyldy_a2461963/

The aforementioned excerpt from the chapter accounts for the guerilla warfare, led by Aqpan, Tailaq and Nazar batyrs that are known specifically for their liberating fights against invaders from Kokand that had been settled in Mailykent. Similar to research enterprises conducted by other *ru* as those of Zhaghalbaily (*Junior Horde*), Qanly (*Senior Horde*), Atyghai (*Middle Horde*), members of the Shegir (*Senior Horde*) tribe have implemented research study of their batyr likewise in order to have a footing for consequent (justified) erection of the respective commemorative site as monuments.

I found it intriguing that across such cases, members of given descent groups that aspire to eternalize the heroic deeds of their grandfathers, tribal warriors and *batyrs*, conduct necessary research works, in the aftermath of which aim to convince members of other *ru*, people who live in the region, and sometimes the representatives of other ethnic groups as in Petropavlovsk regarding both the existence and the actual achievements of *batyrs*. At the same time, commemorative practices are also monitored and regulated by the state, namely, the Onomastic Commission under the Ministry of Culture and Sports of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Therefore, the attempts of various *ru* in immortalizing their respective heroes and warriors are not seamlessly carried out unilaterally, but contested on the regional level, and monitored at the state level.

In the early stages of this research work, along with the aforementioned descent groups, I selected the ‘Besterek’ *ru* as one of the several case studies due to its relatively young age in contrast to other groups and the fact that they organized a couple of grand assemblies over the period of last two-three years. It was interesting to research the very first social processes of a *ru* on the ground by observing how the group members are mobilized and united for common purpose via paying attention to the mechanical aspects of their activities. However, as time passed by, it turned out that the Besterek *ru*, as a public association, remains inactive. For instance, one of the goals that was set at the latest grand assembly was to build a monument in honor of their apical ancestor, Besterek, for which they even allocated a specific land, provided

by their fellow member on his private property in the outskirts of Taraz city. According to my interviewee, N., it turns out that members had not made their individual contributions for commemorative activities and therefore plans have remained on paper. Moreover, none of the affiliates expressed their concerns for such inaction, perhaps because the chairman of the Besterek association lives overseas, namely, in Saudi Arabia. I believe this case is illustrative in a couple of ways, in particular, the role and importance of financial resources in realizing the agenda of public associations of descent groups, whether it is revising of the genealogy or constructing a monument, and the absence of the so-called ‘uncontrolled’ aspiration, as perceived by the state, on the part of public associations to demonstrate their agency and implement local agenda.

North Kazakhstan: The Case of the Atyghai Descent Group

Compared to the previous cases of Zhaghalbaily and Qanly from the west and south of the country, respectively, the research site of Qulsary *batyr* in the northern region is distinct, given its geographical situation, a compound character of the memorial site, and an attempt to reconstruct links to one of the most influential Kazakh khans, Abylai. In the course of my fieldwork in the North of Kazakhstan, Petropavlovsk, I interviewed people, who contributed greatly to the erection of the memorial site to commemorate the warrior of the Arghyn from Atygai branch, Qulsary batyr. Zarkyn, Professor of Kozybayev University in Petropavlovsk, an author of dozens of articles, 12 textbooks and 11 monographs on history and culture of Kazakhstan, many of which are dedicated to investigating the history of Northern Kazakhstan. He turns out to be the pioneer of the idea for commemorating the attainments of Qulsari batyr. In his interview he said the following:



Figure №8. During the tour at the “Residence of Abylai Khan.” Petropavlovsk, 2022.

“although I could not participate in the opening ceremony of the monument, I was the one who gave this idea to Magzhan Rakhimov, the descendant of Qulsari, to open it without the government’s help. There is not much information now about Qulsari’s brother, daughter, and descendants, except the available information, included in my three-volume books on the history of Abylai Khan. I don’t necessarily take genealogy as a credible source a lot because it tends to include stronger ones and left out weaker ones.”



Figure №9. Personal visit to the burial site of Qulsari Batyr and Saint. Bulaq village.

Yessil County. North Kazakhstan region, 2022.

The memorial complex of Qulsari batyr is situated 7 kilometers from the village “Bulaq,” in Yessil county of the North Kazakhstan region, which was solemnly opened on September 16 in 2011. The cornerstone of Qulsary batyr’s commemoration is Kaliaskar Rakhimov’s, his

descendant in sixth generation, laying of the first memorial stone near the future site in 1958. Later, in 2011, many relatives of Qulsari batyr, along with other *ru* as Kerei, gathered to celebrate the site after having collected all the documentation. Apart from being known as a *batyr*, Qulsary was also labeled as “*әулие*” (holy/saint), who could heal people’s sorrows and hardships. Interestingly, books and research studies by Magzhan Rakhimov or Olzhas Kuanbay that scrutinize the political and public life of Qulsary, present his persona to the audience primarily as a “*batyr*.” For instance, a research article that sheds light on the diplomatic and political career of Qulsary, based on the firsthand data from Omsk Regional Historical Archive and Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, depicts Qulsary as “Qulsary Batyr,” “skilled diplomat Qulsary batyr” or “Qulsary Batyr Boriuly [patronymic],” all of which accentuate him principally as a warrior (*batyr*).¹⁹⁶ What makes this case curious is that on the memorial site itself (see Figure 7) Qulsary is portrayed as “*Құлсары әулие*,” that is, a saint (*awlie*). Moreover, the design of the facade of the site represents a modernized type of grave with the rooftop and small benches inside presumably to allow the visitors to make a prayer. Unlike other commemorative sites in honor of historical figures that have the status of a ‘*batyr*’ such as Sarke or Aqpan, Qulsary Batyr’s site was not conventionally embodied in the form of a monument with a masculine hero on it that holds a spear and rides on a horse. Perhaps, one possible answer for such choice of the site’s exterior is due to the fact that Qulsary *batyr* was “a pious [individual],”¹⁹⁷ which could have led to the establishment of his commemoration in the form of a *mazar*, rather than a monument with his imagined physical appearance, a notion that is prohibited in the religion of Islam.

Interestingly, I figured out that there was a firm connection between the museum complex or the so-called “residence of Abylai Khan” in Petropavlovsk, built in 2007, and the monuments in honor of Qulsari batyr as well as Quleke batyr, both of which come from Atyghai

¹⁹⁶ Olzhas Kuanbay, “Kulsary Batyr - Diplomat, State and Public Actor (1715-1776).” *Edu.e-history.kz Electronic Research Journal*, No. 3 (31), (2022): 172-183.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 176.

lineage of Arghyn and both directly related to Abylai Khan's enterprises at the time. The scholarly investigation of the life stories and battling achievements of Qulsari and Quleke shed light on the greatness of Abylai Khan as much as Abylai's shows the courageous spirit of the aforementioned *batyrs* in their service to him.

“Abylai Khan had more than 20 loyal companions. Some of whom were Qulsari and Quleke, the natives of the North, of the Atyghai tribe from the Middle Horde. Both batyrs were politicians. While Quleke ruled over Abylai's army, Qulsary was Abylai's diplomat, holding negotiations in relationships with Russia over 11 years,” says the tour guide in the Abylai Khan's museum.

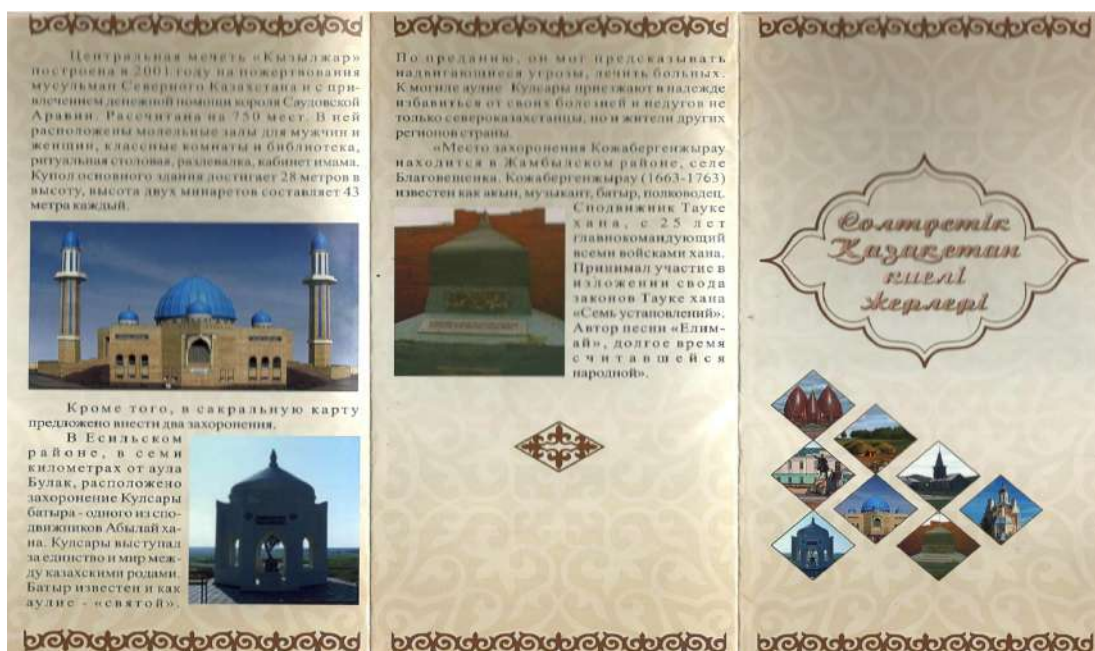


Figure №10. The brochure of North Kazakhstan's Sacred Sites. It includes the burial site of Qulsari Batyr (*bottom left, first column*). Petropavlovsk, 2017.

One of the interviewees that provided some curious insights in the making of Abylai Khan's residence and Qulsari batyr's scholarly grounding, Saule, is the director of the North Kazakhstan State Archive of the Department of Culture, Archives and Documentation under the *Akimat* of North Kazakhstan region. She noted that local political scientist, Mansurov Baighali Mukhamedovich, raised a number of important matters about Qulsari and Abylai starting from

2006 by finding documental confirmations in Moscow, Saint Petersburg, Omsk and Orenburg via conducting archival works in the Russian State Archive of Ancient Acts (Moscow), the Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire (Moscow) and others. According to Saule, such archival works revealed that the Russian Empire offered Abylai Khan a one-floor living residence as a special gift, built out of woods, thanks to the discovered scheme, that is, the technical passport of the object. The current residence of Abylai that operated, as his living residence at the time, was later burned down and subsequently turned into a military hospital. However, finding the conceptual design of the residence in the archives of Russia made it feasible to verify the existence of the residence in the past at the exact place where the current museum complex is set up.

Likewise, at the entrance to the city of Petropavlovsk, one may visually observe the monument in honor of Qozhabergen *batyr* and *zhyrau*, of Kerei *ru* from the Middle Horde. However, according to Saule, the initiative of erecting that monument was not realized with ease. She said that a number of Russian-language editions in the city showed considerable discontent and opposition, questioning his persona and the necessity for such endeavor.

“In order to convince them, I hosted a wide meeting with the involvement of my relatives, scholars, journalists and many others. During the encounter I said that the visiting session of the panel took place here in 2000, in the amount of 16 people, in which Manash Kozybayev had been as the main panelist. In turn, Kozybayev reported on a scientific basis about Qozhabergen’s historical legacy as a warrior of this region, who protected people from enemies. We then only firmly established Qozhabergen as a historical figure” – concluded Saule.

It is also known that the grave of Qozhabergen’s father, Tolybai *batyr*, the commander of the forces of the Middle Horde, was placed near Qozhabergen’s, which supports the claims of Saule and others on the existence of such figures in the northern parts of Kazakhstan for a long time. In this regard, scholars also argue that local intellectuals that worked on drawing the sacred map of the Northern Kazakhstan were instructed to “shore up Kazakhstan’s national identity in

the regions that border Russia [and therefore] ensure that northern provinces could suggest an equal number of sites for the registry,”¹⁹⁸ which illustrates the existing state ideology to make the northern areas of Kazakhstan “Qazaq” again as much as possible. Although the case of Qulsary batyr and other historical figures from the north are analogously legitimized in the eyes of the public through research conferences with the help of scholars as in other regions, there was also a necessity to prove to the doubting ‘ethnic others,’ that is, Russians, that various Kazakh descent groups, residing in Petropavlovsk, or generally in the north of country, are not outsiders, but rather full-fledged inheritors of those lands. Therefore, perhaps, endeavors of local non-state actors commenced by disseminating the information regarding the presence of numerous *mazars* of ancestors throughout the north Kazakhstan to demonstrate the geographic contiguity, which were complemented by the state, as the latter endorsed the research to rediscover the existence of Kazakh elites, such as Abylai Khan’s residence, on the territory of modern Petropavlovsk, formerly known as Qyzylzhar.

Chapter 2.1. Behind The Scenes: Commemorative Practices of Descent Groups

Although the celebration of the achievements of batyrs from diverse descent groups via the erection of pompous monuments by their respective descendants may seem like an illustration of tribalism, one pervasive answer that I figured out from the discourse of interviewees is partially the opposite. A number of respondents from different tribes in various regions assert that practices of tribal commemoration are welcomed and serve the national interests as they help Kazakhs explore their ‘forgotten’ history that is yet to be disclosed. For instance, *“respecting ancestors is a necessity of the people [halyk]. I, for instance, want to search for my great grandparents, but the government does not help, though it provides freedom, but an unregulated one. Erection of monuments by various tribes [ru] in fact unites us because the descendants of Zhalantos and Sarke [batyrs] will not end up bad, if they grow up similar to*

¹⁹⁸ Nikolay Tsyrempilov, Ulan Bigozhin, and Batyrkhan Zhumabayev. 2021. “A Nation’s Holy Land: Kazakhstan’s Large-Scale National Project to Map its Sacred Geography.” *Nationalities Papers*, (2021): 8.

their heroic forefathers” – argues Zarkyn from Atyghai tribe. In general, the presence of monuments in the public space as those of “great ancestors like khans and *batyrs* (warriors) serve rhetorically as an exemplar of great leadership for their descendants in the present”¹⁹⁹ that should be followed as the model hold on to. Perhaps, as a mechanism of justifying the presence of Kazakhs on the northern parts of the country, monument-erection may be used to claim for territorial rights, as Saule insists on the following: “*the offspring of each tribe [ru] must raise the history of their batyrs and glorify them, not by dividing into tribes [ru], but rather for demonstrating the profundity of our history. Because other ethnic groups think that we dwelled here [Petropavlovsk] from somewhere else, but we show via the existence of ancient graves (мазар) and burial grounds (зупам) that our ancestors have served in the interests of and lived in this region.*” Some of the commentators expressed the concern that monuments and memorials should not only be commemorated during their formal inaugurations but should also have a meaningful impact on the everyday lives of all citizens of Kazakhstan.²⁰⁰ In this respect, one of the active members of Qanly tribe, Doctor of Medicine and an entrepreneur, Saurbek, similarly contends that “*the monument per se is not as necessary as the attempts to make it ‘alive,’ in which people do not just stare at, let’s say, Qarasai batyr on a horse, situated in the land of Shapyrashty [generally in Almaty region], but rather placed at the area, where he fought, that is, during ‘Anyraqai battle’ [West Kazakhstan]. Let him have a statue there. He spilt his blood there and people must constantly be remembered about such things because he fought for the sake of Kazakhs, instead of Shapyrashty only.*” Such discourse of Saurbek implies that the activists of descent-based public associations are aware of commemorative issues regarding the ultimate value of monuments and therefore agree that the principle of substance over form must prevail.

¹⁹⁹ Dubuisson, Eva-Marie. *Living Language in Kazakhstan: The Dialogic Emergence of An Ancestral Worldview*. University of Pittsburg Press (2017): 5.

²⁰⁰ Павон.kz, “Одни памятники ставим, другие разрушаем.” [*Some monuments are built, while others are demolished*], 2014, Retrieved from <https://pavon.kz/post/view/34300/see422500?cpage=1&reply=422542>

Furthermore, an 87-years old former chairman of the association for Zhaghalbaily *ru* in Kazakhstan, Bakhyt, advocates for the merit-based celebration of batyrs that is based on objective facts: *“Batyrs appeared from each ru. However, people sometimes confuse different categories of batyrs. People who were renowned only within a single village were also being called as batyrs, but their acts were limited to their aul [village] only. Other batyrs such as Sarke, Yesset, Bokenbai protected the nation, thus, should not be confused with village batyrs.”*

A couple of interesting insights came from historians that researched tribal past and accomplishments of their respective warriors. For instance, Bayanghali, the pioneer of research study on Sarke Batyr and other prominent figures of Zhagalbaily, such as Akmalı Qarzhauov, Bekqul-baba and others, argues as follows: *“yes, we advance our own batyr, Sarke, from our ru, who fought bravely in this part of the homeland against Jungars, but he did not solely protect the people of Zhaghalbaily or tribes of the Junior Horde, but defended all the Kazakhs by not letting the Jungars pass through his territory to other Kazakh-settled lands. Moreover, a certain number of warriors from Senior Horde joined Sarke in the war against Jungars in 1726, which means that Kazakh forces from various tribes [ru] fought together.”* Through the example of celebration of the Sarke *batyr* and his attainments, we repeatedly observe the idea when members of descent groups imagine their tribal warriors as *national state defenders*, rather than heroes confined in the frame of a particular *ru*. Also, respondent N., a young member of Besterek *ru*, who regularly maintains his ties with fellow tribesmen, addressed the forthcoming opening of their *ru*-based monument in 2023 as follows: *“when our monument in honor of Besterek tribe gets opened soon, I think it is a legacy for future generations of Besterek people, and it also shows the unity of our elderly and fellow tribesmen in their ability to produce such site.”*

A historian and *shejire* specialist of Shegir and some other tribes, Mombek, points out that *ru*-based commemoration across Kazakhstan actually *complements* the already existing monuments for *batyrs* that were built by the state. In particular, he says the following: *“why*

should the monuments by tribes not be erected? Let them do so. After installing such sites for batyrs, the history will be learned. Monuments for all the common batyrs already exist. Qabanbay's monuments can be found in every city. Bogenbai is likewise. Are Kazakh batyrs limited to those 5 or 6? I don't see any controversy here. I investigate the history of our batyr myself, who else would do it for me? After all, Aqpan batyr did not only defend the people from Shegir tribe. For the sake of helping Kazakhs, he galloped wherever it was needed, because such is the nature of a warrior." The rhetoric of Mombek on Aqpan Batyr's altruistic and fearless character that extended a hand not only to fellow Shegir people, but any Kazakh person, resonates with the statements of Bayanghali from Zhaghalbaily, who also argued that Sarke Batyr helped out not just Zhaghalbaily, but eventually aided Kazakhs in general by preventing Jungars and other enemies from passing the western steppes to other Kazakh plains.

Also, the problem raised by Mombek regarding the state's promotion of a specific list of *batyrs* with national recognition is also echoed in the study of Bigozhin, namely, the organization of a commemorative event in honor of a Kazakh saint, Isabek Ishan, by local state officials, and how the saint "[was] in the process of becoming part of a pantheon of heroes with national recognition" after his saintly past and stance for 'religious purity' have been publicized to the community, and most importantly, the state.²⁰¹ Although the interests of regional elites and local government officials are driven by the willingness to gain a solid political reputation and acknowledgement at the state-level via implementation of archeological discoveries²⁰² or commemorative activities for events and personalities of historical value in their respective region, activists of *ru* under study advocate for the inclusion of their descent-based warriors into the national *pantheon* of heroes, since they also celebrate them as '*Kazakh heroes*,' who utterly made their contribution to the existence of current-day Kazakhstan.

²⁰¹ Ulan Bigozhin. "Nation-Building and a School Play in a Kazakh Saint's Jubilee.' *Central Asian Affairs*, No. 5, (2018): 30.

²⁰² Ulan Bigozhin. "Kazakhstani Archeology: In the Shadows of Soviet Legacy and Polity of Nation-Building.' *Anthropologies*, No. 1, (2022): 35.

On the other hand, interviewees across descent groups also acknowledged the plausible unconstructive nuances of both the commemoration of *tribal* warriors in the public space and intra-tribal meetings that produce cleavage and misunderstanding. Members of Besterek that are predominantly settled in Zhambyl region, decided to erect an object of memory in remembrance of their descent group, similar to the one of Qanly in Qazyghurt in terms of the format, beginning from 2022. The monument was planned to be established 10 kilometers away from the city of Taraz, in Aisha Bibi village, on the private property of a fellow Besterek, who committed the share of his land for such enterprise. For instance, N. [first letter of name changed], a young member of the tribe and worker of the Department of Internal Policy in Zhambyl, said that they never had any Besterek monument and it would be better to have one because “*near Tulkibas area [Turkistan region], there is a site in honor of Siqym Baba of Dulat (Senior Horde), and Besterek should also have such monument.*” Similar to the previous statement, there are plenty of assertions made by interviewees that resonate with the idea of “*well, others are doing so, why not us?*” possibly leading to the so-called ‘showing off,’ in which not only the erection of monuments for *batyrs*, but the very interpretation of their achievements, the accentuated premise in published books or articles about warriors aims to demonstrate the achievements of a specific *ru*. At the same time, in the context of regions, we observe that typically in the southern areas of Kazakhstan, associations of various descent groups tend to compete for the symbolic capital, embodied in the architectural fabric of the city, town or village. The basic explanation for that, as was formerly noted by an archeologist, Podushkin, is feasibly the impact of one’s descent background as a socio-cultural factor in an environment with the highest concentration of Kazakh inhabitants. Upon initial interaction, individuals are often asked about their *ru* affiliation, which plays a crucial role in determining trust, employment opportunities, and other social interactions in the southern region of Kazakhstan.

Another representative of Besterek *ru*, the elder Yelen, well-known writer and publicist, shared a comical experience from his life, when he looked for sponsorship, about 180 thousand

tenge as an amount of charter capital for opening his newspaper agency a long time ago. But, the affluent member of *ru*, from whom he asked for financial help, replied surprisingly: “*can I organize a funeral repast in honor of your father, instead of giving money for your charter capital?*” Apparently, the rationale for such response was driven by the potential ostentation as a sponsor of such *ru* (tribal) events. Yelen then added laughing that the affluent tribesman would have gained more status and recognition anyway, had he helped him launch an independent newspaper, but his conception of the world and life values were such. In fairness, I have to note that such manifestations of boasting are not limited to members of Besterek *ru* only, but noticeable in others as well.

In the same way, former chairman of Qanly association, Yeleussiz, noted that they have worked on rediscovering the legacy of Qarash Bi from Qanly, along with his descendant, Wali Ibrahimov, and established the statue in Shelek village of Almaty region to demonstrate to the people of Alban *ru* from Senior Horde, one of the most populated descent groups in the region, that “they [Qanly] also had honorable ancestors as that of Qarash Bi.” Through the example of Qarash Bi, I observe another curious socio-cultural phenomenon, when certain descent groups try to augment the geographic recognition or scope of their distinctive historical figures as *batyrs* in areas that are generally not populated by the same respective descent group (*e.g. Qarash Bi in Almaty region, instead of Qazyghurt area or Turkestan region*). Similarly, monuments of Qarasai Batyr from Shapyrashty *ru* are also placed in geographically incompatible areas as Petropavlovsk and North Kazakhstan region, rather than Almaty region (*birthplace*) or western parts of the state (*place of the battle*).

A scholar of Area Studies from Aqtobe, Bayanghali, despite being one of the organizers of their monument in Aqtobe region, questions the applicability of the title “*batyr*” to certain individuals, such as ‘*Sankibay batyr*,’ the name of which bears a street in Aqtobe city, one of the first commemorative practices in the history of the city. He believes that *Sankibay*, as a personality, did in fact exist in the past, but he was acknowledged for his affluence and

possession of an innumerate amount of horses, but he was never a *batyr* per se and apparently no one knows how he was granted such status. The assumption was that one of the key prerequisites for obtaining an approval of an onomastic commission at the time was to attach a title of ‘*batyr*’ to make one’s case more substantial and worthwhile when under examination. Distortion of the history by certain individuals, especially scholars of Kazakh History, that strive to conceal the delicate aspects of their descent history, while exaggerating other achievements – leads to potential misunderstanding of historical elements by present and future generations. One of such adversaries of historical distortions, Zarkyn, shared a thought-provoking statement on the manifestation of ‘tribalism’ (*рушылдық*) in Kazakhstan, which, in his example, is linked to life story of Abylai Khan in his youth, as an orphan.

When I personally visited the museum complex of Abylai Khan’s residence (*museum*) in Petropavlovsk, the appointed tour guide gave an extended speech on Abylai Khan’s course of life, including the story on his arduous youth experience. She said that wandering around steppes as an orphan, who lost his parents and left without relatives, Abylai Khan took on a variety of jobs to make his living, one of such was to look after the camels of Tole Bi, a *bi* (esteemed judge) of the Senior Horde, advisor to Tauke Khan. A day after this excursion tour took place at Abylai Khan’s residence, I had an interview with Zarkyn, whom I met for the first time, and he began criticizing those who portray Abylai Khan’s early life linking specifically with Tole Bi and his camels. In particular, Zarkyn emphasizes that there are certain Kazakh historians and scholars as Talas Omarbekov, who supposedly promote such aspects of Abylai’s childhood in history textbooks in that manner (*which was also noticeable in the discourse of tour guides in the museum*). The problem here, according to Zarkyn, is that Tole Bi comes from the major Uisun descent group of Senior Horde, as does Talas Omarbekov. Moreover, Zarkyn sarcastically challenges whether there were no other camels that existed in the Kazakh Khanate, except for Tole Bi’s that Abylai could supposedly look after to earn a living. This is where ‘tribalism’ rests, in Zarkyn’s opinion, when scholars misrepresent the history by seeking to characterize their *ru*

as prevailing or more dominant in comparison with others. In fact, according to the state newspaper, *Egemen Qazaqstan* (2013), Tole Bi Alibekuly, who was an honorable statesman, public figure and counselor to Tauke Khan, comes from *Qozhamberdi* lineage of *Zhanys* tribe from the *Dulat* lineage (Senior Horde), which is a subdivision of *Uisun*. In turn, similarly, Talas Omarbekov, who was formerly the Head of the Faculty on “History of Kazakhstan” at Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, represents the *Zhanabai* lineage of *Shymyr* tribe from the *Dulat* lineage (Senior Horde). Moreover, they both are the natives of Zhambyl province: Tole Bi was born in Shu area, while Talas Omarbekov comes from Aqzhar village of Baizaq county, a composition of Zhambyl region. It may be a coincidence, but such occurrence, according to certain scholars, is worth consideration with regard examining the potential misrepresentations of the history.

In sum, in the context of Kazakhstan, particularly concerning sites of commemoration such as monuments of batyrs, mosques, museums, and memorials dedicated to historical figures, there is a noticeable presence of both *top-down* and *bottom-up* approaches within a realm of collective memory. What is particularly intriguing is the active participation of non-state actors, exemplified by public associations representing descent groups, in the reproduction of national memory through their commemorative practices, aligning with the state’s endeavors. Additionally, a pervasive theme in these commemorative sites is the portrayal of batyrs on horseback, brandishing weapons, representing a standardized form of depicting heroic figures within the public sphere. While these endeavors face critique from the state, purportedly for their primitive ‘tribalist’ features, I posit that the presence of such alternative voices in Kazakhstan underscores the agency of local actors and the manifestation of regional agendas. However, it is essential to acknowledge that, collectively, these initiatives contribute to the overarching state narrative, aimed at expanding the registry of national Kazakh heroes.

Therefore, the so-called ‘tribal’ commemorations across Kazakhstan essentially *complement* the state-built monuments for batyrs. Besides, activists of descent groups under

scrutiny, ranging from Zhaghalbaily and Besterek to Qanly, Shegir, and Atyghai, envision their respective *batyrs* as integral components of a larger framework. Each celebrated warrior is seen as *part* of the system, contributing to the comprehensive ‘*imagined*’ resistance of Kazakhs in the past, as if the distinguished *batyrs* were already striving for an independent, contemporary Kazakhstan in its present-day geographical frontiers.

Chapter 3. Descent Group Organizations as Public Associations and Mutual Aid Society

Structural organizations of tribes

In terms of structural organizations of descent groups, the ones interviewed in the framework of this dissertation are run as official public associations, registered under the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Kazakhstan. During the Soviet era, there was a noticeable decline in the public visibility of descent group networks, although their significance in private affairs remained intact.²⁰³ Presently, it is evident that these networks have regained vitality, manifesting themselves prominently in both private and public domains. At the same time, one interesting highlight is that the actions of *ru* may appear somewhat hidden due to the use of a discrete name for their *ru*-based public association (e.g. ‘Zhayiq-Astana’ instead of ‘Zhaghalbaily’; ‘Keldibek-Baiterek’ instead of ‘Qanly’) that does not directly give hints about its essence, which in itself encompasses their internal organization, nominal membership rules, and intended budget plans. One principal reason for not directly naming the respective association similar to that of descent group is due to potential allegations of tribalism (Kazakh: *рушылдық/руға бөлінушілік*) from the broader populace. Such prudence and taking into account the public opinion is undoubtedly an indication that tribalism is a sensitive issue in the society. Moreover, activists of descent groups seek to convey a special message that their objective is indeed to ‘*rediscover*’ the past of their *ru* and brave warriors, as they earnestly believe that such

²⁰³ Schatz, Edward. *Modern Clan Politics: The Power of ‘Blood’ in Kazakhstan and Beyond*. University of Washington Press (2004): 48.

types of activity would eventually foster the cultural heritage of Kazakhstan. Nonetheless, the activities of tribal public associations are observable in the public domain through their memorial events. For instance, the association of Qanly descent group in Kazakhstan, which is officially denoted as “*Baiterek – Keldibek*,” has been operating since October 2008, and currently has 25 members on the board. The board members are presented from various localities of Kazakhstan, where people of Qanly *ru* reside in relatively significant numbers, and then the Association approves the member candidates as a result of closed internal elections. Along with them, chairman and deputy chairmen are also elected, but sometimes are spontaneously appointed by a strong and respectable chairman, especially if it is an *aqsaqal*, via his personal blessing to the new chairman, in front of the other members. Besides, the Association has its regional representatives in various parts of the country, who are accountable for disseminating news, important ideas or about upcoming events of the organization to fellow Qanly. Interestingly, there is no aspiration on behalf of the organization to have the delegates of the descent group appointed in each major region of Kazakhstan, namely, in unrepresented places (*i.e. Qaragandy, Semei, Aqtobe, Astana*), instead, the Association aims to elect its representatives in those areas of the country where the people of the respective *ru* background reside the most. For instance, the Qanly people have their appointed delegates only in Almaty, Zhambyl region, Turkistan region, and Shymkent. Also, it turns out that the regional representatives conduct their activities on a voluntary basis, and therefore such roles generally provide more of social status than economic interests for holding these positions.

The quality of information gathered on the structure of public associations of descent-groups is rather generic, given that internal procedure and rules are hidden for outsiders, including members of other *ru*, researchers, etc. The respective chairmen of associations do not share detailed information regarding their budget, expenses or the factual collection of due fees. Also, almost every public association has their own charter that regulates the relationship of members, but the documents *per se* were not directly accessible. The data I managed to obtain

regarding the structure of associations are related to appointment and election of members, regional delegates/representatives, and general plans on holding grand assemblies (*e.g. Qanly has a rule of organizing their annual qurultai*), publishing of books and discussing of potential plans on constructing monuments, etc. Among the analyzed associations, only the Keldibek-Baiterek (Qanly) exercise recording the discussed issues via crafting minutes (*протокол*) similar to state agencies as a way of monitoring and fulfilling the promised ideas and plans.

In terms of the budget of the association, there is a conceptual agreement as for the gathering of contributions, but there is no strict requirement on the amount of fees that each member must deposit because the elderly of the organization take into account diverging financial capabilities of fellows. In other cases, the arrangements tend to carry a conceptual character under a gentlemen's agreement, in which the collection of funding and their realization are rather ad hoc. Moreover, there is an implicit rule that more affluent members of associations allocate more financial resources in comparison with ordinary people, whose benevolence is acknowledged in public. Therefore, wealthier members of *ru* allocate significantly more funding and in return their names are distinguished and listed with titles as '*sponsors*,' '*grateful descendant*' or '*for great contribution*.' The allocation of financial resources are provided for the realization of *ru*-related events, such as the organization of councils (*qurultai*) yearly, supporting associates that are vulnerable financially, extending brotherly help to undertakings of fellows as well as conducting research enterprises related to the descent group. As far as the brotherly assistance is concerned, for instance, a dozen of Qanly *aqsakals* drove to a village in Turkestan region in 2023 in several vehicles in order to join the ceremonial opening of the mosque, built on the initiative of one Qanly man, in an area generally inhabited by other descent groups than of Qanly. Such enterprise was meant to communicate the message of corporate unity and genuine brotherhood of Qanly descent group, despite the long distance trip and opening of a mosque, an activity that is considered an ordinary phenomenon in Kazakhstan. As for the help to carry out research studies, Professor Podushkin, gets supported by the group of Qanly on an annual basis

by both financial and social means, in particular, he received around five hundred thousand *tenge* in 2021 and one and a half million *tenge* in 2022 for his archeological works that included excavations in the settlement of Kultobe that let the discovery of the sample script of the ancient Kangui state (supposedly of Qanly) and other digs in the settlement of Bitan in Zhambyl region.

Similar to the community organization of Qanly, Shegir *ru* also has its own public association with a fund, through which they sponsor a variety of initiatives, based on tribal agenda. However, the majority of costs associated with extravagant ventures like constructing monuments for warriors or arranging elaborate meals in tribute to ancestors are typically borne by affluent individuals, who often have direct connections to the publicly honored ancestor. For instance, in the case of Shegir descent group and the monument of their warrior, Aqpan Batyr, Aset Qayipbekov, regional businessman and supposedly descendant of Aqpan Batyr, bore the majority of expenses. Other cases also include the monument of Sarke Batyr, covered by Amangos Toleuov of Zhaghalbaily, agricultural entrepreneur and social activist of Aqtobe region. In Almaty region, in turn, the descendant in eighth generation of Qarasai, Bolat Nazarbayev, based on his personal donation, erected the monument of Qarasai Batyr in Kaskelen.

In addition, one of the initiatives of Shegir public association was the return of fellow Shegir tribesmen from China, who have migrated there around two hundred years ago, in particular, descendants of the two grandfathers that apparently also derive from Shegir, their apical ancestor. Representatives of Shegir in Kazakhstan went to China and found about 30 families from Shegir progeny, and managed to bring some of the families back to their historical homeland successfully. In one of the interviews with Shegir tribesmen, Mombek expressed his frustration with the helpfulness of the Kazakh government, especially with regard to the policy of ethnic repatriation known as “*qandas*” (blood-related), formerly treated as *oralman* (returners). The discontent was conveyed in the fact that immigrants of Russian ethnicity are granted citizenship allegedly faster (up to 2 years) than ethnic Kazakhs (up to 5 years), which

they directly faced in their endeavor of returning fellow blood relatives from China. The aforementioned statement is perhaps a groundless one because the Kazakh government has repatriated thousands of ethnic Kazakhs beginning from 1997 and the state does not discriminate on the basis of one's descent-group background, but there are evidently different inter-state bureaucratic procedures with every foreign country. Nevertheless, the fact that the Association allocated a share of its funding to visit the families from Shegir *ru* living outside of Kazakhstan with an intention of reuniting them with their historical homeland and consequently refining their genealogical book, based on their knowledge, is again exhibiting their interest in profound self-discovery as a descent group rather than distancing themselves from all Kazakhs and producing some social cleavages.

Additionally, the council of the Zhaghalbaily *ru* was held many years ago, during which the members of the descent group from Qostanai (*Zhetiqara* area) came up with an initiative to form a public association of their *ru*. The contemplations about the name of association took a long time because they restrained from naming it homonymously as '*Zhaghalbaily*' due to a possible accusation of tribalism from the general public, as well. Hence, they decided to label their association as "*Zhayiq – Astana*," registered in October of 2009, referencing to some parts of *ru* members residing on the West of Kazakhstan, historically along the river Zhayiq (Ural), and other locus, placed in Astana, that pursue their association's interests in the administrative center of the country. In terms of membership fee requirements, the Zhaghalbaily people's association, '*Zhayiq-Astana*,' initially planned to establish a fixed due fee for each member in the amount of 1200 tenge as of 2009, but in reality such contributions are not strictly complied with and remain rather ad hoc. Through their association, they found a sculptor from Shymkent, who had been invited to Qosestek Village in Aqtobe region to explore the area and was later assigned as an official designer of the monument, without which one cannot claim the legal right to be an author. Adilghali, Astana-based artist, who was hired by the *ru*'s respective association,

replicated the appearance of Sarke *batyr*, based on the information provided by the members of descent group.

Speaking of motivations of individuals in looking out for their genealogy and remaining parts of their respective descent group within Kazakhstan and sometimes overseas, many of the conversations indicated the advantages of community organizations in the form of *ru*. From the perspective of social assistance, tribes seem to continue practicing certain traditional phenomena as *asar* (Kazakh: асап) up to day, in which collective help is provided on a free basis. According to Yelen from Besterek, the apogee of descent group system of Kazakhs took place in 1990s, when poverty was pervasive, children from less affluent families were helped out in their education, their weddings and life-cycle events were organized when needed, along with the practice of *amengerlik* (Kazakh: әменгерлік) that meant the adoption of orphaned kids by their relatives, close or distant, and even by neighbors, as part of their family. His belonging to the Besterek *ru* also supported Yelen during his adolescence, when his fellows and relatives helped him to have his mother's funeral, thus, *defended* his dignity, while he was unable to do so on his own financially and in terms of organization. In this regard, Hudson asserted that the cohesion of "the blood group was expressed not as a generalized responsibility of all its members for one another but rather as a personal dependence of the weak upon the strong."²⁰⁴ When required, the strong extend a helping hand to the needy from the same descent group, and such reciprocity is expected from the beneficiary towards other kinsmen in the future. Another interesting point made by Yelen is that any Kazakh person has relatives from the three sides (Kazakh: *жигіттің үш жұрты болады: өз жұрты, нағашы жұрты және қайын жұрты*), referring to direct paternal-maternal relatives and in-laws, which might be considered as an *alternative* to modern notions of 'accommodation' or 'per diem' expenses. When looked from a historical perspective, warriors at the time could rely upon their kinfolk in the steppe and rest at points of stopover known as *beket* (station) to take a break and gain strength in order to be able to continue their

²⁰⁴ Hudson, Alfred. Kazak Social Structure. *Human Relations Area Files Press*, (1938): 105.

travel. Even nowadays Kazakhs regularly count on their relatives while traveling, conducting life-cycle events or simply reaching out for a credible source of information.

Also, certain journalists have criticized the commemorative activities of Kazakh *ru*, in particular, erecting monuments exclusively to their ancestors, which are attended by related descendants only, as if they were intentionally showing off in front of other people and provoking adversarial relationships.²⁰⁵ However, in practice, the discourse of Mombek from Shegir *ru* reiterates that descent groups in Kazakhstan are not physically warring each other and not leading to the so-called ‘tribal’ conflicts, but instead, solving ‘intra-tribal’ concerns in cities, towns, villages or other places by themselves, where the population of their *ru* is most populated. In other words, Kazakh *ru* are solving their fellow tribesmen’s issues that the government typically omits or ignores. The mutual aid is being implemented via ensuring social and financial help, especially during life-cycle events. In terms of his personal experience on receiving such help, Mombek said that associates of Shegir collectively provided financial assistance in publishing his research books twice. As far as the attendance of the site is concerned, numerous visitors regularly attend the mazar of Qulsary Batyr, while the monument of Sarke Batyr is visited not only by locals, but also guests of different ethnic backgrounds, which I have witnessed myself during the first stage of fieldwork as one Russian family walked around the site and took photos. Along with the symbolic value that these sites of heroic figures communicate, people also visit them to make a prayer and receive spiritual help, since batyrs are concurrently known for their extraordinary holy power to cure people and give blessings.

One of the forms of tribal help that the government cannot handle, as mentioned by Mombek, can also be seen in the interview with Bakhyt *aqsaqal* from Zhaghalbaily. He recalls how during the tragic incident of *Qantar* in January 2022 throughout Kazakhstan, when there was a mass uprising against the government that included forced entry of state institutions and

²⁰⁵ Ratel.kz, “Раньше род был как одна семья, а сегодня это подобие ОПГ.” [*Clans once were as one family, but today, it resembles an organized crime*], 2017, Retrieved from https://ratel.kz/raw/ranshe_rod_byl_kak_odna_semja_a_segodnja_eto_podobie_opg_?page=2

facilities by instigators, such aggressive people wandered around his village in Aqtobe region as well. Then, one of such local *aqsaqals* from the *aul* referred to one such instigator by “*қай ауылдың баласысың, біздікі емессің ғой деп,*” asking about his place of village residence and realizing that that instigator did not actually live in their neighborhood. Thus, some aggressive calls to destroy local administration’s offices were stopped after that, which signals about the leadership of *aqsaqals* and their knowledge about neighbors as well as their descent group affiliation. In the same regard, Nurzhan from the Qanlı *ru*, who lives in the country house has seen how a newly built apartment next door was of some woman, which was constructed with the help of her younger brothers from the same *ru*, who worked as main brigadiers that bore responsibility on the fulfillment of construction. Moreover, when Nurzhan himself is invited to events of fellow associated such as weddings or anniversary celebrations, he regularly receives gifts in the form of clothes as *shapan* (Kazakh traditional clothing), seasonal wears and so on that actually mitigates the necessity for purchasing things for himself that also minimizes the financial burden on him. This and many other instances of social assistance among *ru* help us understand the contributions of such community organizations in the maintenance of social stability, especially micro-level situations that include social life-cycle events that are normally overlooked by the state. In this regard, an anthropological study by Werner on how rural Kazakhs maintain and extend their household networks vividly presents that “households which belong to the same tribal lineage as the host household perform the bulk of the work”²⁰⁶ during life-cycle events. The findings by Werner not only corroborate the assertions of Nurzhan, but also show the significance of upholding such social security for Kazakhs up to day by participating in reciprocal exchange of gifts, services and labor, in which households from the same lineage (or descent group) are expected to contribute more than others. There is also an informal agreement among Kazakhs that reciprocity is delivered by the recipient to the benefactor should the need arise.

²⁰⁶ Cynthia Werner. “Household networks and the security of mutual indebtedness in rural Kazakhstan.” *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 17, No. 4, (1998): 603.

Kazakh traditions in the School Curriculum

One of the significant cultural principles of Kazakh people revolves around the idea of knowing one's seven grandfathers (Kazakh: *жеті ама*), linked directly with the knowledge of genealogy (*shejire*) that is viewed as the cultural capital of people. It is an ancient ancestral tradition that expects the elderly to teach their offspring about their grandfathers and pass through such knowledge for generations. It is interesting to observe that school curricula of the public schools approximately from 7th to 9th grades are designed in way that includes the discussion of the qualities of nurturing (*мәрбүе*) in Kazakh families. It is yet challenging to evaluate the objectives of the state in its policy goals through the Ministry of Enlightenment (*former Ministry of Education and Science*), whether teachings about traditional means of upbringing a child were meant to be solely informational and whether such curriculum in schools generated an unintended state support to build community organization.

The significance of knowing one's root is bolstered by such denouncing principle as “*жеті атасын білмеген жетесіз*,” that automatically tags a person who lacks knowledge about his grandfathers as non-highborn or not noble, which is a marker of one's social status. In fact, there is some rationale behind this philosophy traditionally, namely, the assurance of the preservation of health and lineage purity in some way as well as an instrument of upbringing a child by illuminating the admirable attainments of his ancestors. A few interviewees with members of diverse descent groups from various geographic regions provided thought-provoking responses, when they were asked about their motives in participating at *ru*-related events.

For example, Talgat from Besterek shared an experience from his life, when his daughter in the 7th grade of school came back home to ask him to list her seven grandfathers in the framework of a homework assignment. Her question, in fact, caught Talgat off-guard because he possessed little knowledge about his grandfathers, except the memory that he was an offspring of *Shal Ata*. He recalls that when he was 5 years old, his grandfather wrote on a piece of paper up to 11 grandfathers, but that record was lost later on and Talgat's father was not much enthusiastic

in preserving the familial genealogy. This is the reason why Talgat looked out for fellow tribesmen initially in search of the Besterek genealogy book to help out his daughter and to safeguard his *dignity*, but then voluntarily joined them to maintain bonds within his descent group. Unlike Talgat, Nurbolat, who is an active member of Besterek *ru*, came to our interview with two versions of his descent group genealogy and was able to explain the peculiarities of *shejire* by explaining the history of the Besterek *ru*. Apparently, misunderstandings arise when other Kazakhs denote people from Besterek *ru* as *Tatar* because the mother of Besterek turns out to be of Tatar background. Nurbolat continues his discussion by clarifying the fact that Bekbolat, the father of Myrzambet, lost in a gamble to some Tatar merchant and had to give his son away as *amanat* (pledge). In the realm of years, Bekbolat seemingly became close with Tatars and the merchant decided to offer the hand of his daughter to Bekbolat, the union of which later brought to life five tall men that were identifiable as *Bes Terek*, translated as “Five Poplar,” denoting to their tallness.

The interest of Nurbolat in genealogy of his descent group started from the conflict at his undergraduate coursework, when a lecturer labeled those unfamiliar with their great grandfathers as *rootless*, *non-noble* and sometimes *orphan*. He was one of such labels, according to the definition of the teacher, since he lacked concrete information regarding his ancestors. His justification for such pushy reaction was due to the ill-informed condition of his grandfather, who, in turn, was born some time after the famine years in 1930s that forced Kazakhs at the time to prioritize their survival only and left no to little room to preserve records about descent group or *shejire*. During my interview with Saule in Petropavlovsk, she made a point about how numerous elderly in the region that has no knowledge about their grandfathers, come visit her to ask about the presence of any archival documentation regarding their *ru*-based genealogy, while others seek for *shejire* because their grandchildren are asked to learn about their seven grandfathers. Some of those elderly men grew up knowing nothing about their lineage because

their fathers were communists, who perceived the phenomena of ‘tribalism’ and genealogy as ‘primitive’ and ‘backwards.’

On the one hand, the government clearly articulates its support of Kazakh cultural traditions. One of such statements was conveyed in President Tokayev’s most recent discourse, in particular, “*we must strive to think and reflect on a national level. For example, for all Kazakhs, honoring their ancestors, knowledge and study of their genealogy is of great importance. Therefore, shejire is an integral part of our cultural code.*”²⁰⁷ From the aforementioned rhetoric, we see that the concept of genealogy and sharing knowledge concerning *zheti ata* are stressed as vital from the perspective of the state. An interesting example of this in our daily lives is the teaching and inclusion of such traditions in the school curriculum for pupils. On the other hand, if honoring ancestors and refinement of the knowledge on *shejire* are essential, as the discourse suggests, then, these are the exact things that are implemented by various public associations of descent groups. They erect commemorative sites in honor of their ancestors, which are known for their evidence-based accomplishments and service to the Kazakh people, and they, as an association, bring people together and raise funds in order to enhance genealogical knowledge, while acting as mutual-aid society, helping families in need. In other words, there should not be any conceptual contradictions between the state and non-state local agents, except possibly for the content of commemoration and the state’s reluctance to acknowledge the agency of associations and share its power with them over commemorative industry.

Chapter 4. Collected Tangible Materials from Descent Group Associates

In the course of collecting data on the ground by meeting with various tribesmen, activists of *ru*, in particular, the respected elders, shared with me some tangible materials, such

²⁰⁷ Akorda.kz. 2024. Выступление Главы государства К. Токаева на третьем заседании Национального курултая “Адал Адам - Адал еңбек - Адал табыс.” Available online at: <https://akorda.kz/ru/vystuplenieglavy-gosudarstva-ktokaevana-tretem-zasedaniinacionalnogo-kurultaya-1525116>

as the brochures of invitation to meetings of *ru*, booklets for educational purposes, books on the history of descent groups and scientific grounding of the existence of tribal warriors, and even some extensive genealogical books.

I have mentioned in the previous chapter that the public association of the Qanly *ru* in Kazakhstan, officially denoted as “Baiterek – Keldibek,” was formed in October of 2008. Just nine months later, the associates of Qanly organized the first ever, nationwide *ru*-based gathering in June 6th of 2009, at the Qanly memorial complex in Qazyghurt county, located along the ‘Shymkent – Tashkent’ highway. During my fieldwork, I had an honor to receive as a gift the printed version of the brochure of invitation, a valuable primary source, the content of which enabled me to understand the vision, goals and agenda of the association. The brochure, in turn, is printed vertically on both sides of the paper with a light green coloring, consisting of six columns, each being dedicated to communicate specific information to its reader. Also, there is a coherent arrangement of information, delivered in each column. For instance, the first column contains a full-size image of the Qanly monument with a title “Invitation” (“*Шақыру*” in Kazakh), placed at the bottom of the page, indicating the nature of the brochure. The following column comprises the details of the invitation, such as the aim, date of gathering (*June 6, 2009*), venue (*at the base of the Qanly monument*), time (*10 o’clock in the morning*), organizer (*‘Baiterek-Keldibek’ public association*) and contact information (*work and phone numbers*). The purpose of the gathering is stated as follows: “*You are invited to the traditional commemorative feast [as] in honor of Qanly baba [forefather], which will be held in Qazyghurt county of South Kazakhstan region.*” Curiously, the format and structure of the brochure are almost identical to the routinized telephone messages (*official letters*) of government agencies that also provide thorough details for all the participants and stakeholders.

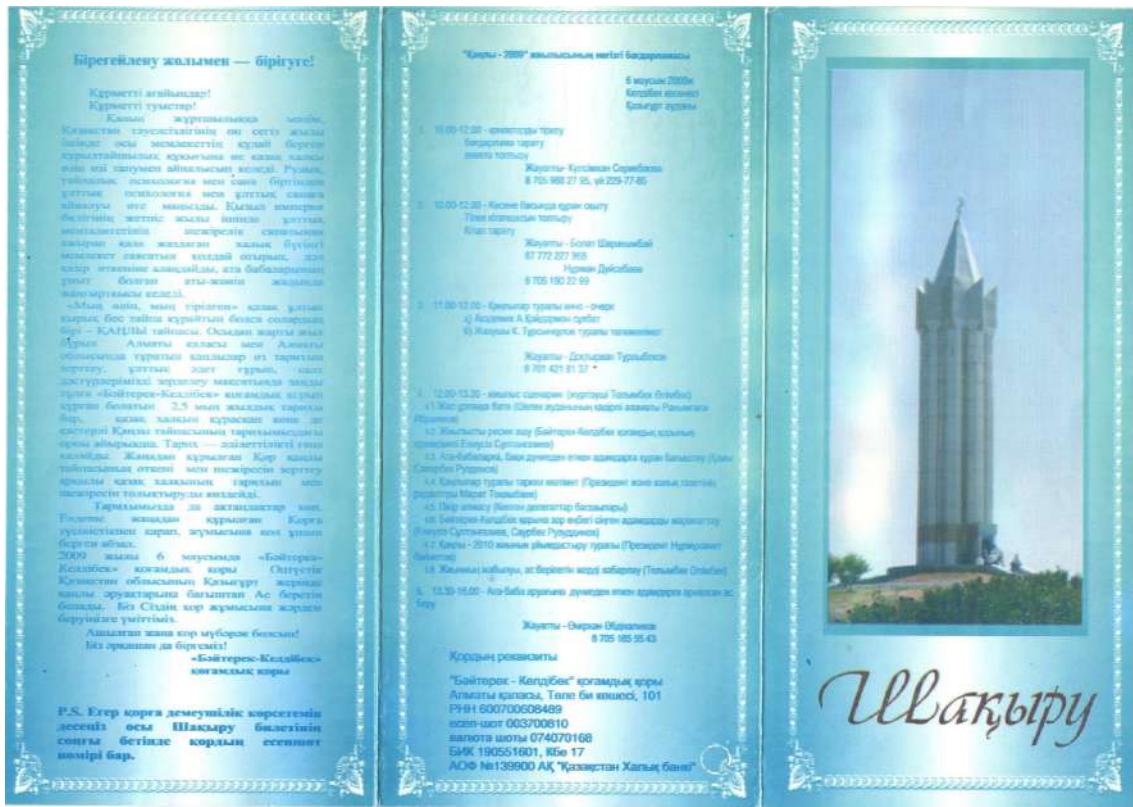


Figure №11. The Brochure of Invitation of a First-ever all-Qanly meeting in Qazyghurt, Turkestan region, 2009.

Furthermore, the third column is solely devoted to two large paragraphs of Nursultan Nazarbayev’s statement regarding the roots of the Kazakh nation and its historical legacy. The main points from Nazarbayev’s statement were derived from his report, given at the I Worldwide Qurultai of Kazakhs, held in Almaty in 1992. In particular, the authors of the brochure emphasized and even highlighted in bold the word “Qanly” (*Қаңлы* in Kazakh), when Nazarbayev asserted in his report that *“our [Kazakh] struggle for statehood and freedom has centuries-old history, from the times of indigenous Scythians, Huns, Oghuz, Saka, Uysin, Qanly, and Kipchak, to yesterday’s glorious event of Zheltoqsan.”* From this column, I got the impression that by quoting Nazarbayev, President of Kazakhstan at the time, and underlining the word Qanly, the authors of the leaflet displayed both its support of the President and his discourse, as well as underlined the significance of their descent group, Qanly, in history of the formation of Kazakh people.

Interestingly, the fourth column of the brochure is filled with the lyrics of an original song about the Qanly, called “We are the Baiterek, We are the Qanly” (“Бәйтерекпіз – Қаңлымыз” in Kazakh), composed by Aqtoty Raimkulova, with the lyrics written by Tolymbek Alimbek. The song consists of five quatrain verses and a chorus. The analysis of the lyrics of the song brings up to several points: (a) the profundity of the history of Qanly people with over twenty-five centuries, referring to the ancient state of Qanly, (b) glorification of the great sons and daughters of the Qanly, such as Al-Farabi, Türken Hatun, the protector of Otyrar city, Qayirkhan, the Khan of Almalyq [Moghulistan], Ozal Tugrul, the scientist, Zhamal Qarshy and the father of the Ottomans, Ertugrul, and (c) the fact that history of sacred Kazakh people is based on the ancient ‘humble Qanly,’ whose descendants reside in contemporary Kazakhstan. The latter point is stressed in the chorus as well, which is sang, “*if you want to know the roots of the Kazakhs, you should get to know the Qanly*” (“Білгің келсе түп тамырын қазақтың, Қаңлыларды білгейсің!” in Kazakh). From the lines of the *ru*-related song, it is clear that the Qanly associates are emphasizing their ‘glorious’ past with the provision of the names of its momentous leaders, warriors, scientists, thus, spreading the knowledge to fellow members and also legitimizing their contribution to the establishment of Kazakhstan.

The fourth, and I believe the most important column, from the perspective of comprehending the objectives of the Qanly association, is entitled as “*Towards unification via the path of identity.*” The first paragraph of the pillar marks the following:

“It is well-known that the Kazakh people, who have the God-given founding right to this state, have been occupied with the period of self-awareness in the course of 18 years of Kazakhstan’s independence era. It is significant that the tribal mentality and psychology must gradually transform into national psychology and national mindset. The people [Kazakhs], who were about to get rid of the genealogical character of the national mentality due to the 70-years of rule of the Red Empire [Russia], are worried about their past, and aspire to revitalize the forgotten names of its ancestors, while supporting the policy of the state.”

It is further argued that one of the forty-five descent groups that make up the Kazakh nation is Qanly. The fellows of Qanly that reside in Almaty and Almaty region, made a decision to register a legal entity in the form of a public association in 2008, in order to scrutinize their own history, the national traditions and customs. The significance of the Qanly *ru* in history is highlighted, which according to modern Qanly people, co-founded the Kazakh nation, given its two thousand and five hundred years old history. Besides, the brochure continues, that the newly formed Association aims to *complement* [author's emphasis] the history of Kazakh people and its genealogy *via* researching the past and genealogy of the Qanly *ru*. The ending of the column contains a post-scriptum that calls people to donate money (sponsorship) to the activities of the public association, to the listed bank account number of the entity. I believe that the narrative of the Association of Qanly displays its intentions as rather *auxiliary* because the idea of 'complementing' the history of Kazakhs channels a clear message that that people of Qanly remain within the overarching Kazakh dimension by adhering to the principle of unity.

The final column includes a detailed five-stage program of the 6-hours long gathering that took place on June 6th of 2009 at the Keldibek Memorial in Qazyghurt. Also, each stage of the event was allocated a specific timeframe with contact persons and their phone numbers included for clarification purposes. For instance, the program complied with formal reception procedures like registration of the guests, distribution of the program, filling of the questionnaires, reading of Quran at the memorial site (*kesene*), commenting on the book of wishes, and distribution of books as an introductory phase of the gathering. More meaningful points of the meeting commence with interviewing an academician, Abduali Qaidar, and watching TV-information about the writer, K. Tursinkulov.

Then, the scenario of the meeting was revealed, which included the traditional provision of a blessing (*bata*) to the youth, the official opening ceremony of the assembly, the reading of Quran in honor of ancestors and others who have passed away, the provision of historical knowledge about the Qanly, an exchange of ideas and thoughts, the celebration of personalities,

who contributed to the progression of the public association, the organization of the following Qanly gathering in 2010, and the closing of the ceremony and sharing a meal at the dedicated place with an aim to organize a commemorative feast (*as*) to the spirits of ancestors.

Although the Qanly *ru* had held its first-ever countrywide gathering in 2009 and prepared the brochure, according to their vision and objectives in those years, which I was fortunate to obtain during my fieldwork, I find it fascinating how this descent group articulates its tribal (*ru*) activities as rather complementing to the national cause because by exploring the history of their tribe profoundly, they would eventually enhance the collective understanding of Kazakhs themselves in the course of history and have more accurate genealogical knowledge. On top of that, the statement about complying with the evolutionary path by converting to national mentality and psychology from the ‘tribal’ one is invigorating, since it feels as if the representatives of Qanly association treat such *ru*-based activists as an indispensable stage in reaching to the ultimate national Kazakh cause.

Apart from the leaflet, I was also lucky enough to gather additional valuable first-hand material, which is a forty-pages long booklet, entitled “*We are Baiterek – We are Qanly*,” that was produced under the auspices of Qanly *ru*’s public association in May of 2009. The designers of the booklet set a goal of presenting the short history and genealogy of the Qanly community for educational purposes, intended for a broad readership. The material itself was printed via the professional help of the publishing house, which includes the names of the main authors as well as responsible editor, corrector, and designer. The total circulation of the skill book equals 1000 copies. The reason why I found this booklet to be assisting is due to the fact that it serves sort of a lengthened version of the previous small brochure under scrutiny, since it incorporates the fundamental genealogical tree of the Qanly *ru*, their historically occupied lands, record of the great sons and daughters that had lived from the ancient times up to the 20th century, and information about modern-day Qanly that reside in distinct regions of Kazakhstan.

The first page of the booklet provides the top-down genealogical tree of the Qanly, in which the scheme of the *ru* is formed from naming ancestors to linking them with their descendants. There is an explanation of the word “*Baiterek*” that function as one part of the name of their public association, which turns out to be their battle cry as well as an eponymous ancestor. Two types of brand (*tamga*) are provided, one being the rein bridle (*shylbir*) and the other – poker (*koseu*). Besides, half of the booklet contains a chapter on the history of Qanly, their origins, economic activities, and other interesting facts. One noticeable aspect of the booklet is that virtually all of the arguments about the Qanly *ru* and their role in history come from Chinese sources, namely, the accounts of the Han Empire, The Qing Empire (Manchus), the Northern Wei, the Sui Dynasty, along with Kazakh Soviet Encyclopedia, Japanese scholar as Kurakichi Shiratori, and the narrative of the Oghuz (*Oghuznama*). Although the latter three have relatively more specific references that include the source names, edition and page numbers, the Chinese sources used are not ensured with accurate bibliographic information to be found.



Figure №12. Booklet about the Qanly, their history and genealogical knowledge, 2009.

For instance, the authors claim that the capital city of Qanly was known as ‘*Biten*,’ which was supposed to be located near the contemporary Turkistan city, on the south of Kazakhstan, according to Japanese historian Shiratori's work, on his study of Sogdiana. The latter was apparently published in 1928 and it becomes curious how the creators of the booklet found that

source in 2009, as they again do not specify the year of publication and page numbers of certain sources.

The enterprise of fact-checking the sources remains beyond my interest, but I drew my attention to this phenomenon because the invention of traditions is certainly taking place by descent groups. For instance, one of the prominent Oriental philosophers of the Medieval, Al-Farabi, was born in Otyrar (Farab), which is in geographic proximity to modern Turkestan in Kazakhstan. Since Qanly people claim that the ancient capital of their state was located near Turkestan, they argue that Al-Farabi was also of Qanly and he is included into the composition of great Qanly figures, which have lived from the ancient times to the 20th century. Although some scholars speculate that the current territory of Kazakhstan might potentially be the soil where Al-Farabi was born, “historical material on the early life of the philosopher is scant and contested.”²⁰⁸ Besides, there are numerous other personalities, such as Roxana (wife of Alexander the Great), Qorqyt Ata (musician and shaman), another Otyrar resident, Aisha Bibi, with a mausoleum located in modern Taraz, built by the Karakhanid Dynasty, Toto (minister of the Yuan Dynasty), Zhalantos batyr (*though a number of other ru from the Junior Horde claim their right to affiliate him with their respective tribe*), and various other figures that are incorporated in the 4-page long list of Qanly people.

The authors of the book apportioned their ‘list of great figures’ of Qanly background into three sections, such as the ancient times (forty-nine persons), 20th century entities (thirty-five persons), people between fifties and seventies, and persons in the national spotlight before their fifties (artists, athletes, the best in various fields, entrepreneurs, government officials). It is noticeable that the sections of the latter two groups of people were unfilled and thus to be newly completed at the time. While it may be objectively simpler to examine one’s Qanly background in the 21st century, I find it fascinating how some of the very ancient warriors, statesmen, great rulers or their wives were amalgamated into the list for their alleged Qanly-descent background.

²⁰⁸ Dubuisson, Eva-Marie. *Living Language in Kazakhstan: The Dialogic Emergence of An Ancestral Worldview*. University of Pittsburg Press (2017): 100.

Such ancestral claims are happening perhaps due to Qanly *ru*'s alleged references to their ancient ancestors, known as 'Kangui,' but the manifestation of invention of traditions in such fashion possibly boosts and firmly grounds the historical role of the *ru* in the formation of modern-day Kazakhs.

Furthermore, the geographic presence or mapping of modern Qanly tribesmen that reside in a number of regions of Kazakhstan is provided in the following section. According to the source, ensured by N. Azhimetov, Qanly people are populated in such areas as former South Kazakhstan region (currently known as Turkestan region), Zhambyl region, Qyzylorda region, Almaty region, along Edil and Zhayiq (Ural) rivers, as well as Zhetisu (Almaty) region, including the Shu area. The majority of Qanly in the current Turkestan region can be found in the composition of three counties as Qazyghurt (where the monument of Qanly is established), Keles and Saryagash, who turn out to be the descendants of forefather Enke, residing in more than 700 houses. Also, some share of fellow members of *ru* happen to live in the Aqkorgan area of Tashkent region and Bostandyq County along Shyrshyk, both located in neighboring Uzbekistan, in geographic vicinity of Turkestan region. The counties of Talas and Zhualy, along with the city of Taraz of Zhambyl region, also have many Qanly people. Traces of the tribesmen are found in Qyzylorda region, although specific areas of inhabitation were left unspecified. The second most populous area of Qanly dwellers is in Almaty region, as one may find tribe representatives in numerous areas, as Shelek, Enbekshiqazaq, Kaskelen, Qapal, Panfilov, Saryozek, Kerbulaq, as well as Almaty and Taldyqorgan cities. This seems like one of the first attempts of drawing the map of contemporary presence of Qanly people in various cities, regions, counties and villages across Kazakhstan, as a means of bringing together fellow members and enhancing their knowledge on spatial occupation of the associates.

The booklet also addresses the future aspirations of the association, namely, researching biographic information of Qanly figures of the past and presenting the complemented version of the genealogy of Qanly people. A book that contains information about contemporary Qanly

people was planned to get published and those interested to be included in the book are expected to provide share information about themselves (*full name, photograph, education, scientific achievements or ranks, creative output, family including wife*) and donate money in the sum of 5 thousand Tenge, after which two copies of the book would be provided, while the rest of the copies were to be given to libraries in villages, where many Qanly people inhabit. In sum, I observe that the first ever attempt of compiling various data about Qanly and presenting them in a structured way was realized in educational purposes both for the members and broader audience, but it did not pass without numerous inconsistencies and far-fetched statements, although it poses a real interest in comprehensively revealing the subject.

Similar to the Qanly, the representatives of Zhaghalbaily descent group, under the supervision of their fellow informal historian and Area Studies specialist, Bayanghali, have published the book in honor of their heroic ancestor, called as “Sarke Batyr” in Aqtobe city in 2022, which I purchased during my fieldwork. This book is a collection of several small-scale chapters, dedicated to illuminate the life path of the warrior, his contribution in the fight against the Jungars during the battle of *Anyraqai* in 1723, under the leadership of Abulkhair along the river of Bulanty. The heroism of Sarke and his fellows is highlighted via showing the power imbalance between Kazakhs and Jungars, since the latter owned more advanced warfare means such as guns, though the aftermath was not in their favor. Also, Sarke Batyr’s help towards the Bashkir people during their revolt against the Russian empress in 1755, namely, protection of thousands of Bashkir from Volga Kalmyks and Cossacks until the amnesty was offered, has been particularly underlined, including a separate chapter by Bashkir writer and journalist, Niyaz Alsymbayev. Such extension of a hand by Sarke was perhaps his gratitude for support, previously provided by Bashkir warriors towards Kazakhs in 1723, headed by Taimas Shaimov, when the Jungar troops made a fierce attempt to conquer the territories of Kazakhs.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁹ Qultaev, Bayanghali. Sarke Batyr. *Poligraphia*, (2022): 46.

It is worth revealing that the writings of an elder from Zhaghalbaily, Bakhyt Sataiuly, are used as a *source* for further statements on the activities of Sarke in the book. For instance, it is claimed that Sarke was the commander of a group of *sarbazdar* (fighters) from Zhaghalbaily during wars, led by Bokenbai in 1716 and Abulkhair in 1725. By using these dates, the author supposes the date of Sarke's lifespan beginning from late 17th to the second half of 18th centuries, although the book for some reason specifies his date of birth and death as 1690 and 1772, respectively. Similarly, Bayanghali references to an indeterminate 'Russian archive' in his argument regarding the inclusion of the individual signature of Sarke on behalf of all Zhaghalbaily people among other 28 persons from different *ru*, who pledged allegiance to Russian empress, Anna Ioannovna, along with the Khan of the Junior Horde, Abulkhair, on February 19th of 1731. Through illustrating his presence in the list of written oath to Anna of Russia, the Zhaghalbaily people seemingly attempt to convince the readers that Sarke was truly a respected *batyr*, who had an equal footing with Abulkhair of Junior Horde and power to speak not only on behalf of Zhaghalbaily *ru*, but sometimes in the name of whole *Zhetiru* (Seven Ru) of the Junior Horde as well. Moreover, as a means of inducing the reader about the existence of Sarke *batyr* and his reputable status among Kazakhs, the book consistently states the following: "the representatives of Middle and Junior Hordes in the amount of 56 people, *batyrs*, *bi*, and all other nobles, arrived in Orenburg, where they re-signed their pledge to Russian empress. Sarke was in that list, placed 8th in order and signed the document on behalf of Zhaghalbaily from Qostanai, Torgai, and Aqtobe regions."²¹⁰ In addition, referring to unnamed diary materials of Russian diplomat of Tatar background, M. Tevkelev, the author suggests that Rysbai, brother of Sarke, was the envoy of Abulkhair, who fulfilled special orders, and later was accountable for the safety of Abulkhair's ambassador and his people.

As far as the descendants of Sarke are concerned, Bayanghali argues that little has been studied, due to the fact that Sarke organized the fight against the Russian colonial policy in

²¹⁰ Qultaev, Bayanghali. *Sarke Batyr. Poligraphia*, (2022): 42.

1740-1744, referring to the fact that information about his activities may have been left covert. Much of the available data regarding the offspring is known thanks to Zhaghalbaily people that reside in Qyzylorda region, who have not only preserved materials, but also named one of the streets in the countryside of the region under Sarke's name. Similar to Qanly people, whose association also publicized its well-known figures in the past and in contemporary Kazakhstan, the book on Sarke Batyr presents the achievements of Sarke's offspring such as Kenshilik Zhumabayev, General and former Head of the Department of Internal Affairs of Aqtobe region, and honorary businessman in the field of agriculture,

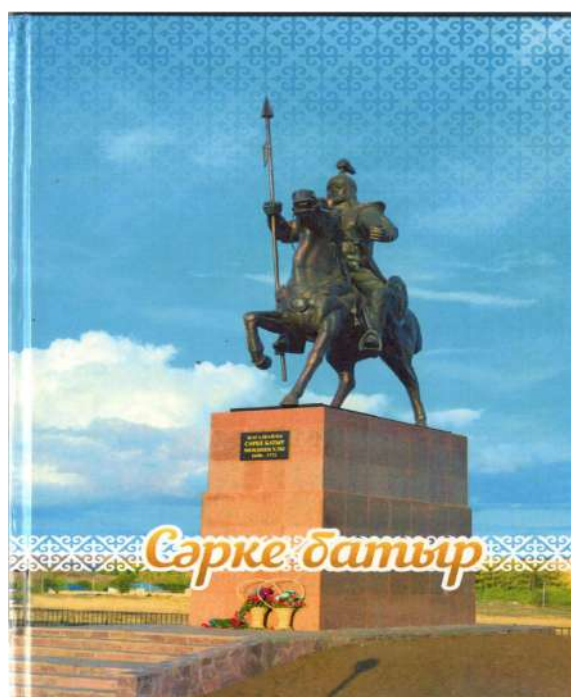


Figure №13. The cover of the book “Sarke batyr.” 2022.

Amanghos Toleuov, who served as the main sponsor of the monument for Sarke Batyr. It is interesting that Zhaghalbaily people address the social issue that presently the title of “*hero*” is awarded by the state, while in the past usually the ordinary people recognized *batyrs* as such for their extraordinary accomplishments in the name of fatherland. Therefore, through praising of the heroic characters such as Sarke, the aim of their association is to pave the way for instilling the spirit of patriotism among the young generation.

On top of the produced book in honor of Sarke Batyr, the Zhaghalbaily people have also directed a 38-minutes long documentary video for informational purposes. The video instantly catches the attention with a portrait of Sarke on a gallop, complemented by the quote: “*The national hero of Kazakhs – Sarke batyr.*” The producers’ imagination of their ancestor galloping on the steppes is demonstrated via featuring live scenes of the flowing Zhayiq (Ural) River. His efforts to unite forces with other Kazakh batyrs such as Tailaq against the nearly invincible Jungars, is stressed. Starting from 1723 to 1726, Sarke is believed to protect the lands along Zhayiq River by not letting the Jungars approach from Torgai town. An interesting element of the imagination of Sarke and his accomplishments by his descendants is fulfilled via illustrating the fragment of head-to-head clashing of young Abilmansur (later known as Abylai Khan) against the Jungar warrior in the movie “Nomad: The Warrior”²¹¹ There, Abylai received the blessing of Abulhair Khan and was designated as the fighter from the Kazakh side to combat against the enemy Jungar, Charysh batyr. With an analogous plot, the documentary video also narrates that Sarke batyr has received the approval of the elderly in order to have a solo battle against some Jungar warrior and defeated him at the square of Qarasiyr, the triumph of which is celebrated as ‘the great victory of Kazakh people.’ As a result of the fight, the authors of the documentary claim that such expression as “*Arm the Junior Horde and set them against enemies*” (Kazakh: Кіші жүзге найза беріп жауға қой) came into use.



Figure №14. The fragment of the documentary for “Sarke Batyr.” It illustrates individuals that were active in researching Sarke. 2019.

²¹¹ This movie is an historical epic film, produced in 2005, that narrates the story of young Abylai Khan and his defense against the Jungars in the 18th century. The sponsor of the film was the government of Kazakhstan, which invested more than 40 million dollars in its production.

The film also includes an interview with the head of Beliyayev County of the Orenburg oblast of Russia, Diner Aleksandr, who marks that they respect the fact that Kazakhs have lived on their current territories historically, while other ethnic groups as Russians, Ukrainians were settled there in early 20th century as a result of Pyotr Stolypin's [statesman of the Russian Empire] policy. Other interviews with the head of the Kazakh community in Beliyayev County, Diyarov Marsel, leading "Area Studies" specialists, Shokumov Savet and Myrzabai Bekarystan, and Doctor of Historical Sciences, Zhumagambetov Talgat, are featured in the documentary. It is interesting that both in the Qanly and Zhaghalbaily video documentaries, there is a clear attempt of including individuals other than the respective descent groups, who usually are statesmen, experts, academicians or public activists by occupation, to make the content of the production more 'reputable' or 'legitimate,' as if such persons with public status add more value and recognition to their matter.

One of the leading researchers of Zhaghalbaily *ru*, Bayanghali, shares the story behind the first endeavors of 'rediscovering' any relevant knowledge about Sarke, namely, some written notes from the *aqsakals* as Qanapiya and Bakhyt that indicated Sarke's burial site that was placed along Zhem (Emba) River, at the necropolis of Qozha (Khoja) saints. Based on that information, a group of Zhaghalbaily activists began searching for the gravesite of Sarke from 2008 and ultimately found it, oriented by some visible tombstone of the Qozhas on the ground. Then, they organized a funeral repast in honor of Sarke batyr, which was attended by more than 400 members of Zhaghalbaily *ru* and others.

In some regards, I also find it intriguing that the content of the documentary resembles that of Qanly in terms of its arrangement, in particular, holding interviews with fellow descent group members, attracting researchers, attending the site with a group of relatives, and involving certain elements of 'invention of traditions' on the 'greatness' and consequently 'importance' of their respective *ru* in the making of contemporary Kazakhs. While the Qanly *ru* champions some of the great figures of humankind, such as Al-Farabi as '*theirs*,' the Zhaghalbaily put their Sarke

Batyr on an equal footing with Abylai Khan, the last independent Kazakh Khan, as if it was Sarke who brutally overpowered the Jungar warrior and then led the whole Kazakh army as projected in the movie, “Nomads.” By pointing towards the aforementioned inventions by descent groups, this is not to belittle the accomplishments of Sarke as a *hero* or the significance the ancient Qanly state and its figures had on the advancement of mankind. Rather, I found it intriguing to observe how and why such *ru* tend to *amplify* their history in a variety of means in the process of its renaissance.

In the course of data collection period, conducted in several stages, I managed to obtain a variety of firsthand tangible materials, including rare brochures, leaflets, booklets, books, documentaries, video interviews, songs, poetic verses and CD discs that were created for informative purposes both for spot and mass audience of people. Such intellectual and creative mechanisms are implemented as very first attempts of ‘restoring’ memory and their distribution by researching the history, great figures and achievements of a given descent group in the history of Kazakh civilizational development. From the valuable video materials of these associations that shed light on their gatherings and discussions, it was palpable to distinguish that members of various descent groups joined large meetings with enthusiasm as they lacked even some basic knowledge regarding the history and genealogy of their *ru*. It was also evident that all of the descent groups strived to present some findings that would illuminate their role and status in the formation of contemporary Kazakhstan. Some of the examples include inventions of traditions by appropriating great historical individuals as Al-Farabi by Qanly, placing their respective batyrs on an equal footing with Kazakh Khans as a way of showcasing their significance and value by Zhaghalbaily, or proving the very existence and justifying their contribution vis-à-vis other ethnic groups in northern parts of Kazakhstan by Atyghai (Arghyn), etc. However, what remains more vital is that these descent groups candidly evaluate their activities in publishing books, producing documentaries or erecting monuments for their *batyrs* as supplementary instead of discordant, towards the rhetoric and ideology that the state conducts. They explicate

their viewpoint by contending that through implementing independent studies of the history of a certain descent group, life story and attainments of their warriors and actualizing the genealogy of the *ru*, they contribute to the awareness of the people and therefore the state, by offering a wide range of evidence on the history of past nomadic Kazakhs. The endeavors of descent groups on exploring their descent-based histories and activities of warriors, which are essential constituents of Kazakh history, became even more germane and topical, given that the “novel and comprehensive academic history of Kazakhstan is getting crafted with the participation of hundreds of scholars,”²¹² as asserted by the President of Kazakhstan.

‘Ru’ in place of Ideology

Before starting the fieldwork activities, it remained uncertain whether descent groups across Kazakhstan practiced tribal/*ru* endeavors as a means to form an ideological agenda on top of the existing ‘state’ ideology, either as a sign of dissatisfaction with the absence of one or due to its weak effectiveness to bolster national (*ethnic Kazakh*) interests. In this regard, the notion of *ideology* turns out to function as equally important variable that I found relevant in the course of field research and numerous interviews. There were various answers to the question of national ideology across interviews, but one common reply was a certainty in its absence on a state level that binds people together, taking into account the interests of ethnic Kazakh people primarily. For instance, Aidos from Qanly provided a classic point of view by contending that “*yes, national ideology exists, but it only gets activated when we are faced with an external enemy. The rest of the time – the internal cleavage of Kazakhs resumes because the government is mistakenly developing a secular state.*”

Another respondent, named as N. [first letter of name changed] from Besterek, shared some delicate insights on the formal existence of an ideology maintained by the state, but being misused by local administrations in respective regions. He said that “*the national ideology exists*

²¹² Akorda.kz. Выступление Главы государства К. Токаева на третьем заседании Национального курултая “Адал Адам - Адал еңбек - Адал табыс” [Speech of the Head of the State, K. Tokayev, at the third meeting of National Qurultai], 2024, Retrieved from <https://akorda.kz/ru/vystuplenieglavy-gosudarstva-ktokaevana-tretem-zasedaniinacionalnogo-kurultaya-1525116>

on paper, but it is absent in reality, and we don't have strong ideologues.” Despite the presence of such doubts on the existence of an effective state-led ideology, we could see that the so-called ‘national ideology’ actually appears in the forms of monuments for *batyrs*, documentary CD discs on the history of origin of descent groups, booklets, leaflets, mosques, memorial complexes and many other means, on the ground level. Although the local non-state actors do not necessarily perceive their descent-group activities as an elaboration and exercise of an ideology on the ground, they are, in fact, contributing to the collective enhancement of the ‘Kazakh’ factor by studying their corresponding genealogies and historical warriors as well as supporting each other (fellows) as mutual-aid societies where necessary.

Moreover, N. also shared his personal experience working in the Department of Internal Policy of Zhambyl region under the “*Rukhani Zhangyru*” division, where he witnessed constant exhibition of corruption by the senior administrators. For instance, when events meant to celebrate Kazakh New Year “*Nauryz*” in March or “Teacher’s Day” are held under the auspices of *Rukhani Zhangyru*²¹³, the Department used to declare a procurement and offer a tender lot to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with funding of events in the sum of 5 million *tenge*, in which only 1 million is allocated for target use, while the rest got exploited for personal benefit. For instance, the tender requires the printing of 10-meters long banner with a caption, but in fact, it turns out to be only 1.5 meters, which infuriated him personally due to its systematic happening. Likewise, during “Thanksgiving Day,” they used to rent vehicles to make a road trip within the region, but they mostly rented longstanding and exhausted cars (*Mercedes Sprinter*) with inscriptions glued onto car haphazardly. There are apparently only five NGOs that raffle the tenders among themselves on a regular basis, with 10% tariff allocated for kickbacks.

In other words, respondent N. believes that the *Rukhani Zhangyru* ideological program serves as a window-dressing for local state officers’ own interests in the region. During the

²¹³ *Rukhani Zhangyru* (Kazakh: Рухани Жаңғыру) was a programme article of N. Nazarbayev that offered a new strategy for country’s growth and an ideological agenda, aimed at upgrading public consciousness, which included the development of the sense of belonging to a single nation – Kazakhstani nation.

official visit of then the Head of the “*Rukhani Zhangyru*” Center under the Kazakhstani Institute of Public Development, currently the Head of Center for Electoral Training under the Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, on a state level to Taraz city, Bukanova Zhanar, gave lectures regarding ideology with the participation of regional (county) heads of the program from all around Zhambyl. According to N., her points on advancing ideology were reasonable, but the regional head of *Rukhani Zhangyru* from T. Ryskulov County stood up and said “*Rukhani Zhangyru was only a programmatic article, but not an actual ideology.*” Each side shared its arguments and the Head of the program offered to stick to their own views. What is fascinating about this case is that under President Tokayev’s administration now, after the tragic January of 2022, the State has apparently sent new guiding principles that forbid mentioning anything related to “*Rukhani Zhangyru*”, “*Elbasy*,”²¹⁴ “The First President of Kazakhstan,” or whatever that referenced the previous political regime. The latter referenced Nursultan Nazarbayev, his official title as the Leader of Nation and the program of “*Rukhani Zhangyru*” that he introduced to the people on April 12, 2017.

The era of Nazarbayev’s reign over Kazakhstan has been denoted by the people as the ideology of ‘living in peace,’ that is, “*economy might be weak along with existing immature political institutions, but at least there is no war in Kazakhstan*” that was cleverly used to offset people’s anti-government sentiments and discontent due to poor living standards. On top of that, many of the interviewees indicated how Nazarbayev established a *ru*-based ideology that pursued the interests of a ‘*super-clan*,’ representing Shapyrashty *ru* from the Senior Horde, legitimized the presidential (re)-elections of Nazarbayev and rationale behind appointed senior government statesmen belonging to Shapyrashty as well. Such agenda was implemented in a way by the nationwide celebration of tribal warriors from Shapyrashty, especially *Qarasai Batyr*, accompanied by *Sauryq Batyr*, *Nauryzbai Batyr* and other warriors.

²¹⁴ The former President of Kazakhstan, N. Nazarbayev, held the special title of *Elbasy* (Leader of the Nation) from 2010 to 2022.

One of my interviewees, Saurbek from Qanly tribe, criticized the erection of monuments for tribal warriors in the lands, where people from the same *ru* reside the most, such as *Qaskelen* town or Zhambyl county of Almaty region, which have a number of celebratory spots in honor of Qarasai *batyr* that appears to be the most legendary hero of Shapyrashty people. Saurbek has a firm belief that any Kazakh *batyr* must be honored at an area, where he had physically fought against enemies, as a means of teaching history to people properly. For instance, one of the first tributes for Qarasai Batyr was opened in Uzynagash Village of Zhambyl County (Almaty region) in 1998, praising his triumph over Jungars in the renowned battle of *Orbulaq*. Another stone-made commemorative site in honor of the same warrior was built by the local administration of Qaskelen in 2006 with Qazbek Zharylqapov and Nurlan Daubai performing as sculptors. In the same year, an *aqsaqal* named Khatshybek Abdikhalyqov, constructed a mausoleum for Qarasai in Ungirtas Village of Zhambyl County, with the reconstruction held in 2019, commemorating the 420th anniversary of the “*paramount batyr of Kazakhs,*” as claimed by the author. More recently, during the 90th anniversary of eponymous Qarasai County of Almaty region in October 2019, on the main square of the *Qaskelen* town there was opened the bronze monument of *Qarasai Batyr*, 11 meters in height, made by Nurken Daukenov as an artist, with the financial help of local philanthropists and businessmen. The monument was erected in the framework of implementing Nazarbayev’s programmatic article, “*Rukhani Zhangyru: Spiritual Revival,*” that aims to preserve historical values, respect historic individuals and upbringing the love of homeland among the youth.

On the other hand, Qarasai is identified for his contribution in the battle of *Orbulaq*, which is geographically located in the western parts of contemporary Kazakhstan. The head of North Kazakhstan regional archive, Saule, mentioned about the tomb of Qarasai from Shapyrashty, located in the North of Kazakhstan, referring to the memorial complex of Qarasai (*Shapyrashty*) and Agyntai (*Arghyn*) *batyrs*, built in 1999 in the Aiyrtau County of North Kazakhstan region as a *symbol* of Kazakh unification. The two *batyrs* were comrades as well as

fought against Jungars shoulder to shoulder in a great number of battles. Therefore, it raises a question about why the representatives of Shapyrashty, the most known agent of which is Nursultan Nazarbayev, looked-for the extensive erection of monuments for Qarasai batyr in Almaty region starting from early 2000s, the birthplace of the First President of Kazakhstan, and what consequences it generated on a state level in terms of tribalist sentiments in the society.

It is interesting to note that the descent group of Shapyrashty was generally considered as insignificant in their amount by the standards of the Senior Horde. In particular, the archival sources on the “composition of the Senior Horde as of 1865-1868 indicate that the Shapyrashty constituted around 1910 nomad tents, while the [other tribes from the Senior Horde as] Abdan [Alban] had 8477 tents, Dulats – 37672 tents, and Ysty with 7514 tents,”²¹⁵ which displays that Shapyrashty had not possessed numerical superiority vis-à-vis other *ru* in the Senior Horde. Moreover, “the direct knowledge about the Chapyrashty [Shapyrashty] is absent in the earliest sources, while we possess the credible information about this tribe only from the beginning of XIX century, where it is listed in the composition of the Senior Horde.”²¹⁶ Despite the relatively recent scholarly knowledge about the Shapyrashty, certain authors that illuminated the opening of the ‘Qarasai Batyr Monument’ in Almaty region in 2019 write that “Qarasai was born in 1598, and in his youth, he was a man of great physical strength and agility, and quite large stature, and it is said that the skin of one bull was barely enough to sew him a pair of boots.”²¹⁷ It is questioning how the author of the article came up with inferences that shed light on the youth life of the warrior and label the physical build of Qarasai as ‘*large*’ and ‘*powerful*,’ supplemented by an imaginary example. While other descent groups promote the history of their warriors through elucidating their achievements in battles and therefore their contribution in the establishment of the idea of ‘Kazakhness,’ the Shapyrashty go beyond mere celebration of

²¹⁵ Vostrov, Venyamin, and Sabit Mukanov. Родоплеменной состав и расселение казахов (конец XIX-начало XX в.). [*The Tribal Composition and Settlement of Kazakhs (late XIX – early XX centuries)*]. Academy of Sciences of Kazakh SSR, (1968): 24.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 50.

²¹⁷ Kazpravda.kz, “Из когорты отважных воинов.” [*From the Cohort of Courageous Warriors*]. 2019, Retrieved from <https://kazpravda.kz/n/iz-kogorty-otvazhnyh-voinov/>

Qarasai's attainments against Oirats by also adding their personal imaginations on the anthropometry of their hero, which cannot be verified.

Interestingly, Vitaliy Khliupin, in the work of the Second All-Russian Congress of Political Scientists on late April of 2000, the timing of which overlapped with the early period of Nazarbayev's rule over country and his attempts to grip more control by extending his presidential terms, delivered a report on Kazakhstani political elite and the issues of tribalism. He argued that "*Nazarbayev had no legitimacy to rule over country according to Kazakh traditions because he does not have the Chingissid blood, thus, he was compelled to request his ideologues to search for his 'Khan ancestors' that later led to the unprecedented glorification of Qarasai Batyr from Shapyrashty tribe (eighth grandfather of Nazarbayev) in inappropriate capacity via the erection of monuments in different parts of the country. An entire layer of 'apocryphal' literature, depicting exceptional achievements of Qarasai batyr in front of Kazakhstani and world history by such people as B. Kadyrbekuly, was developed.*" The persistent exaltation of Qarasai-related commemorative sites throughout Kazakhstan, and especially in Almaty region, may have started the '*tribal*' sentiments and cleavages at the dawn of Kazakhstan's independence era. In particular, as of 2019 alone, there were "more than 200 objects that have been named after Qarasai Batyr that includes settlements, streets, educational institutions, cultural centers, along with multiple books, songs and *kui* (Kazakh-style musical work), created in his honor."²¹⁸ The aforementioned excerpts from interviews of various tribe-members such as Bakhyt, Yergali, Bayanghali, Yeleussiz and others reflect why they were enraged by the so-called *supremacy* of Shapyrashty *ru* over all Kazakhs. As a result of almost 30 years of political and economic rule by Nazarbayev's clan, many Kazakhs from Shapyrashty afforded to make bold statements on the alleged vital role of Shapyrashty people in making the current day '*flourishing*' Kazakhs, referring to the general population. The rhetoric was such that

²¹⁸ Ibid., 2019.

if there were no Shapyrashty, namely, Nazarbayev and his family, modern Kazakhs allegedly would not have become who they are today, in a positive sense.

Moreover, among the current and former political elites of Kazakhstan, representing Shapyrashty *ru*, we may observe plenty of individuals, such as *Akhmetzhan Yessimov* (former head of Samruk-Kazyna Sovereign Wealth Fund and Mayor of Almaty city), *Gizat Nurdauletov* (former General Prosecutor and current Secretary of Security Council), *Yerlan Turgumbayev* (former Minister of Internal Affairs), *Marat Beketayev* (former Minister of Justice), *Dauren Abaev* (former Minister of Culture and Sports, former Deputy Head of President's Administration, Ambassador to the Russian Federation), *Alik Shpekbayev* (former Chairman of Anticorruption Agency), *Bauirzhan Baibek* (former Mayor of Almaty city and First Deputy Head of "Nur-Otan" political party), *Gabit Baizhanov* (former Deputy Chairman of National Security Committee), *Bakhyt Sultanov* (former Minister of Trade and Integration), *Alik Aidarbayev* (former Chairman of JSC NC "KazMunayGas"), *Nurtai Abykayev* (former Chairman of National Security Committee), and many others, who have been appointed by Nazarbayev and known to constitute the influential circle from the same *ru*. But, the point here is the authority of Shapyrashty people for almost three decades of Kazakhstan's modern history,²¹⁹ which suggests Nazarbayev's 'tribalist' approach in first erecting memorials in honor of Qarasai batyr and other Shapyrashty-related commemoratives around the country to enhance legitimacy to his rule, and then appointing his fellow people to key state positions, as a means of establishing the narrative that '*thanks to the Shapyrashty leadership's [supposed] far-seeing policies and high competence,*' Kazakhstan and its subjects managed to prosper to a great extent in socio-economic domains. Such unilateral supremacy of Shapyrashty *ru* may have produced the belief in the society that one of the functions of *ru* affiliation is a political patronage or favoritism that

²¹⁹ It is important to mention that there has been a change under President Tokayev's tenure and many of the listed individuals became "former" after the nationwide tragic incident that took place in January of 2022 due to an attempt of coup d'état.

is needed for being associated with a powerful circle, getting promoted and remaining in an inaccessible buffer zone (e.g. security).

The fact of the advancement of the so-called ‘*Shapyrashty ideology*’ at the expense of the “national ideology” resonates in the responses of interviewees, who expressed their dissatisfaction with the absence of a collective ideology that could unify Kazakhs and foster their living standards in their historic homeland. An elderly of Besterek, Yelen Ata, made a point that the government is even frightened of mentioning the words of ‘*national ideology*’ out loud, let alone implementing some type of ideological policy, because the notion of ‘ideology’ is seemingly scandal-prone in Kazakhstan. He continued, “*the Communists at least had some theory and program, which aimed to terminate the Tsarist government and install socialism, but they failed in their third program. What did the Kazakh government do? They do not even have a theory. Moreover, they adopted laws based on their personal interests and anyone who dares to criticize the state loudly gets prosecuted and is forced to flee the country. It is all window-dressing.*” Similarly, Daulet Qazhy, a journalist, who transformed his living house into a mosque, named after Dinmukhamed Konaev in Shymkent, said: “*the continuity of Kazakh statehood is difficult since the main illness of the people is tribalism. It is no wonder why hundreds or thousands of Kazakhs left the country and are now working overseas in China, the United States, South Korea, etc., as there is no national ideology that would stimulate them to stay here.*” Furthermore, an Area Studies scholar from Zhaghalbaily of Aqtobe region, Bayanghali referred to the notion of *Silk Road* as a part of national ideology, but “*the Russians never allowed us to study it, but we are finding its traces now. Our major weakness is the language issue. Few people have a command of the Kazakh language except for knowing greetings and basic words. Our next flaw is religion. In the past, our traditions were complemented with religion such as respecting the elderly, showing hospitality to strangers, etc. The third fault is wastefulness, escaping with and stealing of people’s treasure on the part of politicians and civil servants.*”

A historian from Shymkent, Mombek, ensured an emotional reply by stating the following: “well, there is a genealogy of the people [Kazakhs], but no national ideology. Look at the language issue. Why do Kazakhs have to know others’ languages, while they [others] are freed from learning Kazakh? There is an ideology of ‘terminating Kazakhs.’ Nazarbayev has done so over the last 30 years. Otherwise, why would a sound person run away from its native language and speak another one? Someone has said that a colonized people must work on getting out of that colonized mindset for 30 years, but our country has been undergoing another wave of colonization. Nazarbayev also offended the interests of Kazakhs by establishing the People’s Assembly²²⁰ of Kazakhstan. What is more sad is that many Kazakhs now believe and say out loud that ‘the enemy of a Kazakh is Kazakh’ and it is because of Abay, who was a Russian agent that was appointed as the chief poet of Kazakhs by the Russians on purpose. ‘Who is Abay to speak on behalf of the whole people? You have the right to criticize or condemn certain individuals, but how could you condemn every Kazakh as a generalization?’” continued Mombek. There were also replies that directly touched the issues of injustice on the part of Shapyrashty elites. An *aqsaqal* of Zhaghalbaily, Bakhyt, marked that everyone who belonged to the Shapyrashty *ru* has been elevated in status (“*бәрі азамат болды*”) during Nazarbayev’s tenure. Additionally, they [Shapyrashty] exclaimed that “негізінде қазақты қазақ қылған Шапырашты деп шықты” (*Kazakhs today became such thanks to Shapyrashty*), but we also have our *batyrs*, *bi*, and honorable people. We need a smart leader that can unify Kazakhs on an equal footing.”

Likewise, Yergali from the Qanly tribe argued, “*the Shapyrashty itself has become the ideology.*”²²¹ However, according to him, despite such supremacy of Shapyrashty for years in our society, the resilient of the *ru* were establishing memorial complexes, mausoleums, and other

²²⁰ Assembly of People of Kazakhstan is an advisory body under the President of Kazakhstan that was launched in 1995 with the objectives of maintaining the interests of all ethnic groups residing in Kazakhstan, and thorough improvement of their national cultures, languages and traditions.

²²¹ By labeling it as ‘the ideology,’ he did not mean the direct meaning of the word per se, but rather implied the existence of muscle flexing.

sites because there is a principle of growing up knowing one's roots. The people from Tama *ru* mostly attend Tama-related events, while the Qanly only attend theirs. A fellow of Yergali, Yeleussiz, shared his vision on how the “national ideology” should be developed and maintained. He considers that despite the differences in belonging to various descent groups among Kazakhs, the idea of national ideology must be grounded on sovereignty of Kazakh land and raising the Blue Flag [national flag] to the sky. Then only, he argues, Kazakhs can pursue their ‘tribal’ interests. Moreover, Kazakhs never permitted marriages of people if some of their seven grandfathers turned out to be related. It shows the nobility of Kazakhs. But, unfortunately, “history is getting distorted by those who have power politically and financially by portraying their *ru* as superior to others. Our Shapyrashty comrades...what they said, so things had been (“*ақ дегені алғыс, қара дегені қарғыс*”). Similar to Shapyrashty, members of Qypshak *ru* are presenting the achievements of Qanly as theirs, though they both grew up together. The explanation of this situation is that ‘*we have to display our superiority.*’ But, it is no use to our sovereignty and interests of people” - concluded Yeleussiz. From the discourse of a number of participants regarding the question of national ideology, I clearly observed a systematic disappointment, originated and expressed due to the enhancement of one of particular *ru*, Shapyrashty, as the only source of authority, and the heightened attention towards other ethnic groups, while neglecting numerous other Kazakh descent groups for decades.

Since several interviewees highlighted the elevated role of Shapyrashty descent group's agents in the socio-political and economic domains, I found it germane to conduct a series of interviews with ordinary members of Shapyrashty to get their feedback, on the ground, concerning the rhetoric of alleged supremacy of Shapyrashty in the society that lasted for years. I visited several areas, namely, Kaskelen town, an administrative center of Qarasai county of Almaty region, Uzynagash and Ungirtas villages of Zhambyl County in Almaty region, where a great number of peoples from Shapyrashty *ru* are settled. The timing of my visit, from November 3rd to November 6th in 2023, coincided well with undertaking the pilot project of the

elections of Akims²²² of counties and towns at the regional level in Zhambyl County, which maximized the chances of encountering people from Shapyrashty near polling stations.

In Kaskelen, between the Akimat of Qarasai county and the city library, one finds a sizeable monument of Qarasai Batyr, placed on the main square of the area. During a taxi ride from Almaty towards Kaskelen, I figured out that the driver turned out to be Shapyrashty by descent in the course of our conversation. When the driver was asked a question about whether he enjoyed any privileges in his life experience for simply being a member of Shapyrashty, he replied that some people at the time questioned his occupation as an inter-city driver as follows: *“why are you making a living as a taxi driver? Aren’t you Shapyrashty?”* assuming for granted that representatives of his descent must work at a solid job. The reply to such a challenging question was simple: *“I am an ordinary Shapyrashty.”* In addition, when I was exploring the monument of Qarasai Batyr in Kaskelen, I came across an elder Shapyrashty man, who was sitting on a bench in a small parkway in front of the site. His commentary was insightful as he said the following: *“starting from 2015, it became more and more embarrassing to attend a variety of tois [celebrations] because people kept pointing out during conversations that Shapyrashty people are such and such in a negative tone because N. Nazarbayev supposedly was a thief, etc.”* Besides, an aqsakal added that not every Shapyrashty person can become a director or head of some organization, enterprise or necessarily a man of extreme wealth simply due to his *ru* background because there are innumerate regular members of Shapyrashty that earn a living in modest ways as same as many other Kazakhs.



²²² Akim is Kazakh to denote the head of local government in Kazakhstan.

Figure №15. Personal visit to the monument of Qarasai Batyr, Kaskelen, Almaty region, 2023.

One of the thought-provoking observations during my trip to Kaskelen was the monument of Qarasai Batyr on the central square, which drew my attention not because of its physical outlook, parameters of the site or methods of construction, since it resembles numerous other monuments for *batyrs* throughout Kazakhstan. What actually attracted my sight were two small signboards, placed right at the back of the monument (see Figure 10) that sheds light on the issue of agency of this particular site. The translation of text in Kazakh on the upper placard is as follows: “*the monument has been erected by the personal finances of philanthropist, B. [Bolat] Nazarbayev.*” In turn, Bolat Nazarbayev is an infamous brother of the First President of Kazakhstan, N. Nazarbayev, who owned one of the major universal trade markets, Altyn Orda, situated in the Qarasai county of Almaty region, and was rumored to run multiple profitable businesses throughout the country. It is interesting that there are inconsistencies as to who sponsored the construction of Qarasai’s monument because the media outlets state that the site was built “with the support of local patrons and entrepreneurs,”²²³ “local maecenas and businessmen,”²²⁴ with no reference to B. Nazarbayev as an actor, while the monument itself has a different message that directly specifies the actual sponsor. At the same time, if we scrutinize the lower placard on the monument, we notice that apart from the references to the Akim of the county, main sculptor and the contractor that were directly related to the site’s construction, the last part demonstrates that there is also the Chairman of the Fund, S. Jylgybaev. The details of the fund is not listed, whether it is “BN Invest” or “Saliqaly Urpaq” [Noble Generation] that belong to B. Nazarbayev, or some other fund or association that are connected to the people of

²²³ Total.kz, “Памятник Карасай батыру воздвигнут в Алматинской области.” [*Monument of Qarasai Batyr is Erected in Almaty region*]. 2019, Retrieved from https://total.kz/ru/news/kultura/pamyatnik_karasai_batiru_vozdvignut_v_almatinskoi_oblasti_date_2019_10_10_16_43_38

²²⁴ Tinfo.kz, “Памятник Карасай батыру построили меценаты в Алматинской области.” [*Monument of Qarasai Batyr was constructed by maecenas in Almaty region*]. 2019, Retrieved from <https://www.tinfo.kz/news/obshchestvo/pamyatnik-karasaj-batyr-postroili-metsenaty-v-almatinskoi-oblasti.html>

Shapyrashty. The fact that the monument was built by the sole benefactor, B. Nazarbayev, instead of common efforts of the whole public association, as in the case of Aqpan Batyr, Sarke Batyr or Qanly monument, stays in line with the discourse of ordinary Shapyrashty whom I interviewed, that assert for not receiving any direct or indirect benefits for merely being an affiliate of the Shapyrashty descent group.

Also, this further leads to an understanding that many of the interviewees from other *ru* that criticized all of Shapyrashty for self-centeredness and neglecting other Kazakh descent groups in the post-independence period, were likely mistaking ‘tribalism’ for ‘nepotism.’ A group of Shapyrashty men in Uzynagash village collectively insisted that N. Nazarbayev had not done any exceptional goods to the ordinary Shapyrashty, but instead his status benefited his immediate relatives and loyal circle of people only. One of the respondents argued the following way: *“why did Nazarbayev build a new city of Astana farther away from his hometown? If he wished to make the Shapyrashty the center of political and economic development of our country, he would have solely contributed to the growth of Almaty region, where he and his tribe members historically come from. If people say that every single Shapyrashty was privileged under Nazarbayev, I think they are saying it out of envy.”* I believe that the bottom line of these observations lead to the conclusion that although N. Nazarbayev has regularly appointed fellow Shapyrashty to key state positions during his leadership that is assessed by other *ru* as an expression of tribalism, which can be the case to a certain degree, but lesser so than nepotism, because the majority of ordinary Shapyrashty were definitely not the beneficiary of his reign.

Moreover, the initiators of the erection of monuments for Qarasai Batyr in Almaty region seem to conceal the details of the fund, under which the financial and mechanical aspects were realized. It is unclear whether the Shapyrashty people have a public association, similar to other *ru* under examination, through which they implement their activities. If they have one, there is also no data on the internal structure of the *ru* association, its internal charter, whether there are any board members that are appointed or elected by fellow members. Therefore, the activities of

the Shapyrashty descent group seems to be the least ‘democratic’ so to speak and less transparent, in contrast to associations of Zhaghalbaily, Qanly or Shegir. The only hint that allows to assume the relevant association of the Shapyrashty, comes from the materials of the applied research conference, dedicated to the 420th anniversary of Qarasai Batyr, held in 2018 at Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, where along with the rector of the university and scholars, we also see the participation of the “chairman of the public association, State Movement ‘Ak Orda,’ Kairat Satybaldy,”²²⁵ who is a nephew of N. Nazarbayev, a Shapyrashty by descent. In turn, K. Satybaldy merits the organizers of the conference for holding such an event as it ensures an impetus to popularize and examine the legacies of Kazakh *batyrs*. In both cases, whether it is the monument of Qarasai Batyr in Kaskelen or organization of the research conference in honor of Qarasai, specific figures such as Bolat Nazarbayev or Kairat Satybaldy are featured as the direct stakeholders, without the collective involvement of their respective descent group association.

Conclusion

A myriad of monuments and memorial complexes perpetuate the reproduction of the nation on a daily basis, embodying a form of ‘banal’ nationalism. The conveyed messages, divergent as they may be, cater to both local and national audiences. In general, it is clear that Kazakh people attach great importance to their ancestors, which are celebrated in a variety of commemorative ways, including monuments, memorials, mosques, funeral repasts, busts and other that are illuminated in the public space. Therefore, the public organizations representing Kazakhs descent-groups are engaged in symbolically ‘reintroducing’ their seemingly overlooked *batyrs* into the societal realm. This serves as a means of showcasing their historical achievements in the pursuit of the safety and prosperity of Kazakh people. Moreover, these accomplishments

²²⁵ Kaznu.kz, “Память о батыре.” [*Memory about the Batyr*]. 2018, Retrieved from <https://welcome.kaznu.kz/ru/3/news/one/14616/>

are embodied in the concepts of sovereignty, independence, and freedom, with the aim of revitalizing traditions, culture, and language. The research challenged revolved around addressing the question of why contemporary, settled Kazakhs continue the practice of affiliating with descent group (*ru*) unions and participating in related events. This involves romanticizing the past through activities such as erecting monuments for warriors, publishing books, renewing genealogical knowledge, and utilizing legal public associations as platforms for conducting activities associated with descent groups. There were numerous instances available for scrutiny concerning the activities of descent groups on the ground, in particular, monuments in honor of various *batyrs* (warriors), distinguished throughout the country. Each descent group (*ru*) exhibits unique identifying traits, distinct characteristics and an individualized representation. Nevertheless, I selected five such cases that stood out in their distinctiveness while exhibiting certain resemblances and common patterns. Through conducting two stages of data collection in July and August of 2022 and November and December of 2023, I made visits to various cities and regions to meet with the interviewees and personally explore the sites associated with warriors. Thus, I executed semi-structured interviews with the founders of monuments associated with tribal identities and active members involved in coordinating events within descent-group organizations dedicated to the organization of such gatherings regularly.

Through an ethnographic study employing interviews, it was revealed that engagement in initiatives by *ru* or descent groups can be attributed to various reasons. Firstly, individuals from different Kazakh tribal backgrounds express a consistent desire to ‘reinvent’ and ‘rediscover’ their historical narratives, which have often been suppressed and distorted over decades. A prevalent trend in post-independent Central Asia involves a deliberate detachment from the Soviet past, leading members of descent groups to reconstruct their pre-colonial histories and traditions that were perceived to be corrupted by Russo-Soviet influence. This, in turn, serves as a justification for the efforts to ‘nationalize’ their state, which contains such goals as to uncover the forgotten warriors of their respective tribes (*ru*) and facilitate a deeper understanding of their

own identities. Furthermore, the enduring Soviet influence on commemorative practices in contemporary Kazakhstan becomes apparent in the remembrance of crucial historical figures and pivotal events. This is notable because Kazakhs in pre-colonial times have not hitherto had such traditions within their socio-cultural framework. The storyline presented by *ru* activists from different Kazakh tribes, residing in various parts of Kazakhstan, endorse the notion that the revered *batyrs*, irrespective of their descent background and the distinct periods in which they acted as warriors in history, were united in their purported shared objective of emancipating Kazakhs from or striving for the cause of their sovereignty.

The practice of '*Zheti Ata*' extends beyond the mere ability of enumerating one's direct seven grandfathers or refrain from biologically disadvantageous marriages; it encompasses a compilation of wisdom, reputation, and knowledge transmitted across generations. In essence, the phenomenon of *shejire* was ubiquitous in the Kazakh steppes, with its primary function encompassing not only the "facilitation of political alliances, social structuring, and lineage segmentation but also serving as a significant social guide and a potent discursive representation."²²⁶ Thus, the concept of 'imagined relatedness' among Kazakhs through the understanding and oral transmission of genealogy predated modernity and remains relevant even today. For instance, in certain areas of the country, such as the North of Kazakhstan, where the descent-based activities are less intense compared to southern or western regions, numerous elderly individuals, devoid of knowledge about their grandfathers, frequently contact the Center of Regional Archive for seeking information regarding archival documentation pertaining to their *ru*-based genealogy. Concurrently, others seek guidance on *shejire* due to the school requirement for their grandchildren to acquaint themselves with the lineage of their seven grandfathers. A subset of the elderly men grew up with a lack of knowledge about their lineage, as their fathers, adhering to communist ideologies, regarded the concepts of 'tribe' and 'genealogy' as primitive and backwards.

²²⁶ Saulesh Yessenova. 2005. "Routes and Roots' of Kazakh Identity: Urban Migration in Postsocialist Kazakhstan." *The Russian Review*, Vol. 64, (2005): 663.

In this context, the longstanding genealogical memory among Kazakhs, serving as a social guide in the steppes for centuries, proved resistant to eradication by the Soviets, particularly in private settings. Even though clan or tribal networks experienced reduction or elimination in the public domain, it is crucial to distinguish between the absence of a public presence and the absence of significance. Accordingly, the introduction of Soviet modernization did not successfully silence the ‘primordial’ tribe or clan system of the Kazakhs. The importance of genealogy, for instance, has consistently served as a socio-cultural marker for generations among Kazakhs. It currently facilitates a profound awareness that each Kazakh must be able to position himself within the historical context or the broader ‘family tree’ of the nation, adhering to cultural practices. Therefore, various descent groups are now actively involved in the contemporary realization of their broader family trees, aiming to enhance a more informed comprehension of their interconnectedness.

I also acknowledge that there was a weakening of descent-based ties among Kazakhs to a certain extent as a result of the processes of ‘sedentarization and collectivization.’ Nevertheless, the advent of socialism led to significant scarcities in essential daily goods, thereby fostering the creation of access networks, primarily through kin connections, to obtain economic, social, or political goods like housing, healthcare, and consumer durables. In essence, the conditions of the ‘shortage economy’ increased interpersonal interactions, particularly within in-groups, where mutual trust was more prevalent compared to interactions involving non-Kazakhs. These instances indicate that the Soviet elites strategically manipulated the concept of Kazakh identity through diverse measures to align it with official ideology and rationalize the Soviet/Russian responsibility for cultivating what was perceived as an ‘inferior’ population, namely, the Kazakhs. However, the unintended consequence of Soviet policies turned out to be the reinforcement and deepening of descent-based identity in Kazakhstan, functioning as an integral component of ‘Kazakhness.’

Currently, there is an intention to establish a legacy of descent groups in the form of knowledge for present and future generations, leaving a lasting imprint in history and validating their societal standing through the reclamation of ancestral achievements. Certain groups of people within the Kazakh population consider it crucial to identify with their respective descent group as a means of seeking insights from the past to address current challenges. In this context, tribal public associations also serve as *mutual-aid* societies, functioning as ‘*localized*’ civil society organizations that address socio-economic issues faced by their fellow tribesmen in areas where government’s involvement is limited. In this regard, the phenomenon of *ru*, emerging amidst imperfect social frameworks, proclaim the enduring significance of familial bonds to the global audience, which hold the potential to contribute significantly to social development by fostering cohesion and solidarity and hence the notion of *ru* might play a crucial role in revitalizing civil society amid profound internal challenges.”²²⁷ Addressing the willingness of individuals in exploring their genealogy and preserving the cultural heritage of their respective descent groups within Kazakhstan, and occasionally overseas, numerous discussions underscored the perceived advantage of community organizations in the form of Kazakh *ru*. With regard to social assistance, descent groups appear to persist in the practice of certain traditional phenomena, such as ‘*asar*,’ which endures to the present day. In times of need, individuals with considerable financial means extend assistance to those in need within the same descent group, with an anticipated reciprocal obligation from the beneficiary toward other kinsmen in the future. Besides, descent groups in Kazakhstan do not engage in physical conflicts with one another, eschewing the manifestation of so-called ‘tribal’ conflicts. Instead, they tackle intra-tribal concerns within urban, town, village, or other locales where their *ru* has a concentrated population. Therefore, Kazakh descent organizations actively resolve issues affecting their fellow tribesmen, often overlooked and disregarded by the government. This

²²⁷ Omar, Hakim. В чем сила казахского рода – историк. [A Historian on the Strength of Kazakh Genesis]. Original publication March 30, 2023. <https://www.caravan.kz/news/v-chem-sila-kazakhskogo-roda-istorik-922878/> (accessed April 14, 2023).

engagement in mutual aid encompasses the provision of social and financial assistance, particularly during important life-cycle events.

Before erecting monuments or any commemorative sites associated with *ru*, it is customary for *ru* leaders to undertake a research-driven exploration of their historical background and tribal warriors (*batyrs*). This process comprises engaging historians, genealogy researchers, and activists who dedicate their time to disclose not only the factual presence of these warriors but also to showcase their victories in battles within the public domain. The noteworthy observation lies in the recurrent organization of scientific conferences, which operate as mechanisms for amplifying the visibility of respective monuments to the public. These conferences achieve this not by only popularizing the monuments but also by substantiating their significance through scholarly participation. The comprehensive nature of these gatherings is further accentuated by the inclusion of a series of festive events, meal repasts, and traditional *kokpar* games, augmented by significant monetary rewards.

Alternatively, there is a concern on the part of the state that such commemorative activities of various Kazakh *ru* may impair its nation-building efforts and internal solidarity. In particular, the iterative discourse of the President is clearly articulated insofar as the state believes that there has been a growth in the practice of installing monuments dedicated to individuals with only regional recognition. In other words, allowing everyone to exclusively erect monuments for their ancestors could foster ‘tribalism’ and narrow-mindedness throughout the country. Both regional and state onomastic commissions were cautioned to prevent such occurrences tasked with averting unauthorized decisions. Therefore, when representatives from various Kazakh descent groups delve into their historical research, explore the life backgrounds and historical contributions of warriors that culminate in the establishment of commemorative sites, the state speciously perceives such endeavors as expressions of parochialism or regionalism. Since states “validate the power of their authority and legitimacy through the use of

commemorative artifacts,”²²⁸ it is clear why the government seeks to uphold its sole monopoly over the spatial and ideological niches of the country, feigning as if local actors are challenging the power of the state. In addition, there may be suspicions regarding the possible distortions of history, particularly by both professional and untrained history specialists of descent groups, who could obscure delicate aspects of a given tribe’s history while exaggerating other achievements, that poses a risk of potential misunderstanding of historical elements by future generations. Such selective interpretation and manipulation of historical narratives may hinder a comprehensive and accurate understanding of the past, contributing to misperceptions and gaps in knowledge among future generations. In this regard, the state emphasizes the importance of scholarly integrity and a balanced representation of historical events to foster a nuanced and truthful understanding of the complexities inherent in the history of descent groups and the broader Kazakh context.

Broadly speaking, the government expressed trepidation about the alleged expanding influence of what is referred to as ‘tribalism’ in Kazakhstan. However, these seemingly localized developments are, in reality, indicative of ongoing nation-building processes on the ground, according to the claims of the respondents. As a result, contemporary Kazakhs not only uphold traditional customs and practices, but also vigorously idealize the past, particularly of the pre-colonial era, by commemorating heroic warriors extensively in the public space. Through the romanticization of the *batyrs*, various Kazakh *ru* aspire to establish the notion of virtuous Kazakh warriors as the quintessence of the nation. These warriors are portrayed as individuals with a selfless perspective, prioritizing freedom, the defense of the land, and a readiness to engage in warfare against ‘Kazakh enemies,’ placing their own individual concerns beneath the interests of the Kazakh people or the nation.

²²⁸ Kulshat Medeuova, and Ermaganbetova Kuralai, M. Kikimbaev, D. Mel’nikov, Z. Naurazbaeva, A. Ramazanova, U. Sandybaeva, D. Tolgambaeva, and A. Tlepbergen. “Praktiki i mesta pamiati v Kazakhstane (strukturno-tipologicheskii obzor).” Astana, Kazakhstan: TOO Master Po, (2016): 58.

A more in-depth analysis reveals that the narratives behind the erected monuments emphasize the idea of nation-state, highlight the significance of lineage, its symbolic power and importance to the Kazakh people. It is essential to bear in mind about the existing elements of ‘tribal’ competition among various *ru* of Kazakhs. Nevertheless, this competition, firstly, coexists with their desire to connect their ‘historic’ ancestral warriors with the concept of the *nation-state*, and secondly, descent groups engage in competition while recognizing a shared identity as ‘all Kazakhs’ with a common history. This denotes that despite the observable elements of rivalry between the *ru*, they are not competing as separate nations; rather, they are operating as distinctive descent groups within the Kazakh identity. Thus, I contend that labeling the actions of tribal associations, as an expression of ‘tribalism’ that creates partitions in society, is a misrepresentation. Instead, from the collected data, I identify a fascinating form of hybridity, designating a shift from ‘tribal’ to ‘nation-state.’ In this transformation, the revered descent-group warriors are depicted as Kazakh heroes, emphasizing their significance for all Kazakhs rather than promoting the superiority of any specific tribe.

Some scholars claimed that the niche of nation-building is quite disputable, where there is “a contestation even among the titular ethnic majority,”²²⁹ in our case, Kazakhs. However, there is a contest over cultural landscape and ideological space not between the communities of various descent groups, but rather the state and the Kazakh *ru* associations. On the one hand, there is an officially sanctioned and acknowledged pantheon of heroes that are promoted on the state level. More specifically, the historical figures and events commemorated by the state across the nation span various epochs, ranging from the 10th century to the establishment of the Kazakh Khanate, the colonial periods under Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union, and extending into the post-independence era. The state exhibits a readiness to portray warriors, e.g. Kerey and Janibek Khans, Abylai Khan, Qabanbay and Bogenbai Batyrs, as the ancestors of spiritual unity and national distinctiveness, symbols of the unique military art and experience of the Kazakh people,

²²⁹ Rico Isaacs. “Nomads, Warriors and Bureaucrats: Nation-Building and Film in post-Soviet Kazakhstan.” *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 43, No. 3, (2015): 399.

embodiments of Kazakh nation's traditions, culture and national significance. They are perceived as instruments for instilling patriotism and serve both as sacred sites and touristic attractions. Therefore, the state venerates these figures as a means of presenting an imagined uninterrupted permanence of Kazakh statehood, thereby promoting an explicit historical narrative aligned with its nation-building objectives. However, public associations representing numerous descent groups actively seek to bring to light the stories of their respective historical ancestors (*batyrs*). These groups argue that their ancestors also played a role in fostering the continuity of modern Kazakhstan and, as such, deserve recognition and support from the State. It suggests that there is an advancement of local agendas. Yet, tribesmen seamlessly integrate their activities into the state's overarching narrative of 'national' heroes. Non-state local entities (descent groups) in Kazakhstan, manifested in the guise of public associations representing descent groups, endeavor to highlight warriors who have been either overlooked or inadequately acknowledged by the state. These entities believe that such individuals warrant due attention, thereby supplementing the state's narrative that extols Kazakh national heroes for their contributions to the establishment of contemporary Kazakhstan.

As regards the phenomenon of the *batyr*, it is asserted that a *batyr* is an individual characterized by a profound understanding of the 'art of war,' distinguished by diligence and achievements, serving as a leader and warrior, capable of self-sacrifice for the prosperity of the homeland and nation. The *batyr* is considered an embodiment of national culture and spirit. The monuments dedicated to various Kazakh batyrs from the pre-colonial era, renowned for their exceptional contributions in combatting adversaries, typically Western Mongol tribes, are predominantly crafted from granite. These structures serve as conduits to convey the enduring might and resilience of ancestral heroes who sacrificed their lives for the greater good – the Kazakh people. Such monuments also act as educational agents for current and future generations, perpetuating the narratives of heroic forebears who safeguarded their homeland and fought for freedom. The notions of land and freedom persist as enduring values for Kazakhs,

consistently emphasized by both state and local entities. However, there remains ambiguity regarding the specific lands preserved during that era, their contemporary spatial inclusion, and the nuanced implications of ‘fighting for freedom’ within that historical context.

One intriguing characteristic of monuments depicting batyrs, initiated by local actors, is the evident manifestation of the localization of warriors. This involves associations of descent groups establishing commemorative sites in regions that constitute the ancestral origins of the respective heroes. Various groups within the Kazakh *ru* exhibit a conceptual grasp of spatialization of the country, leading them to consider regional nuances in the execution of their memorialization activities.

An intriguing aspect arises in the interconnectedness and mutual reinforcement of the concepts of descent and lineage among the Kazakh people. Typically, individuals of Kazakh descent trace their lineage back to seven generations (forefathers) with identifiable or traceable identities. However, the foundation of their identification extends beyond this, being associated with their ancient ancestor who is the progenitor of the relevant descent group, whether factual or imagined. Despite the existence of intricate sub-divisions and lineages within these descent groups, my interviewees, irrespective of their affiliation with discrete sub-groups and lineages within a larger assembly, do not confine the acknowledgement of their senior kin solely to the seventh generation. Instead, they refer to their respective *ru*, such as Arghyn, Qanly, Zhaghalbaily, Besterek, or Shegir in a broader sense, considering them as their apical ancestors. Consequently, the initiation of the identification of these groups emanates from the grand genealogical knowledge. Although the biological connection to these earliest forefathers may not be tangibly discernible, it remains conceptualized as ‘imaginary.’

As far as the analysis of Sarke Batyr from Zhaghalbaily as a prominent figure of history is concerned, the concept of Sarke and his companions engaging in battles not solely on behalf of the inhabitants of Zhaghalbaily or affiliated descent groups within the Junior Horde, but also beyond the framework of their respective *Juz* conveys a broader narrative. This narrative

suggests that Sarke's protective endeavors extended beyond his immediate descent group and relatives to encompass the protection of Kazakhs from diverse geographic regions. Through such assertions, the people of Zhaghalbaily seek to underscore Sarke's significant contribution in safeguarding Kazakh communities at large. Consequently, the celebration of Sarke's achievements is posited not only as a matter of importance to Zhaghalbaily *per se*, but also as a source of collective pride for all Kazakhs. As regards the monument of Sarke, despite the diverse endeavors to replicate or reimagine his physiognomy, the monument conspicuously features prototypical traits associated with Kazakh males, resembling those found in numerous other monuments across Kazakhstan.

Moreover, the Zhaghalbaily's descent group's initiative to revise and modernize their grand genealogy has grounding, given the existence of more than two prevalent versions that required systematic re-organization. This effort aimed to establish the most accurate and reliable historical data concerning the descent group, free from substantial errors and distortions. The collective financial resources of their association were directed towards prioritizing the research of their genealogical history, recognizing the considerable financial and temporal investments required for engaging a genealogy expert to conduct the necessary examinations, which inherently demanded a significant amount of time.

The ongoing nation-building processes evident on the ground aligning with the state's de facto undertakings are discernible. This alignment is notably apparent in the strategic placement of Sarke Batyr's monument symbolically along the highway near the Russian borders (Orenburg) and the renaming of the former Russian-named village of Aleksandrovka after the Kazakh composer Shamshi Qaldayaqov, who hails from the Zhaghalbaily background. The public declaration of the associations' goals, emphasizing the restoration of their historical narrative underscores the Zhaghalbaily's active reimagining of certain historical records pertaining to the lineage and history of their ancestors. This is manifested through the systematic

organization of genealogical records and the rediscovery of *batyr's* achievements, all while navigating potential sentiments or accusations of tribalism.

A discernible pattern emerges wherein, akin to the members of Zhaghalbaily and Shegir, counterparts within the Qanly *ru* exhibit a shared commitment. This commitment is characterized by a steadfast resolve to establish a solid scientific foundation before articulating any public statements concerning their ancestral achievements and territorial claims for symbolic purposes within contemporary Kazakhstan. A notable characteristic of the Qanly documentary is the inclusion of several non-Qanly participants, presumably engaged due to their expertise in matters concerning the ancient Kangui State. Figures such as Talas Omarbekov and Aleksandr Podushkin, distinguished scholars and external observers, contribute to the legitimization of Qanly's beliefs through their very presence and auxiliary discourse, thus, providing an additional layer of credibility to the documentary.

However, the alignment between Podushkin's research activities of the early Kangui State and how the current Qanly people perceive or represent themselves remains ambiguous. The rationale behind their public association's annual allocation of financial resources to the aforementioned scholar is not explicitly clarified. While other descent groups like Zhaghalbaily, Besterek, or Shegir celebrate the legendary accomplishments of their warriors, emphasizing their significance in the formation of Kazakh identity, Qanly's approach appears rather distinct. They attempt to delve deeper into history, endeavoring to establish relational links with the historic Kangui State. This effort is aimed at showcasing that their 'imagined' ancestors played a foundational role in the civilization now recognized as independent Kazakhstan.

The emphasis played by the Qanly people on illuminating the historical achievements of their ancestors, as evidenced by their territorial presence in modern terrain of Kazakhstan and the recognition of notable figures like Al-Farabi and Shoje Bi, aligns with the overarching argument that the so-called 'tribal' activists are fundamentally undertaking to integrate their descent groups within the broader 'national' narrative. The Qanly case, in particular, underscores the

notion of continuity in Kazakhstan's history and its contemporary geographic territory, drawing connections with ancient states such as Qanly and Uisun. The significance of the past in shaping identity remains a consistent theme across all the studied descent groups, including the Qanly. The transmission of historical knowledge about Qanly occurs through various mediums, including informative CD discs, a diverse array of books, brochures, and regular meetings where they engage in discussions on relevant topics and set their agenda. The source of their identification appears to be profoundly rooted, with present-day Qanly tracing their lineage back to the ancient state of Kangui. Additionally, they envision themselves as the descendants of notable historical figures, such as the philosopher Al-Farabi and Turkan Hatun, the ruler of Khorezm, both purportedly believed to originate from Qanly. It is noteworthy that these individuals are also acknowledged as part of the Kazakh heritage by the state.

Also, professor Podushkin, drawing from his personal experience, had the opportunity to partake in one of the *qurultais* (grand assemblies), organized by the Qanly group. Particularly, the assembly extended invitations to members of other *ru*, a gesture perceived positively by Podushkin. During one of such assemblies, individuals from Dulat, Qonyrat, and some other groups were present not merely participants, but were accorded the status of honorable guests, distinguished by being adorned in *shapans*, the traditional Kazakh male attire, as a symbol of respect. Thus, professor Podushkin acknowledges that while such instances may be considered exceptions rather than the norm, they nonetheless indicate a level of maturity within certain descent groups, like Qanly, offering a glimmer of hope for further harmony among various Kazakh *ru*.

In contrast to preceding cases of Zhaghalbaily and Qanly in the western and southern regions of the country, the research site of Qulsary Batyr in the northern regions stands out due to its unique geographical location, the composite nature of the memorial site and the effort to establish connections to one of the most influential Kazakh Khans, Abylai. Qulsary, recognized not only as a *batyr* but also as a saint, reputed for healing people's sorrows and hardships,

distinguishes itself further. Unlike conventional monuments dedicated to historical figures with the '*batyr*' status, such as Sarke or Aqpan, Qulsary Batyr's site does not portray the typical masculine hero on horseback wielding a spear. Instead, the architectural design of the site, featuring a modernized grave structure with a rooftop and small benches inside, suggests intent to facilitate prayer for visitors. The preference towards building a *mazar* rather than a monument was firstly driven by the religiosity of Qulsary, though the narrative about his personality promotes the notion of a warrior (*batyr*) first, then only of a saint. Interestingly, a significant link is discerned between the museum complex, known as the 'Residence of Abylai Khan' in Petropavlovsk, built in 2007, and the monuments honoring Qulsary batyr and Quleke batyr. Both individuals belong to the Atyghai lineage of Arghyn and are directly associated with Abylai Khan's initiatives during that period. The state complemented these endeavors by endorsing research aimed at rediscovering the existence of Kazakh elites, exemplified by Abylai Khan's residence, on the territory of modern Petropavlovsk, formerly known as Qyzylzhar.

While the case of Qulsary and other historical figures from the north undergoes analogous legitimation through research conferences with scholars, a unique dimension emerges in the necessity to prove to skeptical 'ethnic others,' particularly Russians, that various Kazakh descent groups residing in Petropavlovsk or the north are not outsiders but integral inheritors of the land. This led local non-state actors to initiate efforts to disseminate information about the presence of numerous ancestral *mazars* throughout northern Kazakhstan, demonstrating geographic contiguity, which is another reason why Qulsary Batyr was commemorated in the form of a mazar. In addition to emphasizing the martial attributes of tribal ancestors, which is a standardized means of displaying a hero's attainments, which were engaged in conflicts against various adversaries of Kazakhs, these figures are concurrently venerated as saints. As warriors from different *ru* are recognized not only for their military prowess but also for their reputed ability to heal individuals through extraordinary powers that further legitimizes their warriors'

physical capabilities, their descendants seek to convey specific messages regarding the significance of these individuals for the overall development of the Kazakh community.

In a manner akin to other instances of commemoration, a prominent representative of Shegir descent group Aqpan Batyr's historical tribute, acknowledging him as a warrior who liberated Kazakhs from external adversaries, such as the Khanate of Kokand and engaged in conflicts against the Jungars, is also marked by celebration from his direct *ru* descendants. Much like initiatives undertaken by other *ru*, such as Zhaghalbaily (Junior Horde), Qanly (Senior Horde), and Atyghai (Middle Horde), members of the Shegir *ru* (Senior Horde) have engaged in research studies focused on their batyr as well. The objective was to establish a well-founded basis for the subsequent and justified erection of commemorative sites, including monuments, dedicated to their respective heroic figures. It is noteworthy and intriguing that, in these instances, members of specific descent groups are actively involved in conducting essential research works. Subsequently, their aim is to persuade not only fellow members of their *ru* but also individuals residing in the region, and sometimes representatives of other ethnic groups, as seen in Petropavlovsk. The overarching goal is to substantiate both the historical existence and the significant accomplishments of their tribal warriors and *batyrs*, with the intention of immortalizing their heroic deeds via illuminating them to the public.

Apart from the main case studies above, this dissertation work initially included the study of the newly emerging public association of a young in terms of its age, Besterek *ru*. It drew attention as to conducting a research into the early social processes of the Besterek, particularly the mobilization and unity of group members for a common purpose, which could provide valuable insights into the mechanics of such associations. The observation that, over time, the Besterek public association has remained inactive despite setting a number of goals, such as building a monument in honor of their founding ancestor in Taraz, sheds light on certain challenges faced by such groups. The case of Besterek serves as an illustrative example, highlighting the critical role and significance of financial resources in realizing the agenda of

descent group associations. In this instance, the lack of individual contributions for commemorative activities has resulted in plans remaining confined to paper, despite the allocation of specific land for the intended monument. Additionally, the absence of expressed concerns or a proactive response from affiliates regarding the inaction underscores the complexities surrounding the effectiveness and ‘feared dynamics’ of such public associations from the perspective of the state. Moreover, the analysis touches upon the nuanced relationship between descent group associations and the state’s perceptions of alleged ‘uncontrolled’ aspirations of the former. The apparent lack of initiative on the part of the Besterek public association to demonstrate agency and implement their local agenda suggests a dynamic wherein external factors, possibly including state influence or expectations, play a role in shaping the activities and efficacy of such groups.

While the celebration of *batyrs*’ achievements through the erection of grand monuments by their respective descendants might initially appear as an expression of tribalism, the discourse from interviewees reveals a partially opposite perspective. Many respondents from different tribes across various regions emphasize that descent-based commemoration practices are not only welcomed but also serve *national* interests. According to them, these practices specifically aid Kazakhs in exploring their ‘forgotten’ history that is yet to be fully unveiled. In this light, the efforts to honor and commemorate ancestral heroes are seen as contributing to a broader national narrative and historical understanding rather than solely reflecting ‘tribal’ sentiments. In a broader context, the existence of monuments in public spaces dedicated to esteemed ancestors, such as *batyrs*, serves a rhetorical function by symbolizing exemplary leadership for their present-day descendants. These monuments stand as tangible representations of the virtues, courage, and qualities exhibited by the revered ancestors, encouraging their descendants to view them as models to emulate. The monuments, therefore, play a role in shaping collective identity and fostering a sense of continuity between past and present, inspiring present generations to uphold the ideas and values embodied by their forebears. Historians and specialists in *shejire*

within the studied descent groups emphasize that *ru*-based commemoration across Kazakhstan serves to *complement* existing monuments for batyrs built by the state. They question why monuments by descent groups should not be erected and challenged the limited recognition of Kazakh *batyrs* to select a few like Qabanbay or Bogenbai, who are widely commemorated nationwide. Instead, they argue that establishing such sites for various *batyrs* would contribute significantly to the understanding and appreciation of Kazakh history. Activists within the studied *ru* passionately engage in commemorative activities dedicated to events and personalities of historical significance in their respective regions. Their advocacy extends beyond local recognition, as they fervently promote the inclusion of their tribal warriors into the national pantheon of heroes. Moreover, these activists celebrate their respective historical figures not merely as regional or *ru*-specific champions, but as ‘Kazakh heroes,’ who played a vital role in shaping the very existence of contemporary Kazakhstan. Therefore, their efforts underscore a broader aspiration to integrate the narratives of their descent groups into the larger tapestry of Kazakh national history.

The fieldwork activities brought clarity to the question of whether descent groups across Kazakhstan engage in *tribal/ru* endeavors to formulate an ideological agenda alongside existing ‘state’ ideology. The exploration revealed that the notion of ideology plays a significant role, emerging as a relevant variable in the course of field research and numerous interviews. The practices of descent groups in this context are seen as potentially influenced by a desire for a distinct ideological framework, either due to dissatisfaction with its absence or a perception of its weak effectiveness in bolstering national (*ethnic Kazakh*) interests. This accentuates the complexity of ideological dynamics within descent groups and their interactions with the broader state ideology in Kazakhstan. Despite doubts about the effectiveness of a state-led ideology, manifestations of the so-called ‘national ideology’ are evident *on the ground* through various forms such as monuments for *batyrs*, documentary CD discs, detailing the history of descent group origins, booklets, leaflets, mosques, memorial complexes and other types of mediums.

While local non-state actors might not explicitly perceive their descent-group activities as the exercise of an ideology *per se*, they are, in fact, contributing significantly to the collective strengthening of the ‘Kazakh’ factor. Their engagement in the study of genealogies, exploration of the Kazakh historical warriors, and mutual support through activities like mutual-aid societies all contribute to the broader enhancement of the Kazakh identity.

Notably, several interviewees highlighted the impact of the era of Nazarbayev’s reign in Kazakhstan, suggesting the establishment of a *ru*-based ideology that primarily served the interests of a ‘super-clan,’ representing the Shapyrashty *ru* from the Senior Horde. This perceived ideology allegedly played a role in legitimizing the presidential (re)-elections of Nazarbayev and providing a rationale for the appointment of senior government statesmen from the Shapyrashty *ru*. The agenda associated with this descent-based ideology was reportedly implemented through nationwide celebrations that specifically honored tribal warriors from Shapyrashty, with Qarasai Batyr being a famous example. The inclusion of other warriors such as Sauryq Batyr and Nauryzbai Batyr in these celebrations further emphasized the prominence given to the Shapyrashty *ru* within this ideological framework.

The invention of traditions was systematically implemented by the people of Shapyrashty *ru*, especially in spreading the deeds of Qarasai Batyr to the society. For instance, the methodology employed by one of the authors on Qarasai Batyr in formulating inferences regarding the youth of Qarasai Batyr and characterizing his physical stature as ‘large’ and ‘powerful,’ accompanied by an illustrative yet imaginary examples, raises questions. In contrast to other descent groups that typically emphasize the historical accomplishments of their warriors in battles and their role in shaping the concept of ‘Kazakhness,’ the Shapyrashty people distinguish themselves by extending beyond a straightforward celebration of Qarasai’s achievements against the Oirats, Kazakh enemies. In doing so, they incorporated personal imaginative elements pertaining to the anthropometry of their hero, Qarasai, a feature that lacks empirical verification. This observation underlines the necessity of critically evaluating historical

narratives and acknowledging the potential inclusion of imaginative embellishments in the portrayal of historical figures.

This consequently fosters the realization that a considerable number of interviewees from different *ru*, who castigated the entire Shapyrashty for perceived self-centeredness and alleged disregard for other Kazakh descent groups in the post-independence era, may have been mistakenly conflating the notions of ‘tribalism’ with ‘nepotism.’ A collective assertion from a group of Shapyrashty men, interviewed in Uzunagash village, posited that N. Nazarbayev had not rendered exceptional benefits to the regular Shapyrashty populace. Instead, it was contended that his status as a President primarily advantaged his immediate relatives and a selected loyal circle. This leads to the inference that, although N. Nazarbayev consistently appointed fellow Shapyrashty individuals to pivotal state positions during his leadership – an action perceived by other *ru* as reflective of tribalism to some extent – it leans more toward nepotism. This conclusion stems from the empirical observation that the majority of ordinary Shapyrashty had not benefited from his tenure.

Concerning the organizational structures of descent groups, those examined within the scope of this dissertation operate as official public associations, duly registered under the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Kazakhstan. It is pertinent to emphasize that the actions of these *ru* may appear somewhat discreet owing to the adoption of a distinctive name for their *ru*-based public association. However, it is essential to note that the activities of these associations are observable within the public domain through the organization of assemblies, research conferences, erection of monuments, mosques, and other commemorative sites. Also, each organization has its members that contain representatives in various parts of the country. Regional associates of these associations, in turn, are responsible for disseminating information, principal ideas, or details about upcoming events within the organization to their respective fellows, including the interested youth. It is crucial to underscore that the regional representatives perform their duties on a voluntary basis, and thus, there are typically no

economic interests associated with holding such positions. Regarding the associations' budget, there exists a conceptual agreement on the collection of contributions; however, there is generally no stringent requirement specifying the precise amount that each member must deposit. Such flexibility attributes to the consideration by the organization's elders for the varying financial capabilities of its members and therefore reluctance to put burden on members. A common guiding principle entails that more affluent members contribute significantly larger funds, and in acknowledgement of their substantial support, their names are often recognized with titles such as '*sponsors*' or '*for great contribution.*' These financial resources are then allocated for various purposes, including the realization of *ru*-related events, such as the annual organization of councils (*qurultais*), provision of support to socio-economically vulnerable fellow associates, and conducting of research endeavors associated with their descent group. In some cases, the predominant share of expenses linked to grand undertakings, such as the construction of monuments, dedicated to warriors or the orchestration of elaborate ceremonies in homage to ancestors, is generally shouldered by prosperous individuals (*e.g. Toleuov Amangos from Zhaghalbaily, Qayipbekov Aset from Shegir*). It also draws attention that such sponsors normally maintain direct affiliations with the publicly celebrated ancestor, exemplified by Aqpan Batyr from the Shegir descent group or Sarke Batyr from the Zhaghalbaily.

The quality of information regarding the organizational structure of public associations affiliated with descent-groups appears to be somewhat generic, as internal procedures and regulations remain undisclosed to external parties, including members of other *ru* and researchers. Chairpersons of these associations refrain from divulging detailed information regarding budgetary allocations, expenses, or the actual collection of fees. Each descent group typically possesses its own charter that governs member relationships, although these documents are not readily accessible. The available data pertaining to the structure of these associations primarily encompasses the appointment and election of members, the designation of regional delegates or representatives, and overarching plans for organizing grand assemblies (*e.g. Qanly's*

annual *qurultai*), publishing books, and deliberating potential plans for constructing commemorative sites. Among the examined associations, it is noteworthy that only the *Keldibek-Baiterek* (Qanly) association employs the practice of recording discussed issues through the crafting of minutes, a procedure similar to state agencies. This method is employed as a means of monitoring and ensuring the implementation of proposed ideas and plans. In contrast, other associations tend to adopt a more conceptual approach under a gentlemen's agreement, wherein the collection of funding and its utilization are characterized by ad hoc arrangements.

During the data collection processes through interactions with diverse tribesmen, specifically esteemed elders and *ru* activists, tangible materials of great value were shared with me. These provisions included invitation brochures for descent-group meetings, educational booklets, historical books on descent groups, scientific documentation substantiating the existence of tribal warriors, and even comprehensive genealogical volumes. Having analyzed the vast first-hand materials, I contended that the grand narrative of these associations conveys an auxiliary objective, as the notion of 'complementing' Kazakh history implies a clear message that individuals within these respective organizations remain firmly situated within the broader Kazakh dimension, adhering to the principle of unity. For instance, although the Qanly *ru* convened its inaugural nationwide assembly in 2009 and prepared a brochure that encapsulated their vision and objectives during that period – documentation I was fortunate to obtain during my fieldwork – I am intrigued by the manner in which this descent group characterizes its tribal (*ru*) activities as a *complement* to the national cause. Their perspective posits that through a profound exploration of their tribe's history, they can contribute to an enhanced collective understanding of Kazakhs in history, while fostering more accurate genealogical knowledge. Furthermore, the assertion regarding compliance with an evolutionary path by transitioning from a 'tribal' mentality and psychology to a 'national' one is invigorating. This suggests that representatives of the Qanly association view such *ru*-based activism as an indispensable stage in achieving the ultimate national Kazakh cause.

I am also enthralled by the amalgamation of certain ancient warriors, statesmen, great rulers, or their wives into the list based on their purported Qanly-descent background. Such claims may stem from Qanly *ru*'s alleged references to their ancient ancestors, Kangui. However, the manifestation of the invention of traditions in this manner potentially serves to enhance and solidify the historical role of the descent in the formation of modern-day Kazakhs. In conclusion, I note that the initial endeavor to compile diverse data about Qanly and present them in a structured manner was undertaken for educational purposes, targeting both members and the broader audience. However, this effort was not devoid of numerous inconsistencies and far-fetched statements, despite its genuine interest in providing a comprehensive exploration of the subject.

Similarly, an interesting aspect of the depiction of Sarke Batyr and his achievements is exemplified through the portrayal of the head-to-head clash between Abilmansur (Abylai Khan) and the Jungar warrior in the film 'Nomad: The Warrior.' In this cinematic representation, Abylai receives the blessing of Abulhair Khan and is designated as the Kazakh fighter to engage in combat against the Jungar adversary, Charysh Batyr. Similarly, a documentary video with a parallel narrative recounts that Sarke Batyr, after gaining approval from the elders, engaged in a solo battle against a Jungar warrior and emerges victorious at the square of Qarasiyr. This triumph is celebrated as the '*great victory of the Kazakh people.*' In certain aspects, I find it intriguing that the structure of the documentary bears resemblance to that of Qanly, particularly in terms of its organization, which involves interviews with fellow members of the descent group, collaboration with researchers, on-site visits with a group of relatives, and the inclusion of elements related to the 'invention of traditions' surrounding the 'greatness' and, consequently, the 'importance' of their respective *ru* in shaping contemporary Kazakhs. While the Qanly group emphasizes the importance of great figures such as Al-Farabi as 'theirs,' the Zhaghalbaily position their Sarke Batyr on an equal footing with prominent Abylai Khan.

During the data collection period, which spanned several stages, I acquired a diverse array of firsthand tangible materials, including rare brochures, leaflets, booklets, books, documentaries, video interviews, songs, poetic verses, and CD discs. These materials were created for informative purposes, catering to both a localized audience and a broader mass audience. Such intellectual and creative mechanisms represent initial attempts at ‘restoring’ memory through the exploration of the history, notable figures, and achievements of a specific descent group within the broader context of Kazakh civilizational development. The valuable video materials from these associations, providing insights into their gatherings and discussions, revealed an evident enthusiasm among members of various descent groups. It became apparent that many lacked even basic knowledge regarding the history and genealogy of their respective *ru*. Furthermore, it was clear that all descent groups were motivated to present findings that illuminated their role and status in the formation of contemporary Kazakhstan. Examples include the appropriation of great historical individuals like Al-Farabi by Qanly, positioning their *batyrs* on equal footing with Kazakh Khans to emphasize their significance and value, as observed in Zhaghalbaily, or establishing the very existence and justifying contributions vis-à-vis other ethnic groups in the northern parts of Kazakhstan, as demonstrated by Atyghai (Arghyn). However, the more crucial aspect lies in the acknowledgement by these descent groups that their activities in publishing books, producing documentaries, or erecting monuments for their *batyrs* are supplementary rather than discordant to the rhetoric and ideology propagated by the state. They articulate their viewpoints by contending that independent studies into the history of a specific descent group, the life stories and achievements of their warriors, and the actualization of their *ru*’s genealogy *contribute* to the collective awareness of the people and, consequently, the state. This contribution is seen as providing a diverse range of evidence regarding the history of past nomadic Kazakhs.

In sum, the sheer concepts of *ru* and *batyr* appear to be reified representations owing their existence to pre-Soviet imperial and even more, Soviet, ethnological scholarship. The fact that

these concepts have in the post-Soviet period emerged to eminent social relevance is remarkable and makes the topic of this study a valuable contribution to scholarship on the political culture of Kazakhstan and hence, Eurasia. The current research was guided by the inquiry into why a substantial number of citizens in contemporary Kazakhstan, who hail from an ethnic Kazakh background, but leading lifestyles markedly divergent from the traditionally nomadic, animal raising, bellicose lifestyles of the past, invest considerable efforts in constructing the ‘memory’ of *batyrs* (historical or mythical heroes) through the establishment of memorials and civic organizations that commemorate *ru* (clan or tribe) affiliations. Thus, building my study on tangible primary materials (textual, pictorial, various media-based), discursive materials (interview texts, scholarship, pseudo-scholarship) and to a minor degree, observation, I put forward a thesis that irrespective of allegations that the fuss around *batyrs* testifies to socio-political or ideological tribalism, the findings from the ongoing discourses suggest that those who support the cult of ‘their’ *batyrs* do not mean to adhere to tribalism of any kind, but view their activities as an input to the re-establishing of social morality on the *ru* level, which contributes to the nation-building processes (or is even, according to some, a necessary step towards it) and supports the state effort of uniting all Kazakhs.

The ideas of ‘localization,’ and more to the point, ‘territorialization’ seem to be major issues that underly the cult of *batyrs* in several aspects. Firstly, numerous challenges raised by ethnic Russians inhabiting in northern areas of Kazakhstan on the necessity of erecting commemorative sites for Kazakh figures, their importance and relevance on those lands, are being addressed by the idea of “the graves of our ancestors” that is being appropriated in north Kazakhstan through the otherwise “atypical” mode of memorializing, namely, through saint/*batyr* mausoleums, not (only) horseman statues. Secondly, the question where the appropriate veneration place of the *batyr* is – either birthplace or venue of great deeds, is contested, which suggests the significance of such debate. In addition, the renaming of streets and more so, the “occupying of public space,” primarily along routes rather than next to modern

settlements through planting monuments is an interesting scrutiny. In particular, the genuine intention of *ru*-based associations in delivering the undistorted history to their contemporaries and the next generations by commemorating the achievements of *batyrs* at venues of deeds is evident. At the same time, further research needs to be conducted on whether *ru* associations erect sites of remembrance outside cities and away from public sight deliberately to avoid the criticism of the state.

Moreover, some of the highlights of the study include the desire to raise *ru*-based activities on a “scholarly” level, at all cost, including fake scholarship, the tacit imitation of Soviet-style cult practices, and the trickling down of Kazakhstani presidential cult into the *batyr* cult. The activities of associations representing various descent groups can be evaluated within the framework of the grand question in identity research, in particular, is it about delineating “us” against the outside, or about stabilizing “us” inside, or both. Although it is an old debate in identity studies, similar to the debate of fluidity, hybridity, ambiguity, I think the enterprises of Kazakh descent groups, expressed through the establishment of commemoratives and civic organizations largely aim at stabilizing “us” inside, given the recurring discourse of the respondents on the so-called prevalence of the Shapyrashty *ru* that has been purportedly advanced at the expense of all-Kazakh revival of history, culture, traditions, and language. Thus, the idea of making up for lost time through expanding the knowledge on the histories of *ru* and celebrating respective heroes, not only stabilizes the idea of “us” inside, but also ultimately acts as a means of delineating “us” against the outside via maintenance of *ru*-based activities and tributing the heroic accomplishments and sacrifice of the *batyrs* in the cultural space.

Although the scope of this research is limited to five case studies from various geographic areas of Kazakhstan, the implications of this study open up an avenue for future research and may be taken into account by state ideologues in reconsidering their approach on nation-building processes and maintaining it in concert with the local actors, since the endeavors

of the latter are argued to corroborate to the single ideological space of the country, which is what the state is seeking to achieve.

Glossary

Amal küni – celebration of the arrival of spring by Kazakhs, predominantly in Western regions of Kazakhstan

Aitys – improvised oral poetry, poetic competition

Akim – mayor of districts or cities

Akimat – official residence of the mayor of districts or cities

Alash Orda – Kazakh provisional government, founded in 1917, was part of the Russian Republic and Soviet Union

Amanat – pledge, security

Amengerlik – one of the Kazakh traditions, when a widow had to marry one of her husband's brothers to resolve the issue of the father's absence

As – feast, funeral repast

Asar – a provision of collective voluntary help among Kazakhs

Ata – grandfather, ancestor

Aqsaqal – a respected and wise elder

Babá – forefather, great ancestor

Bai – a term to denote rich individuals among Kazakhs

Bata – a verbal blessing, usually provided by the elders, seniors or parents

Batyrs – heroes, warriors

Awlie – saint, holy

Barymta – a steppe code, referring to the nomadic practice of raids to capture valuables

Bi – an esteemed judge, advisor

Horde – the division of the Kazakh Khanate into three hordes: the Junior, the Middle and the Senior, with allocated territories

Halyk – a term that refers to the general public

Imam – a spiritual figure and religious leader, who manages a mosque

Jüz – a Kazakh term for labeling the division of the Kazakh Khanate into three hordes

Khan – a Turko-Mongol title given to rulers and officials in Central Asia

Kökpar – the Kazakh national equestrian sports with an emphasis on goat-picking

Kolkhoz – a collective farm in the former Soviet Union

Mangilik El – the state-led national idea, which literally means “Eternal Country,” referring to the ancience of Kazakhstan

Maslikhat – a local representative body in Kazakhstan

Mazar – a shrine or enshrined tomb

Mission civilisatrice – the rationale for colonization or intervention seeming to accelerate modernity

Nepotism – the practice by which power-holders favor close relatives and friends by providing them with jobs

Oblast – a term to denote an administrative region in Kazakhstan

Oralman – an old term used by Kazakh authorities to describe ethnic Kazakh repatriates

Pantheon of heroes – the registry of recognized Kazakh national heroes or state defenders

Qandas – a new term used by Kazakh authorities to describe ethnic Kazakh repatriates that stresses the idea of blood relation

Qalyn mal – bridewealth, dowry price

Qurultai – a general assembly of people, which used to relate to nomadic political and military assemblies

Raison d’être – French for ‘reason for being’

Ru – belonging to a certain group of people, based on descent

Shapan – a spacious robe, Kazakh national dress

Shejire – genealogy, genealogical tree

Shejireshi – genealogy specialist

Tenge – a monetary unit and official currency of Kazakhstan

The Black bone – the subjects, ordinary people, non-noble

The White bone – hereditary ruling class, aristocratic descendants of Genghis Khan among Kazakhs as well as individuals that trace their ancestry back to prophet Muhammad and his descendants, which among Kazakhs are known under the name of Suids/Seids and Qozhas/Khodjas

Ulus Jochi – the Golden Horde, the medieval state, managed by Jochi, Genghis Khan's eldest son

Zhyrau – poetic singer, singer of war campaigns

Zhayiq – a Kazakh term to denote the river Ural

Zhem – a Kazakh term to denote the river Emba

Zheti Ata – the Kazakh tradition that obligates every person, especially males, to recite their direct seven ancestors to maintain family line

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Appendices

A. Questions asked from respondents, representing Shegir, Qanly, Atyghai, Zhaghalbaily and Besterek descent groups (*ru*) in semi-structured interviews.

1. Do you know whether there is an official national identity in Kazakhstan?
2. If yes (to the previous question), do you find the national identity, promoted by the state, to be consistent or ambiguous? Why?
3. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the national identity in Kazakhstan?
4. Do you believe that having a sub-ethnic (*ru*) identity helps you in socio-economic and/or political domains, as in the times of your nomadic ancestors, who relied on genealogy as a comprehensive guide in the steppe? Why or why not?
5. What is the rationale behind participating at tribal events such as the construction of monuments for one's *ru*-based heroes, organization of *qurultais* (*assemblies*), feasts, writing or rewriting of *ru* genealogies, and so on?
6. Why did you come to this monument/*qurultai*/event?
7. What do you think about this statue? Do you approve that they built it?
8. Do you visit other statues, *qurultais*, commemorated by other *ru*? Which ones, and why?
9. Why do you think people attach some values to their tribes? Why is it important to be a member of such tribal union?
10. How do you get to know whether there is a tribal event to be organized (for example, via messengers like WhatsApp, a website, or some other forms of liaison)?
11. Is having a sub-ethnic (*ru*) identity in the form of a tribe, on top of having an ethnic belonging, a component of Kazakhness or rather an unrelated separate entity?
12. Has being a member of 'X tribe (*ru*)' helped you in life? Has your tribe (*ru*) helped you when you needed it? Have you helped people in your tribe (*ru*)?
13. Why do you think your *ru* is a 'great' one? What is its greatness about?

B. Questions asked from respondents, representing Shapyrashty descent group (*ru*) in semi-structured interviews.

1. Do you think people from Shapyrashty *ru* became 'prosperous' and 'flourishing' in the era of Nursultan Nazarbayev's tenure years?
2. Some people from various Kazakh descent groups (*ru*) argued that Shapyrashty people supposedly put forward the idea about their 'unique' contribution to the making of independent Kazakhstan and modern Kazakhs? Do you agree with such statement?
3. Have you or your relatives/friends/colleagues benefited personally from being a member of Shapyrashty *ru* then and now? What privileges/disadvantages did you gain as a result of being a representative of Shapyrashty *ru*?
4. Was there the so-called ideological 'dominance' of Shapyrashty *ru* in Kazakhstan over the last 20-25 years?
5. Is there a difference that exists between 'ordinary' and 'elite' Shapyrashty people, if any? Do you think the close circle of Nursultan Nazarbayev was formed on the basis of tribalism or nepotism?
6. What are some of the *batyrs* from Shapyrashty, except for Qarasai? Do you know other renowned warriors from the same *ru*?
7. Is there any internal grand assembly (*qurultai*) among the people of Shapyrashty? If yes, do you participate at those occasions? Why, why not?