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## THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT FOR THE PROBLEMS OF MODERNIZATION OF THE PUBLIC CONSCIOUSNESS AND CULTURAL MEMORY FOR KAZAKHSTANI SOCIETYA

*This article attempts to indicate some problems that, in our opinion, actually exist within the modern post-Soviet states and to highlight the factors that hinder and restrain the processes of modernization of the public consciousness. It is clear that each of them requires a more detailed review and reasoning with the help of additional extensive and diversified knowledge of the sources, i.e. in-depth argumentation. However, the limited content of the article prohibits this. In addition, the main focus of the article seeks to highlight the key concerns which are socially significant and at the same time are controversial aspects of the current developmental practices of the post-Soviet independent states. These problems are many and diverse. In this regard, it is quite possible that the aim to raise not just one, but a number of such questions in this article will be perceived as a kind of chaotic oversaturation of the problem. Nevertheless, this is due to the willingness to "discuss many disturbing issues," albeit in a staged manner, and sometimes with rather broad brushstrokes. This article considers the historical genealogy, context, and content for the problems of the modernization of the public consciousness and cultural memory within Kazakhstani society. It emphasizes that reflections and stereotypes of the traditional agrarian mentality expands their niches in the socio-cultural space of Kazakhstan. The success of such an "intervention" is majorly, if not overwhelmingly, conditioned by the social structure's peculiarities in modern society and, in particular, by the processes of marginalization and impoverishment of wide population segments (which is typical for all post-Soviet states). All of the above is legitimized by the symbolic resources found in historical memory, the digital environment, media, and areas of discourse which solidify symmetrically the informational matrix structures of the traditional sociocultural context.*

**Key words:** *identity, nation, tribalism, historical memory, nomadism, nomadic culture, history of Kazakhstan, modernization of public consciousness, marginalization, impoverishment.*

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THE STATIST philosophy of the Republic of Kazakhstan reflected in both its constitution and declared strategic projects is focused on building a very modernized society. In the context of modern civilizing criteria and notions in general, as well as practices of the developed world in particular, this implies the creation of a developed market economy, institutionally strong democracy, and, of course, a mature civil society. The primary subject of such a society is the nation, understood not as an ethnically designated self-identification, but as a political and legal category, that is, an integrated community of all the state's citizens regardless of any personal or group self-categorization.

However, admittedly, the reflection on the civil mentality of post-Soviet societies concerning the concept of "nation" as a form of common civic identity is rather ambiguous. Discussions on this issue are still ongoing both in Kazakhstan and in Russia. The key questions in this public controversy usually sound like this: "What does the Kazakhstani or Russian nation stand for? A Kazakh nation or Russian nation exists. Why are we looking to the West again? To do so is not a decree for us, we have our own age-old traditions." There are also many, so to speak, softer "consensual" counterarguments which as a rule come from the intellectual community, such as: "Why all these disputes? The nation and the people are one and

the same, so why all this unnecessary fuss?”

In connection with this, many observers seem to view the civil and political immaturity of post-Soviet societies in such a fundamentally ethnocentric nihilism (*Ismagambetov* 2018). This is partially true. At the same time, it is impossible to ignore the influence of many decades of Bolshevik-Stalinist teachings concerning the “national question” in which the idea of nation implied exclusively an ethnic categorization. And, according to them, if one means a broader generalization, then even Marxism-Leninism provided a scientifically grounded idea for it long ago. These are the “working masses,” that is, the “people.” Thus, in accordance with the ideological pragmatics of the state, the “ethnos” imperceptibly spilled over into the “demos.”

Note that the reference to the collective anonymity called “people,” which can be interpreted however one wishes and, most importantly, is ideologically beneficial, allowed the Stalinist-Soviet regime to decide who could be considered the “people” and who were its “enemies,” who belonged to the true Soviet people, and who should be included in the category of “anti-Soviets.” By the way, in the post-Soviet arena various radical “ethnic-ists” have vested themselves with the same jingoistic breeder functions. They are unknowingly diligent students of Stalin’s national bolshevism with its “big brother” formula, demanding special priority rights and advantages for the “titular ethnos,” considering everyone else to be “minorities” or even a “diaspora.”

This category of commentators adhering to their concept of “people,” have historically existed at all places and at all times. However, this same historical experience teaches that when warlike national-patriotic appeals evolve from the margins into a certain explicit or implicit ideology of the state, populistically enchanting the general society, this ultimately leads to most serious, and sometimes tragic, upheavals. As Olzhas Suleimenov formulated back in 1975, “when nationalism wins, the nation loses” (*Suleimenov* 2011: 7).

Thus, the political and legal perception of “nation” and the mainly abstract definition of “people” as absolute identities as well as the understanding of the concept of “nation” not as a civil state, but only in ethnic terms, comes from the wholly ideologically charged Soviet general consciousness. Meanwhile, in the context of consolidating a multiethnic society such an admixture is not harmless. To that end, it is possible to recall the sad experience of the USSR, where, due to making absolute the purely class approach to conceptualization of “people” and the pressure of Stalinist dogma in the interpretation of the nation; it was considered ideologically inadmissible to appeal to the category of “political nation”, i.e. a “So-

viet nation.” Therefore, widely varied propaganda and instrumental manipulations became naturally possible. This included the conceptual interchangeability which has become commonplace: “The Soviet people are the Russian people,” and “The Soviet Union is Russia.” Characteristically, there was usually one explanation for all these arbitrary substitutions. These advocates would contend that there was no offense because everyone understood that saying “Russian,” meant, of course, “Soviet,” and “Russia” means the “Soviet Union.” But it was clearly “understandable” only from the viewpoint of one ethnic group, in this case, the specific one is obvious.

How did the people of other Soviet ethnicities feel morally and psychologically? It is obvious that such an arrogant disregard for their feelings caused in their ethno-national consciousness to have a notion of being discriminated against and diminished. This, in turn, aroused protective ethnocentric complexes which involuntarily stimulated the already rather strong urge toward ethnocentrism. It is clear that the discrepancies between the declarations about the “Soviet people as a new international community of people” and real-life experience exposed the ethnocratic nature of the Soviet state in the eyes of society which was one of the fundamental reasons for its collapse.

Thus, noting this influence of Soviet ideology which created the stereotypical inertia of the past on the passive attitude toward the nation as a common political and legal civil identity; it should be emphasized that such perception hindered by another, much more fundamental factor. Namely, the marginal and changing nature of public perception in modern society.

This circumstance mediates the sharp dissonance of sociocultural orientations observed in post-Soviet public perception. It means that in such a clearly structured public consciousness, the stereotypes characteristic of both the traditional agrarian and Soviet mental paradigms are rather powerfully involved. Simultaneously, however, a modernized sociocultural public reflection has begun to acquire its avant-garde role and functionality.

The more or less broad development of this new market culture, conventionally understood as a modernized consciousness, seems to be characterized as being a prolonged process. If the creation of a market economy takes place almost simultaneously, albeit in its palliative, sometimes quasi-form, then the formation of a democratically stable, modernized culture requires the life of more than one generation. Over time, the old mental stereotypes will increasingly be lost, thus, yielding their positions to qualitatively new sociocultural orientations.

As for the Soviet consciousness, its constancy is understandable. It appears to be an oppressive nostal-

gia for the “golden Soviet era” with its universal state paternalism, equality in the distribution of resources (including free education and medicine), social insurance, and guaranteed jobs and wages. More simply it was an unspoken, but entirely implied “social contract,” which the state was obliged to fulfill towards the society in return for its loyalty to the regime.

However, to a far greater degree is an influence of a significantly broad frustration manifested in the disappointment of “people from the Soviet past” in their expectations and hopes for finding an unambiguously better alternative. Unfortunately, the conditions of the people’s daily lives which discredit or delay the promised changes have provided a large amount of food for thought. Thus, their defense of the Soviet era is not in the least a purely nostalgic phenomenon. If the situation was bad, and then afterwards became much better, then this “bad” would not be constantly and enthusiastically remembered. Whatever it is, the identity tied to “Sovietness” remains a priority in the minds of a major segment from the Soviet generation. Sometimes this identity is the only significant priority. It is also important to note that this orientation towards “Sovietness” constitutes a fairly wide segment of the modern public consciousness.

If we bear in mind the modern general public’s traditional agrarian mentality, then the explanations for their revitalization, i.e. revival, are not that difficult. Although, at first glance, a certain paradox can be seen. First, the Soviet regime had been attempting to “grub out” these “vestiges” for almost seventy years, and then, second, the same attempt has been underway for almost thirty years of modernization. Where does this involution come from? As international experience demonstrates; it is during the periods of modernization that the archaic nature revives and intensifies within society. Modernization is always accompanied by rapid changes and during periods of reform, permanent structural crises are inevitable. These crises seriously disrupt people’s usual, established way of life which gives rise to almost mass alarm, i.e. feelings of anxiety. In an effort to escape from the overstrain of constantly adapting along with the seeming chaos and depressing uncertainty, many look for salvation in some ideally imagined “zones of calm and understandable predictability,” including “the quiet backwater of traditionalism” (*Krupko* 2018: 370).

Another reason is the fact that this traditional agrarian mentality did not disappear at all during Soviet times, it survived. However, the extent of the niches it occupied was different. Traditional ideas’ most favorable environment for its conservation and relative sterility was the rural periphery, i.e. rural social space, which historically was the focal domain for their reproduction (*Abylkhozhin* 2020: 154-171).

The urban environment with its dense and diverse social networks; broad access to information; intensive diffusion of various social and ethnocultural paradigms; a heterogeneous environment for socialization of the individual; and finally, the same perception of the urban lifestyle all contributed to marginalize traditional consciousness and is turned it into a reflective passivity. However, due to the processes of mass counter-urbanization, i.e. the dilution of the urban state of mind via the stereotypes of the rural subculture; the “logos” of the traditional agrarian consciousness began to be widely extrapolated into the urbanized environment (more on this issue below). Of course, this does not explain everything, more detailed comments are needed, but in view of the limited extent of this article, we will confine ourselves to this statement for now.

In the context of our topic, it is important to note that this exaggerated collective thought is characteristic of the traditional agrarian consciousness. As a rule, in a multiethnic society such ideas manifest themselves in the form of a vulgar and exaggerated ethnocentrism. If the social environment becomes more ethnically homogeneous, and, accordingly, intra-ethnic competition, along with other methods of solidarization and positioning begin to actualize. For example, identification with specifically regional images or, if some kind of need for a symbol arises, then more divisive symbols that promote a tribalistic concept emerge. It is clear that such associations characteristic of the traditional agrarian consciousness impede the perception of broader forms of solidarity, including such general civic self-identification as that of a nation according to the understanding already mentioned.

Unfortunately, this characteristic held by the traditional agrarian mentality of making these symbols absolute is steadily expanding its niches within the general public. There is no need to be an expert sociologist to make such a statement. It is enough to turn to the Internet.

While we are not entirely certain, it is unlikely that no other national versions of general knowledge, such as Wikipedia, have biographical descriptions of specific famous personages from culture, science, politics or society that contain information about their clan or even subclan in association with their birth. This is a common practice for us. Even on the Internet, one can find various “tribal identification lists” with titles such as “Famous Argyns,” or by analogy, Naimans, Tama, etc.<sup>1</sup> It is often characteristic that below these listings are various comments such as, “He is not Argyn, but Kerey,” or “The Naiman have

<sup>1</sup> Ed. note: These are all names of historic tribal groupings from among Kazakhs.

become insolent – they have stolen our great congener”, etc.

The online Wikipedia resource “Kazakh shezhirelerin tizimi” – “The list of Kazakh genealogies,” contains more than 30 books representing versions of general Kazakh genealogies and about 150 books with genealogies of individual clans and tribes. Often the decision to write such a book is made collectively. For example, many clans arrange something like congresses or *kurultais*, electing a “president” or clan secretary to coordinate such issues.

In the last decade, electronic genealogies have acquired new content due to the fact that genetic analysis has become more affordable. So, on the website for the Project DNA-Shezhire ([shezhire.kz](http://shezhire.kz)), DNA analysis is available for a fee. There is an electronic application *Zheti ata* – “Seven Ancestors” which has been developed and has discovered a large target audience. A whole market of souvenir products functions successfully which commercializes tribal identity that include all kinds of *tumars*-amulets, mugs, clothes, stamps, etc. containing the title of individual clans, *tamgas*<sup>2</sup> and other symbols, panels, tapestries, carpets with images of the family tree, sometimes inlaid with precious stones, etc. The clan sites often advertise these types of products. As noted by Zira Naurzbayeva, a well-known researcher of Kazakh traditionalism, “to know *Zheti ata* is one of the homework assignments in elementary school...” (Naurzbayeva 2019). Another characteristic story could be observed in one of the cities of southern Kazakhstan. Some time ago, inscriptions with the *zhuz* designation<sup>3</sup> or the name of the clan became popular on the frames of car license plates. However, after a while, the local *akimat* (city administration) banned the sale of frames with such inscriptions.

Tribal symbolism manifests itself in Kazakhstani historical memory through iconic imagery such as *batyrs*,<sup>4</sup> which represents the socio-cultural identity and collective memory of specific segments of the population, country, or city. After 1991 there was a proliferation of these symbolic figures in the historical memory of Kazakhstani society, resulting in the joke: “There are more *batyrs* than Kazakhs.” Each tribal group sponsors one or another specialist-historian to unearth the genealogy of the *batyr* which is

the legendary ancestor of this group, thereby legitimizing their social status or claims to position within the clan business.

Regarding this revitalization of tribalism, about twenty years ago some experts said that all this was the “cost of restoring national independence” or, as one political scientist put it while paraphrasing Lenin’s famous words, it was the “childhood disease for the formation of national statehood.” Perhaps at that time such remarks were partially true. But today, by modern standards our state is already quite a “mature man,” and this sort of argumentation is hardly justified.

In the same social networks—which serve as a very important informational indicator concerning the mood of the general public—many comments can be found on the topic of regional particularism, or, to put it bluntly, “*zhuzism*.” For example, one can read how some bloggers from western Kazakhstan heap reproach on the southerners by saying that the southerners “have come in large numbers to our oil industry, let them work at home.” Or, “they are carrying away our oil resources,” and the response, in turn, is no less ambitious: “You are full with petrodollars there,” etc.

Some observers, again, tend to see this as nothing more than “childishly touchy blogger jokes,” wisecracks, and inoffensive scorn. However, as the expression goes, God forbid, some amateur agitators should appear and begin to try to turn “children’s fun” into quite serious adult games. Let us recall the experience of Czechoslovakia, that started with newspaper and journalistic skirmishes which evolved into the idea of “internal colonialism” in the general public. The Czechs began to insist that “poor” Slovakia was hanging “like *pood*<sup>5</sup> chains on their feet” while the Slovaks argued that the Czech Republic was exploiting them. Whatever it was, but there was a “velvet divorce” of these two republics. Various speculations concerning this concept of “internal colonialism” are present in Italy, between the industrial North and the agrarian South. Catalan separatism is found in Spain at the core of the financial and industrial city of Barcelona. In this regard, there is the well-remembered rhetoric of the late 1980s, when Russian nationalists kept discussing the populist pathos in the media and even within the walls of the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR: “How long will the martyr Russia sponsor all the other Union republics?”

Noting a certain revival of collective patriarchal orientations within modern society, it makes sense to consider some of the historical prerequisites for this phenomenon.

<sup>2</sup> Ed. note: *tamgas* are identity or brand markings often for livestock, but also found on pottery and other items dating back to the Bronze Age in Central Asia.

<sup>3</sup> Ed. note: A *zhuz*, or horde, are one of the three traditional major groupings of the Kazakh khanate dating back to at least the 15<sup>th</sup> century which incorporate affiliated tribes and clans. They are the Greater Horde, the Middle Horde, and the Smaller (or Lesser) Horde.

<sup>4</sup> Ed. note: A *batyr*, translated “hero or warrior” is a general term for a known historical figure of the Kazakh nation.

<sup>5</sup> Ed. note: *pood* is an obsolete unit of mass in the Russian system of measures, equal to 16.38 kilograms.



It is a common fact that tribalist and localized methods of group-centered solidarity practically dominated the thinking of pre-revolutionary Kazakh society. In other words, the group-centered self-identification patterns, notions, and preferences were precisely associated with the tribal and horde identities.

Although on a marginal and abstract level one might also be aware of belonging to broader collectivist coalitions. Various “overflowing” identities or episodes of “excitement” depended on the closeness of contacts with a “different” external environment. This is understandable, since a concept of “they” must appear first, and only then is “we” possible. It was with this connection that binary opposites took place categorized along the lines of “pastoralists/sedentary farmers”, “steppe nomadic community/city dwellers (i.e. the Sarts).” Finally, in the event of some general disasters for the Kazakhs, the concept of “our own people/foreign people” was enabled. However, we repeat, the priority in personal and group self-identification was given precisely to the primary associative genealogical connections, which had either a real, or, for the most part, legendary, location within the tradition. It might be an exclusively figurative, symbolic character. For example, even during the almost widespread anti-colonial movement of 1916 within its Turgai hearth, the Argyns and Kipchaks nominated their individual clan “khans” and viewed them as their rebel leaders.

Many scholars of nomadic society have noted that patrilineal family-clans and tribal ties are more obligatory and functional within the social structures than traditional agrarian societies. Tribal bonds form of a more fundamental and rigid connection, and therefore, are a more adaptively stable structure than in sedentary agrarian societies.

In that context, note this obvious statement by Vasily Bartold, one of the most authoritative scholars on Central Asian history who directly observed the lives of the peoples of colonial Turkestan both in the pre-revolutionary and early Soviet times: “When you ask a Turkestan resident who he is, he will answer you that he is, first of all, a Muslim; then, that he is a resident of a given city or village (Bukhara or Samarkand), or, if he is a nomad that he is a member of a given tribe such as Mangyt, Yomut or Naiman....” (Bartold 1964: 528-529). As the quote reveals, the importance of tribal affiliation among the nomads of the region (Kazakhs, Turkmen, Kirghiz, etc.) surpassed even religious-confessional identity. That is, tribal devotion was stronger than Islamic identity among the nomads. And this, despite the fact that adhering to it contradicted Sharia and was condemned by all Islamic philosophers who appealed to the Prophet’s hadith: “Tribal solidarity should not exist among us” (Suzhikov 2019: 85).

A number of factors determined the primacy of tribal ties in nomadic society and their incomparably greater role in this context than in sedentary agricultural societies. But primarily, it is the specific nomadic mode of production.

Bearing in mind the traditional agrarian community in general, we recall that labor was a social form of cooperation among individuals for economic production. The need for such solidarity was conditioned by their common production interests expressed in a common attitude towards natural economic development’s as an object of labor.

This space of agrarian economic and cultural activity was comparatively narrow. It met its goal via the cultivation of arable land and adjacent fodder pastures for livestock; the nearest forest; or an area of the river flowing nearby; which, was combined with the “ancestral homestead” and stationary outbuildings passed on from generation to generation. This all formed a constantly unchangeable “landscape of life” or territorial domain of vital interests for sedentary farmers.

Its economic development did not require any spatially extensive cooperation of production and its regulation, consequently, was through the various structures and social relations that formalized it. In this regard, the latter could just confine themselves to a neighboring community, which was generally autonomous in its economic decisions and did not depend on neighboring territorial communities with any regular basis.

If the sedentary farmers with their household’s individual production needed to regulate land (or other economic resources) relations were only between their neighboring communities. However, the production of nomads and livestock breeders was not limited to the space of some locally permanent habitat. Nomads, although with varying degrees of seasonal and semi-seasonal intensity and distance, were almost continually mobile in order to provide their livestock with plant and water resources all year round (the average nomadic radius ranged from 150 to 500 km, but some nomadic groups, for example, in the western regions of Kazakhstan could reach up to 1000 to 1500 km).

In this nomadic habitat, all economic entities participating in it were somehow included in the spatially expanding collective production process since they were in a symbiotic relationship with the common natural resource environment. In this sense, they formed a kind of integral territorial and production community. It incorporated both various sized *aul* communities<sup>6</sup> (in terms of the number of livestock

<sup>6</sup> Ed. note: An *aul*, the Kazakh word typically translated as “village” was historically a collection of yurts composed of a tribe,

and family farms), which functioned according to the principles of family-clan cooperation; and large economic units in which production was conducted not on the basis of cooperative labor, but through rich cattle owners who employed poor hired hands who did not own livestock.

Within such an integral community based on territory and production, it was necessary to coordinate and somehow regulate the process for using pastures, watering holes for livestock (especially artificial wells), nomadic routes, and convenient sites for temporary nomadic camps, to resolve the economic and competitive disputes and conflicts that arose in this regard. It is clear that the most convenient and, more importantly, generally recognized way of resolving all these conflicts concerning economic activities could be social interactions and contacts which were formalized specifically through tribal relations.

In inter-village disputes and mutual claims regarding the use of forage and water resources, such relations were more certain and reliable than appeals to the “basis of evidence” from ideological arguments such as tribal myths, legends, traditions, appeals to the discursive rhetoric of *aitys* with the unofficial “advocates” being the *akyns*, and even the customary law or authority of the elders.<sup>7</sup> After all, such “convincing arguments” for one side were accepted also for the other, since each of the opponents had their own versions of myths, legends and traditions, their own indisputable authorities, and their own interpretations of customary law and traditions. In other words, nothing else could be compared with mutual tribal relations which are based on the myth of “common blood” in terms of the effective impact in achieving consensus and mutual economic cooperation.

In addition to this, it should be noted that many purely economic reproductive relationships existed between the parties of the integrated territorial-production community at all their various stages (production – distribution – exchange – consumption). As an example, there are the so-called *sa'una relations* (from the Turkic word *saun* meaning “to milk”) that were widespread in the livestock raising environment. This traditional form of lease consisted of rich farms transferring part of their livestock for grazing to the impoverished *auls*.

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clan, or family. In modern terms it constitutes a small to medium-sized town or sometimes carries the same connotation as a rural region.

<sup>7</sup> *Aitys*, roughly translated “dispute” is usually a musical competition in which two or more *akyns*, or musical poets, poetically and musically duel with one another using the traditional two-stringed *dombyra*. Such completions are usually extemporaneous and are quite popular in Kazakhstan and other Central Asian countries.

Soviet historiography, with its iconic methodological principle of “party-ness,” and its preoccupation with the search for class struggle even in a pre-capitalist nomadic *aul* (which was intended to confirm the supposed objectively conditioned nature of the October Revolution on the agrarian periphery of Kazakhstan), viewed *sa'una* relations as exclusively an instrument of class exploitation. Meanwhile, its practice involved nothing more than the specifics of organizing the pasture and cattle breeding management system.

It is a known fact that an indispensable condition for the relative stability of nomadic production was the constant maintenance of an equilibrium between the number of livestock and the irrigation potential of the grazing pastures. Meanwhile, in some wealthy farms and well-off *aul* communities, the livestock population often increased to such a high concentration that the demand on the pasture was already beyond its capacity.

On the one hand, this could lead to a depletion of the feed and water supply while on the other to the impoverishment of pastures and a decrease in their biological productivity or even contribute to desertification. This was also associated with the threat of a complete loss of pasturage, especially in arid and semiarid areas of cattle grazing. In these locations it took from 70 to 150 years to restore only one conditional centimeter of a fertile vegetation layer. In addition, the excessive congestion of the flocks made it less mobile and manageable, which constrained the necessary dynamics for nomadic communities.

The economic interests of *sa'unas* had a very rational basis for all subjects involved when entering into those relationships. Large cattle holders, through a *sa'una* (i.e. dispersing their herd), ensured the necessary eco-balance while at the same time such segmentation provided a type of property insurance. Thus, if in the event of some difficulty such as drought, *jut*, or an epidemic affecting cattle, and they died in one location, others would remain in more favorable grazing areas.<sup>8</sup>

As for the so-called leaseholders, which were the poor or low-income communities, they could use the milk and sheared wool from grazing the *sa'una* cattle, which was a tangible means of maintaining their subsistence. But it was more important that through the *sa'una* relationship, communities with low-cattle incomes acquired the only available opportunity to raise their aggregate *aul* herd, which consisted of personal and family livestock from the members of the community. Without this process, which provided a

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<sup>8</sup> *Jut* was a climactic phenomenon in which a sudden freeze in the early Spring months made access to fodder on the steppe difficult or impossible for small cattle.

significant correlation of quantitative and qualitative boost in genetic and reproductive activity, it was impossible to carry out the collective production in any acceptable way for a given economic unit.

Another example involved the natural disaster of *jut* (see note 7 below) that stock-raising farms periodically experienced which made fodder inaccessible for small cattle, especially sheep. In this case, the *aul* communities would appeal to a large livestock owner, who had a herd with a significant horse population to provide his herds of horses to be driven to the pasture, thereby softening the dense ice and snow crust layer.

These above-mentioned examples along with others similar to them, inter-farm relations involving some of those from the integrated territorial-production community (i.e. ordinary and low-income *aul* communities) fulfilled the means of production and the development of the necessary goods and services which provided the “subsistence economy” while others (i.e. farms of large or fairly prosperous livestock owners) acquired the conditions for the production of a surplus.

All these production contacts, conditioned by mutual economic interests, functioned via tribal relations. They played the role of social as well as information networks which were demanded by the organizational specifics of nomadic production, whose assistance made possible the effective regulation and management of collective production. The spatial expansion and establishment of such networks was carried out through the patrilineal-exogamic system of marital relationships that functioned in nomadic society. In this arrangement, men of one patrilineal group selected wives for themselves in another clan or tribal community who were not directly related to the groom's lineage.

As a result of this exogamic practice, which was passed on from generation to generation, the original genetic-biological substrate of any given patrimonial lineage eventually dissolved into its foreign additions. Consequently, the tribal groups in biological terms, due to the fact of no consanguineous kinship, were heterogeneously mixed.

However, as commonly understood, the nature of traditional patriarchal consciousness, including its subconscious structures, is immanently responsive to mythology. Thus, the farfetched, but invariably “ancient,” “heroic,” and “glorious” story of common origins was perceived with no alternative. It was recognized by everyone who was initiated into the sacred, legendary myth about the single, consanguineous origin of certain tribal or extended family-clan associations. In other words, the latter concept was inherently nominal in that they were considered “relational” by name or imagination and enshrined in a

certain ritual or ceremonial procedure. This mythological socialization was incorporated into a given community. Primarily, this myth of the “one blood” performed the most important consolidating function because nothing holds the group together like its common collective memory and past history (including genealogy) be it real or legendary.

Such mechanisms aimed at the continuation of the community and are completely natural for traditional communities living in a cyclical paradise of eternal archetypes. They are dictated by the invariable way of life and the constancy of economic activity. A human being immanently acts according to the scenario of minimizing life risks and energy costs which are a permanent and inevitable part of life experience. In the harsh conditions of a subsistence economy (for example, in the arid and semiarid steppe), existence can occur only through an absolute merger with the community which erases not only spatial, but also temporal boundaries between the members of the community. This embodies the eternal ancestral “chronotopes.” The previously mentioned *batyrs* often appear in historical sources with the same names. Scholars do not exclude the possibility that a particular *batyr's* descendant or a young *batyr* from his family acted under the name of the sacralized hero. Moreover, the dichotomy of “collective vs. individual” itself does not become actualized until a certain moment when, at the micro-social level, elites, such as shamans and their clients stand out; and at the macro-social level the division of labor arises and deepens and the type of economic changes due to authentic social and economic evolution or due to external, often forced, modernization. Experiencing the phantom pain of atomization, the community uses mimesis (i.e. imitation or eternal cultural repetition) and historical memory as a conservative stabilizing mechanism, forcibly socializing the individual in an attempt to limit his expanding horizon of expectations. One of the first intellectual delineators of the Kazakh steppe, Shokan Valikhanov, a Chingissid, who found himself in the dramatic situation of being “not here, but not yet there” wrote:

*“Truth, no matter how bright it is, cannot expel the most incorrect delusions when they are sanctified by time, and especially among the Kirghiz people, who still adhere to shamanism, mixing it with a homeopathic dose of Islam. The basis of this religion, as is known, is the idolization of deceased ancestors. Through this all the customs and superstitions of the ancestors are made sacred for the Kirghiz. In addition, the Kirghiz have a limitless number of sayings and aphorisms, once composed by their adroit fathers. For all their beliefs and customs, they find a ready-made argument from antiquity and think that they are right”*(Valikhanov 1984).

The answer to the question “why are things this

way and not otherwise?” was, “because they are eternal,” and to the question of “when?” the answer was “always.” But these questions, of course, did not arise on their own. They were generated by the stability of continual repetition, mimetic culture existed in cyclical time. The myth performed an etiological function, inscribing the past into the future’s present, the individual into the collective, and the tribal into the universal, without, of course, dividing these categories.

It must be said that ethnocentrism existed here synonymously with logocentrism, thus, successfully becoming its structure, meaning, and ontology. Being the basic form of socioeconomic and existential self-organization, tribal relations were projected onto the Universe which brought along the corresponding etiological logic of the prime cause and structure of the world as a universal community. The elements of this community are combined in varying degrees of kinship, mythopoetic interdependence, or antagonism.

Any reproductive economic relationships with their rather extensive and vast territorial nature were rationalized by all business entities only as manifestations of generic assistance and the team spirit inherent in the community of kinship, (i.e. tribal unity, blood-related altruism, and paternalism).

Thus, livestock breeding and the pastoral nomadic economic system provided the specific character in determining the stability and paramount importance of tribal identities in traditional Kazakh society. This explained the prioritized orientation of its public consciousness towards its meaning and in this case, the formula “being determines consciousness” is quite legitimate. As noted by the well-known scholar of nomadic society Gennady Markov, the tribal structure was “the only possible one in a nomadic economy” (Markov 1976: 9). Many other such scholars agree with this statement.

Additionally, the weak developmental conditions for the social division of labor in nomadic society along with the extremely low population density (1-1.5 people/sq. km) resulting in basically no urbanization meant that tribal ties remained a very self-reliant means of social organization. However, from these factors also derived of the same economic, organizational and technological specifics arising from livestock breeding and nomadic production.

While this economic arrangement continued to function, the actual significance of the nominally patriarchal-tribal and regionally specific *zhuz* identities remained, and along with this, traditional Kazakh society’s predominant orientation of their mass consciousness toward these identities.

Proceeding from the logic of “economic and cultural determinism,” it would seem, based on the expectation in Soviet times, that the above-mentioned

symbols of self-identification would “fade away” and would occasionally emerge only in historical memory since the Soviet regime already during the years of forced collectivization retained nothing from the traditional structures of the past. Believing this, Soviet propaganda included the tool known as “Marxist-Leninist historiography” which inevitably and with inexhaustible imagination promoted the thesis that “the *kolkhoz* (i.e. collective) farm system [had] finally destroyed the age-old patriarchal-tribal foundations of the peasantry.” In Soviet historical scholarship, dozens of monographs were written on this topic, and without any exaggeration, hundreds of dissertations were defended.

In reality, *kolkhozes*, facilitated the conservation of these very “foundations.” After all, during the period of forced collectivization, the *kolkhozes* included the former locations of tribal communities. Meanwhile, the sense of the “border” was one of the most important conditions for identification, and therefore the “collective farmers” in their self-identification continued to follow the usual priorities of self-categorization.

It is no coincidence that in the 1930s in numerous “collectivization” reports found in the *Kazkraykom* (Kazakh Regional Committee) of the All-Union Communist Party (of Bolsheviks) that in these locations it was reported that “... we actually got ‘the tribal *kolkhozes*,’ where the collective farmers quite often elect their tribal authorities and *bais*<sup>9</sup> for the position of chairmen.” There is a related story of a former party worker who in 1959-1962 was the first secretary of one of the rural district committees of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan. He explained that during the Khrushchev campaign aimed at the extension of the *kolkhozes*, the members of one of the agricultural collectives in his area unanimously and stubbornly did not want to unite with another *kolkhoz*, since they were from a different species, i.e. “not ours.”<sup>10</sup>

In light of the above, another point should be made. As already mentioned, initially the tribal community’s core principle was economic cooperation whose purpose was to ensure the “subsistence economy.” In terms of property relations, such cooperation of labor possessed a dual character related to the means of production.

When considering the Kazakh cattle-breeding tribal community (although this was typical for all economic and cultural types of communal structures), this duality was manifested in the collective production, in its private appropriation, collective-group

<sup>9</sup> A *bai* was a Kazakh elder of status and wealth during the pre-Soviet era.

<sup>10</sup> Central State Archives of the Republic of Kazakhstan. F. 5. Op. 11.D. 221.L. 133-135.



(communal-tribal) ownership of land (pasture), as well as in private-family ownership of livestock (*Masanov* 1995: 70).

The *kolkhoz* system, with its general principle of total socialization, also implied collective production and collective ownership of the means of production (i.e. *kolkhoz* land use). However, it also socialized private family ownership of livestock along with even the private appropriation of the product of labor. If distribution and consumption was conducted through the traditional mechanisms of redistribution within the tribal community, now these stages of the production process were the exclusive monopoly of the *kolkhozes* (admittedly, if we call a spade a spade, this means the state). In other words, the *kolkhozes* became an even more “collectivized” form of the former tribal community since they “socialized,” that is, neutralized any vestiges of some sort of “individualization” and real differentiation, such as private ownership of livestock and private appropriation of production wares.

Consequently, the *kolkhozes* were, in fact, a near exact prototype of the tribal community, although in an invariably sterile, Sovietized form. Hence, it is clear that the *kolkhoz* system reproduced exactly the same “collective man” or “the man of the group,” deprived of economic freedom, and, therefore, heavily burdened with the need to collectively conform. From the time of the designation “collective farmer,” the previous tribal group now became “the *kolkhoz* named after Lenin” or “XXIII Party Congress.” Thus, from the change of “logos” or terminology little changed in terms of substance. The *kolkhozes* retained all the prerequisites for the “reproduction” of group-centric consciousness capable of the ambivalent perception of both past (traditional) and new (Soviet) conformist-solidary images and symbols for self-identification.

The characteristics of the rural subculture with its natural domain and rural social space played an important role in the stability and adaptability of traditional relations. This social space dispersed information and provided communication links due to its narrowed locality of rural social networks and their autonomy and relative isolation from the intense influence of a broader external space.

Thus, in a sense, this “seclusion” of the rural world preserved many of the indispensable conditions that ensured the replication of traditional, socio-normative culture and the methods that derive sociocultural self-identification and reflection.

This can include, for example, a more thorough involvement of members of a particular group in its common memory (relative to the of a city). Such a collective memory steadfastly reinforces the commitment to “their moral community” as it integrates common meanings and images through the knowl-

edge of their common ancestor’s heroic deeds or the glorious history of the tribe in general. This occurs through perceived myths and legends even if they only provide an esoteric understanding of the sacred poetics of the local toponyms, etc.

But at the same time, it is important that such a collective memory has a stable character in order to maintain its uninterrupted and unfading intergenerational transmission. This was largely achieved within these territorially narrowed and relatively “closed” rural local societies. This transmission was in a major way initially provided to a decisive extent by primary family socialization.

In addition, socialization via gerontocracy in which the traditional priorities of deep respect for the older generation in general and the elderly in particular also play a significant role. This includes the concept of the absolute recognition of the elder’s undeniable authority. The older generations, as bearers of the past collective experience, acted as informal channels for the rearing of the younger generations, including their socialization to the stereotypes of the traditional mentality.

The persistent nature of collective memory transmission as the most important condition for traditional culture’s reproduction and the consciousness derived from it also enabled it to retain its stability. It was impossible to overcome by either the Bolshevik attempt at class suppression in the second half of the 1920s which sought to eliminate the “vestiges of the tribal system” in the Kazakh *auls*, or even the later more radical collectivization. This was true of any other attempts by the Soviet state in the subsequent years of its existence.

In modern society, increasing attention to traditional life is very often justified by the need to maintain respect for traditions, the history of the people, and their collective memory. If this was the case, it would be good, then such “flashbacks” can and should be welcomed. However, as the realities of current everyday life reveal, the appeal to tribal and regional-specific symbols of identity (*zhuz-ism*) is very often used as a tool in the competition for power or socially prestigious resources; some kind of business prerogatives (especially among structures of medium and small business); or in the struggle for access to distribution mechanisms, etc. Among the general public, the meanings of archaic traditions are often used for the purposes of some ordinary, everyday interests. In other words, references to past traditional images and methods of ethnocentric solidarity are included in some informal institutional relations which are quite noticeable.

Moreover, in certain, but rather significant strata of society (listed below), this kind of relationship is beginning to acquire an almost customary, everyday

character. The type of social consciousness described here, by its definition “traditional,” implies unconditional adherence to the traditional folk, or socio-normative culture. When answering the issue of “development or tradition” the priority is always given to the latter. The choice in favor of tradition persists in the face of a more severe dilemma that may prove to be a threat to health and life itself due to adherence to custom. In other words, even the instinct of self-preservation is relegated to the background. This is clearly demonstrated by the current conditions of the coronavirus pandemic. Despite the introduction of a strict regime quarantine, reports online provide constant examples of massive violations in the form of *toy dastarkhans* (wedding celebrations), *ases* (commemorations for the deceased), *kudalyks* (gatherings of the in-laws) and *kyz uzatu* (engagement ceremonies) which often require movement from district to district or from one region to another. At the same time, the number of participants in these and other rituals involving the concentration of people in small spaces, as a rule, significantly exceed the limits allowed by the quarantine conditions. This often leads to serious risks and even grave consequences both for such violators and for their possible environment.

As noted, reflections and mental stereotypes of the traditional agrarian mindset are steadily expanding their niches among the general public consciousness. The success of such an “intervention” is largely, if not decisively, conditioned by the nature of the social structure of modern society. Without considering the reasons, notably the most significant share of this mindset belongs to the marginalized and impoverished strata of the population which is absolutely characteristic of the entirety of post-Soviet territory. These are predominately modern or, more recently, rural residents who migrated in large numbers to the cities following the collapse of the USSR and its *kolkhoz-sovkhoz* system. They are usually in despair and in search of a better life. It is objectively clear that they serve as bearers of the rural subculture, which, as mentioned, is the natural domain of traditionalism. Accordingly, traditional consciousness is the focal environment for its continuation. This steady migratory stream of villagers to the cities has created not so much urbanization of the population as the “ruralization” of cities, which is characterized by a mass introduction of the rural, traditional subcultural stereotypes into the urban environment and their displacement of the “logos” of the urbanized subculture.

It is the villagers (and now urban residents) who were most exposed to the processes of marginalization and impoverishment. And, as is known, the marginalized and those especially affected by low economic conditions creates a consciousness that is characterized by a number of negative, destructive

psychological and emotional factors. These include a receptivity to exaggerated traditionalist ethnocentric and passive xenophobia. The search for an answer to the question of “who is to blame?” rather than being directed towards oneself, is instead exclusively outward looking. It is exclusively outside oneself or one’s “native” group. In other words, the “enemy” is always somewhere out there, but not within us. If only people (i.e. the authorities) will point out these “enemies,” the culprits of all our troubles whose destruction will immediately solve all problems (and as demonstrated by the experience of the various “color revolutions” during the post-Soviet period, such activists who speculate on the slogan “here and now” are quickly found). It can be said that with this sort of consciousness, a “culture of violence” is immanent whereas tolerance is not to be found.

As for the “middle class,” its share in post-Soviet societies is still, unfortunately, very insignificant (of course, if not considering all those whose income is statistically higher than average for this society). Meanwhile, it is the “middle class,” the majority of property owners, that act as the main and only obligation for democracy in modernized societies. They are the bearer of democratic culture in general and in political, legal, and civil culture in particular.

For almost thirty years throughout the post-Soviet territory, the need to develop structures for medium and small business is constantly discussed. In this case, as a rule, an increase in the share of these sectors of the economy in GDP is what is meant. However, the dynamics in this process do not yet show a significant increase and this is alarming, since it is the small and medium enterprises (SME) that are the platform for the formation of the “middle class.” Therefore, increase in the proportion of SMEs will give rise to the proportion and social role of the “middle class.” Then, in turn, the broader and more stable the social base of democracy and the building of civil society will become. It follows that the problem of expanding the stratum of the middle class has not only economic significance, but to a much greater extent a socio-political one.

Taking the above into account, it is hardly necessary to prove the urgency of the task of modernizing society, and, accordingly, public consciousness. This is obvious, at least, for sober-minded people. Our attempt has been to identify the problems that exist in Kazakhstan, whose understanding and solutions require not just light demagoguery, often absolutely populist in nature and intended for meeting the needs of the philistine masses, but for very serious and socially responsible approaches. These should also include the effective use of modernization tools, including the promotion of the idea of a common civil identity as the most important condition for the

solidarity of society. The President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev in his latest interviews for the media has repeatedly spoken in the spirit that “all nationalities and ethnic groups living here [in Kazakhstan] are a single nation.”<sup>11</sup> And it is very important that the whole society be imbued with the consolidating meaning of this formula. However,

emphasizing again, it depends on the success of the modernization of society, and, accordingly, its public consciousness. The delay in this process is directly proportional to the growth of the presence of conservative mental stereotypes and reflections within the public consciousness, as well as specifically isolated patriarchal methods of self-identification.

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<sup>11</sup> URL: [https://informburo.kz/interview/kasym-zhomart-to-kaev-vse-nacionalnosti-prozhivayushchie-v-kazahstane-po-suti-yavlyayutsya-edinoy-naciey.html?\\_utl\\_t=wh](https://informburo.kz/interview/kasym-zhomart-to-kaev-vse-nacionalnosti-prozhivayushchie-v-kazahstane-po-suti-yavlyayutsya-edinoy-naciey.html?_utl_t=wh) (date of access – October 25, 2020).