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Young People's Perspectives on How 'Zhuz' and 'Ru' Clans Affect Them: Evidence from Three Cities in Post-Soviet Qazaqstan

Yerkebulan Sairambay*

Abstract

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, elites seeking political power in the newly independent Qazaqstan fostered the use of clan affiliations, such as 'Zhuz' and 'Ru', in order to develop a Qazaq identity. However, this change resulted in clan politics at both the elite and individual levels, which have become an integral part of today's clan divisions in modern Qazaq society. The main purpose of this paper is to explore how contemporary young Qazaqs perceive Zhuz and Ru clan-based kinship divisions to affect them. The research objectives of this work are achieved through an extensive review of the relevant literature, as well as through a careful analysis of the outcomes of semi-structured interviews (n=20) and online surveys (n=200) with young people from Nur-Sultan, Aqtau, and Shymkent. This article finds that young Qazaqs perceive Zhuz and Ru clans mainly to affect them in terms of employment, marriage, and online media.

Key words: modern clans, Zhuz, Ru, clan-based divisions, Qazaqstan, Kazakhstan.

1. Introduction

Clan divisions continue to affect power relations in a wide range of contexts in the contemporary world (Schatz, 2004, p. ix). This can be observed not only in the Middle East, Africa, and Europe but also in the countries of the former Soviet Union. There are numerous clans in Central Asia, and despite Sovietisation, clan politics still persist in the modern states there (Collins, 2003, p. 177). This is especially true for Qazaqstan. The term clan has no precise definition (Minbaeva and Muratbekova-Touron, 2013, p. 111), and scholars have interpreted it in different ways depending on the contexts in which it occurs. Some scholars perceive 'clan' as an enlarged family group with blood relation ties (Ning, 2012, p. 122), while others refer to clans as extensive social 'networks of kin and fictive kin ties, or perceived and imagined kinship relations' (Collins, 2006, p. 25). In this article, I will use the following definition presented by Schatz (2004, p. 26):

> *"Clan is a division that exists within an ethnic group and in which demonstrable common kinship is understood to underlie membership … and descent is the central operative principle of its identity that needs actual genealogical ties."*

In other words, clan is a sub-ethnic division based on common descent and with genealogical information to determine membership. This paper analyses the perceived contemporary influences of kin-based clans on young people in Qazaqstan. In so doing, the paper concentrates on two distinct types of modern clans in Qazaqstan: first, the 'Zhuz' (also known as 'hundred' or 'horde') – a major, traditionally and geographically formed umbrella clan of ethnic Qazaqs in Qazaqstan; second, 'Ru' – a clan of close blood relatives, which can be, but is not always, a subdivision of a Zhuz clan. Most Rus are subsets of a Zhuz, making a Zhuz an umbrella clan – that is, hundreds of Rus make up a Zhuz. Zhuz and Ru clans originally formed as tribal alliances.

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Since Qazaqstan's independence from the Soviet Union, the usage of such clan divisions has persisted; Ru divisions are especially strong among young Qazaqs (Ramazan, 2015, p. 2; Aqan, 2016; Abdikuly, 2017). In the globalised world, these divisions pose certain difficulties for some aspects of the economy, politics, and social life in Qazaqstan. Although Zhuzes and Rus provide blood purity, cohesion, and traditional values, many people use their affiliations to certain clans as a determinant in decision-making, as a tool of patronage, and as a power instrument in various aspects of their lives (Junisbai, 2010, p. 237; Kleveman, 2003, cited in Minbaeva and Muratbekova-Touron, 2013, p. 111). In this regard, the question arises as to whether young people face clan-related challenges and/or opportunities in their workplaces, businesses, studies, elections, marriages, and private lives. There is no literature that can offer a quick answer to this question; academic literature on contemporary Qazaq clans is inconclusive, leaving space for additional research into this topic, especially in regard to the perceived effects of Zhuz and Ru on young Qazaqs.

Clans can survive in the context of modernisation and the rise of state bureaucracies over time, 'from colonial rule to late colonialism/independence, the transition, and the post-transition period' (Collins, 2004, p. 235). This is especially the case when formal institutions experience an 'economy of shortages' and inefficient markets (Kornai, 1991, cited in Collins, 2004, p. 236). Collins asserts that during a regime transition the informal structures of clans allow them to adapt and fill various gaps by serving as kin-based networks for political, economic and social exchange. These informal structures have allowed for the continued concealment of clan affiliations – a legacy of socialism – in post-Soviet Qazaqstan. It is difficult to identify the members and boundaries of clans, as they are not formally registered. Clans 'are not rooted in visible markers […] but rather in an exchange of genealogical information' that defines identity, difference and can take place privately (Schatz, 2004, p. xxii). Kin-based clan practices and affiliations thus can be concealed from a state that attempts to prosecute clan networks.

The importance and functions of clans change across space and time. For example, according to Schatz (2004, p. xxiv), Soviet attempts to exterminate clan divisions were not successful because of the nomadic pastoral economy which undergirded the Qazaq clans. After 'Moscow's drive to bring state control to the exchange of goods (social, economic, or political goods)' in the Soviet period, Qazaq clans reproduced themselves as concealable kin-based divisions (Schatz, 2004, p. xxii). This means that clans continued in a concealed form in order to provide access to goods for their members in the all-pervading 'grey market' that existed under Soviet rule. Thus, concealable clan affiliation became useful for Qazaqs and persisted in Soviet times.

The concealment of clans that became an asset in the 1990s in Qazaqstan further shaped the clan-based relations that we witness today. First and foremost, we can see kin-based networks that take control of illicit social niches in order to compete for scarce resources, as Schatz (2004, p. xxiii) notes in his work. Second, we see a broad discursive battle on the value of clan divisions within social networks such as VKontakte and Facebook, online platforms and in public (www.vk.com, www.facebook.com, www.ratel.kz, www.altyn-orda.kz). Contemporary debates on social networks and in social life about clans mainly concern the Qazaqs' division into Zhuz and Ru clans, with many participants arguing that Qazaqs should not divide themselves into clans (Shakhanov, 2013, p. 5).

However, recent events related to Zhuz and Ru clans have not escaped public attention and show that there is a tendency to formalise these clans in order to make them visible. For instance, prominent lawyer Zhangeldy Suleymanov recently proposed an initiative to enter clan affiliations alongside every citizen's nationality on Qazaqstani passports and/or ID cards (www.zakon.kz, 2015). Another example is the 'Zheti Ata' ('Seven Ancestors') phone application, available on App Store, where people can share their stories, text in a chat, search events and see other users' rankings of Rus. This application is widely used by young Qazaqs, according to the 'Zheti Ata' developer (Prokopenko, 2016), and at one time it became the most downloaded (№1) application in the Qazaqstani App Store, outstripping WhatsApp Messenger (Suleimenov, 2016).

In terms of contemporary international academic literature, scholars have presented diverse perspectives on the significance of clans in contemporary Qazaq society, particularly in relation to politics. On the one hand, some scholars (e.g. Schatz, 2004; Collins, 2006) argue that clans – kinship-based blood ties – are important in understanding the post-Soviet politics of Qazaqstan. On the other hand, several scholars (e.g. Luong, 2002; Junisbai & Junisbai, 2005; Isaacs, 2010) argue that kinship-based clans do not play the central role in the informal politics of Qazaqstan. Luong (2002, p. 52) claims that regionalism 'has emerged as the most salient political cleavage' rather than tribal divisions. Examining the 'Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan' movement, Junisbai and Junisbai (2005, p. 373) find that the most important divisions in Qazaqstan are 'elite cleavages based on rival economic interests' rather than clan or other divisions. Isaacs (2010, p. 18) argues that the informal politics of post-Soviet Qazaqstan 'emerged in response to the uncertainty of transition' rather than 'cultural legacies bound by kinship identity'. Looking beyond politics, Gullette (2007, p. 385) argues that there is a need for more research that focuses on ordinary people, not elites, in order to understand their everyday experiences of certain divisions, such as clans. The present study is not primarily concerned with politics, and as such does not seek to answer the abovementioned political-oriented debates. Instead, following Gullette, it aims to understand non-elite young Qazaqs' perceived everyday experiences of Zhuz and Ru clan divisions more generally.

Current debates in Qazaqstan on clan-based kinship divisions seem to be raised mainly, though in a limited way, by local scholars in Qazaq-language journals. This can be explained in part by the fact that all Qazaq clan relations take place through the Qazaq language and are otherwise largely invisible. Moreover, the electronic revolution has produced various new platforms for Qazaqs to discuss clan issues, facilitating social exchange in relation to clans. For example, Liyassova et al. (2013, pp. 35-36) consider Ru affiliations to be an important phenomenon that is currently being revived and moving in a new direction, which they argue is the main hindrance to the development of a Qazaq national consciousness. They argue that Ru affiliations lead to a special form of protectionism in the selection and placement of personnel. They claim that this protectionism continues to be the main driver of employment difficulties, particularly in regions and *oblasts* with large numbers of Qazaqs.

Similarly, Minbaeva and Muratbekova-Touron (2013, p. 109) point out that clannism impacts human resource management to a great extent in certain types of companies. Drawing from the results of their empirical research, they distinguish and compare three types of companies in Qazaqstan: state-owned companies in which clannism has strong effects, privately owned companies with moderate influences, and subsidiaries of multinational companies with minor impacts. Another author Qabanbay (2016) argues that Qazaq clans allow a confidence in 'black' deals, as they do not require special membership procedures and clan affiliations are set from birth. He further argues that many Qazaqs use their Zhuz and Ru clans as tools to ease the gain of material wealth without significant effort; conversely, individuals are likely to 'fail' in their chosen careers if they do not accept 'clan games'. In the same vein, Ospan (2017, p. 46) identifies Ru relations as a corruption tool that has been adopted at all levels and sectors of society. He gives many examples of clan-based injustice in sport, education, and science.

Over the past twenty years there have been, in fact, few scholarly works (e.g. Esenova, 1998; Masanov, 1998; Luong, 2002; Schatz, 2004; Junisbai and Junisbai, 2005; Collins, 2006; Gullette, 2007; Isaacs, 2010) devoted to modern clan politics in Central Asia, particularly Qazaqstan. Globalisation has brought many changes to Qazaq society: in particular, the internet, social networks, and new media have changed people's social interactions in terms of acquiring, saving and sharing information. Hence, there is a lack of academic literature regarding the effects of such changes within Qazaq clans. Moreover, there is no work dedicated to the influence of clans on young people in Central Asia. Therefore, the main strength of this paper is that it explores the perceived effects of contemporary clan divisions on young people in Qazaqstan for the first time and introduces new empirical research about the modern clan divisions of Qazaqstan from the perspective of young Qazaqs. This paper supports those (e.g. Gullette, 2007; Abiltain, 2009; Atabaev, 2013) who stress that more research is needed to establish a solid understanding of Qazaq clans; their role

in contemporary social, economic, and political life; their future prospects; and the challenges they represent to post-Soviet democratisation. The results of this article show that young people mainly perceive clans to influence them in employment, marriage, and online media.

2. Research background

The main reasons for Zhuz formation were natural-geographical (Barthold, 1911, p. 211) and political considerations (Viatkin, 1941, pp. 97-99; Toleubaev et al., 2010, p. 78), as well as interests in defending and conserving nomadic territory (Salgarin, 2008, p. 19). Rus were formed because of genealogical concerns, which compel Qazaqs to know and recite their seven direct blood ancestors and do not allow marriage within seven generations for maintaining the purity of blood (History of Qazaqstan: encyclopaedia 2006, p. 641). Before the joining of the Qazaq Khanate to the Russian Empire, clans such as Zhuzes and Rus were unconcealed and it was easy to distinguish people by their clan affiliations, as each Ru had its own symbol and motto (Bekmakhanov, 1994, pp. 97-120). Each of the Qazaq Zhuz clans had its historically established space (Toleubaev et al., 2010, p. 78). There are three Zhuz clans: the *Senior Zhuz* (Zhetysu and South Qazaqstan), the *Middle Zhuz* (Central, North, and East Qazaqstan), the *Junior Zhuz* (West Qazaqstan). Within these three Zhuzes, there are twenty main tribes and thousands of Rus (Table 1).

Table 1: 'Zhuz' and 'Ru' clans of Qazaqstan

Qazaqs			
Senior Zhuz	Middle Zhuz	Junior Zhuz	Non-Zhuz Rus
-Dulat -Shapyrashty -Oshaqty -Ysty -Alban -Suan -Saryuisin -Sirgeli -Qanly -Zhalaiyr -Shanyshqyly	-Argyn -Naiman -Qypshaq -Qonyrat -Kerei -Uaq	-Baiuly -Alimuly -Zhetiru	e.g.: -Tore -Qoja -Sunaq -Tolengit -Nogai-Qazaq
There are thousands of Rus within these twenty main tribes of Zhuzes.			

Source: Own design based on the existing literature on Qazaq clans

However, some Rus such as *Tore, Qoja, Sunaq, Tolengit,* and *Nogai-Qazaq* do not belong to Zhuz clans, because they belong to *'Aqsuek'* (elite groups) and/or appeared after the Qazaq Khanate had been established (Qazaqstani Encyclopaedia, 2017). Despite this, they also have many Rus as their subsets. These non-Zhuz Rus appeared as a result of various historical events: the Mongol invasions and conquests (*Tore* members are descendants of Genghis Khan); Islamic missionary work in Central Asia (*Qojas* and *Sunaqs* are descendants of Islamic missionaries); and the disintegration of the Nogai Horde (*Nogai-Qazaqs* are those who joined the Qazaq Khanate after the collapse of the Nogai Horde).

The social significance of the 'seven ancestors' tradition is vital in Qazaq society (Abzhan, 2014, p. 58). Abzhan (2014, p. 59) points out that this system is unique and can be considered as a branch of Qazaq national culture. There are some Qazaq professors (Medeuov, 2011; Abdibekov, 2015; Bolsanbek, 2016) who consider the 'seven ancestors' system to be a necessity, implying that the greater the difference between two people's ancestors, the more likely their progeny is to have pure blood. Abdibekov gives one example in his interview with 'Aqiqat' national-political public journal in 2015. There, he relates a discussion about the meaning of a Qazaq proverb relating to clans in the International Qazaq-Turkish University:

"Күйеу – жүз жылдық,
Құда – мың жылдық."

["The groom is for a hundred years,
The in-law is for a thousand years."]

The logic behind this proverb is that a couple can live a century, whereas all descendants of a couple stay as relatives until the 40th generation (about a thousand years), referring to the role of the 'seven ancestors' system. As Abdibekov (2015, p. 27) notes, after the 40th ancestors, a person's blood becomes spotless. A prime example of an actual clan-based marriage situation is given in the work of Qozhambetova (2013). She says a couple from the same Ru who married were harshly criticised by the other members of their society, although they had no overlap up to their ninth ancestors; however, society members considered their marriage to be a negative example for other young people and were against it. Qozhambetova (2013, p. 6) worries that many Rus have already reached their 10th-15th generations but still have not produced new Rus, as used to be done in the past. Ospan (2017, p. 48) gives another example, saying that researchers in South Korea tested blood samples of various world nations. When they tested samples from 43 different Qazaq Rus, they found that all the samples could be traced back to a single male ancestor. As a result, they concluded that Kazakh blood is the purest blood in the world, proving the importance of the 'seven ancestors' tradition.

Therefore, another aspect of the social importance of clans is that they are believed to prevent blood illnesses if one follows clan rules in marriage. Genetic disorders and hereditary diseases such as Down syndrome, Patau syndrome, Edwards's syndrome, and Turner syndrome are thought to result from ignoring clan rules (Abzhan, 2014, p. 56). Although there is no evidence that such syndromes are less prevalent in Qazaqstan, Abzhan bases his claim on the research of the English biologist William Bateson and the British geneticist Reginald Crundall Punnett.

There are some unwritten and unchangeable rules that have existed in Qazaq clans for many centuries (Shakhanov, 2013, p. 5). A Qazaq person's Zhuz and/or Ru affiliations are given at birth and cannot be chosen or changed by clan rules. The clan affiliations of children born in inter-Ru relations are always determined by the paternal line, that is, children will become members of the same clan as their fathers. Almost all Qazaq families use Ru as a determinant in marriage and traditional customs. Up to the present time, almost every Qazaq knows his or her Ru, and consequently Zhuz, because most Rus belong to a certain tribe and Zhuz. This knowledge of Ru and Zhuz belonging creates a disconnect between Ru members and non-Qazaq regional elites, such as Russians, in Qazaqstan (Kuchins, 2002, p. 233).

3. Research design

3.1 Research focus

This study focuses on the perceived impacts of Zhuz and Ru clan identities on the experiences of young people in Qazaqstan. The research is based on an analysis of online surveys and interviews with young Qazaqs from Nur-Sultan, Aqtau, and Shymkent. The central research question explored in this paper is: *How do young people in Qazaqstan perceive Zhuz and Ru clan-based kinship divisions to affect their experiences?*

3.2 Research methods and framework for data analysis

The clan is a phenomenon that the majority of people choose to conceal rather than reveal. The mixed-method approach is the best way to achieve an in-depth understanding of the evolving status of clans in Qazaqstan and to develop generalisable results that allow us to compare the findings of both qualitative and quantitative methods. In order to study the main settings of clans' perceived effects on young people, this research takes place through a mixed-method approach with an exploratory sequential design.

First, I conducted semi-structured interviews to explore young people's perceptions of the effects of clan divisions on their lives, as well as to provide guidance for designing online surveys. Second, I developed online surveys with questions informed by the results of the semi-structured interviews. This combination of qualitative and quantitative methods produced robust and varied data, while providing a variety of ways in which young people could participate in the project. Thus, these two methods complemented each other in both data collection and data analysis, which facilitated answering the research question.

As the three Zhuzes are regionally dispersed, I conducted the interviews over two months (June 2017-July 2017) in three different areas: namely in the cities of Nur-Sultan, Aqtau, and Shymkent. I chose these three cities for the following reasons: I chose Nur-Sultan because it is located in the north (Middle Zhuz region), is the capital and largest city in Qazaqstan, and is a hub for educational establishments and youth non-governmental organisations (NGOs). I chose Aqtau because of its location in the west of Qazaqstan (Junior Zhuz region) and because of recent political events – presumably attached to clannism – that had occurred in the Mangystau oblast. Last, I chose Shymkent because it is located in the south (Senior Zhuz region), is the 'cradle' of Qazaq culture and traditions, and is in the most densely populated oblast of Qazaqstan. I reached my research participants through VK (VKontakte – a local version of Facebook) groups and electronic mailing lists of universities and youth NGOs in the aforementioned cities. The advert calls for my research did not include specific information about clannism in order to minimise participant bias within the sample selection. The research eligibility requirements were the following three criteria: (1) Qazaq nationality; (2) between the ages of 18 and 29; (3) located in one of the three cities (Nur-Sultan, Aqtau, and Shymkent).

Summer interviews enabled me to refine and adapt my draft survey questionnaire for autumn research. I distributed and collected online surveys via email from September 2017 to January 2018. Both surveys and interviews were carried out anonymously in order to increase the quality of the research and make participants feel more comfortable with their responses. Overall, 241 people responded to my research calls in VK groups and email lists over five months. I excluded partially completed and uncompleted online surveys. Of the included respondents, I chose 200 participants on the basis of their Zhuz affiliations in order to balance equal representativeness where needed.

Following data collection and transcription, which produced 143 pages of interview data, the data were analysed by content and narrative analyses. First, codes were inductively identified in the data and attached to transcript pages. Second, codes were sorted and transformed into sub-themes, identifying similar patterns, phrases, commonalities and/or disparities. Last, sorted sub-themes were clustered around larger key themes to separate meaningful patterns. As a result, the following three key themes were identified from the interviews:

1. Clan affiliations and employment (including the public sector);
2. Blood purity and progeny health;
3. New platforms for modern Qazaq clans.

The next stage of this research was the quantitative phase, in which the aforementioned three topics were translated into empirical indicators and structured in the form of online survey questions.

3.3 General information about the backgrounds of the research participants

There were 20 Qazaq interviewees between the ages of 18 and 29 who participated in semi-structured interviews in 2017, which lasted from 40 to 59 minutes. 'Table 2' shows a breakdown of the interviews in three cities and interviewees' general data such as clan affiliation, age, gender, and job experience.

Table 2: Basic information about the interviews

Nur-Sultan							
Candidate number	*Pseudonym*	*Zhuz*	*Age*	*Gender*	*Job experience*	*Interview duration*	*Interview language(s)*
001	Dastan	Middle	29	Male	Yes	59 minutes	Qazaq
002	Aigerim	Middle	19	Female	No	54 minutes	Qazaq
003	Serik	Middle	19	Male	No	46 minutes	Qazaq
004	Diana	Middle	19	Female	Yes	43 minutes	Qazaq and Russian
005	Dariga	Middle	18	Female	No	41 minutes	Qazaq
006	Madina	Middle	19	Female	Yes	40 minutes	Qazaq and Russian
007	Bolat	Middle	22	Male	No	54 minutes	Qazaq
Aqtau							
Candidate number	*Pseudonym*	*Zhuz*	*Age*	*Gender*	*Job experience*	*Interview duration*	*Interview language(s)*
001	Amangeldi	Junior	21	Male	Yes	42 minutes	Qazaq
002	Qairat	Junior	25	Male	Yes	45 minutes	Qazaq
003	Aizhan	Junior	22	Female	Yes	45 minutes	Qazaq
004	Yerzhan	Junior	25	Male	Yes	50 minutes	Qazaq
005	Shoqan	Junior	19	Male	Yes	45 minutes	Qazaq and Russian
006	Aisara	Junior	26	Female	Yes	59 minutes	Qazaq and Russian
Shymkent							
Candidate number	*Pseudonym*	*Zhuz*	*Age*	*Gender*	*Job experience*	*Interview duration*	*Interview language(s)*
001	Nursultan	Senior	24	Male	Yes	43 minutes	Qazaq
002	Aidar	Senior	22	Male	Yes	45 minutes	Qazaq
003	Samat	Senior	22	Male	Yes	41 minutes	Qazaq
004	Zhibek	Senior	22	Female	Yes	44 minutes	Qazaq
005	Bagila	Senior	22	Female	Yes	40 minutes	Qazaq
006	Abay	Senior	29	Male	Yes	49 minutes	Qazaq
007	Dana	Middle	25	Female	Yes	57 minutes	Qazaq

With regard to the Zhuz affiliation of all online survey participants, the following table can be drawn:

Table 3: Umbrella clan (Zhuz) affiliation of participants in online surveys

Umbrella clan (Zhuz)	**Share**
Senior	47.5%
Middle	34%
Junior	12.5%
Non-Zhuz Rus	4.5%
No answer	1.5%
Total	100%

3.4 Limitations and potential problems

A general limitation of semi-structured (unstructured-conversational) interviews and online surveys on clan politics is that a clan is an unofficial phenomenon that many people prefer to conceal rather than disclose. For this reason, privacy, concealability, a lack of statistical data, as well as unavailable concealed and inaccessible materials were all hindrances to my research. A further drawback is a personal bias, as I am Qazaq and a member of Qazaq clans. To minimise personal bias, I maintained a neutral and impartial stance on the participants' responses during the qualitative phase of this research. During the interviews, I did not express my own personal opinions or feelings and avoided implying that there is a right answer. I also kept detailed records and incorporated all data into the report. Moreover, I evaluated all data equally, considering every response.

Thus, the validity of the research results is ensured by applying methods of analysis that are generally used in the political and social sciences, as well as adhering to well-established conventions regarding their realisation. Reliability is ensured by keeping a very careful and precise record of each stage of the research.

4. Empirical research findings

4.1 Clan affiliations and employment (including the public sector)

One interesting finding from online surveys is that few respondents use their clans in workplaces – only 12% of all respondents answered that they use their clans in their job places. But when the question was posed whether they support the use of clan belonging in employment, this figure went down to 4%, and 8% of young people were neutral. Other respondents neither used clan affiliation at work nor supported its usage in employment. These results stand in contrast to the existing literature. The high disapproval levels might indicate that young people did not want to reveal that they followed such practices. This would align with the findings of some scholars, such as Schatz (2004), who points out that most people choose to conceal their clan practices rather than disclose them. Responses to online surveys were also very different from interview responses, which are presented below.

Several interviewees from Aqtau and Shymkent said they had experienced the influences of clan divisions in job interviews, while respondents from Nur-Sultan reported no questions on clan identifications in job interviews. One of the interviewees in Shymkent shared his experience:

> *"Once there was a free vacancy and there were three candidates for this position including me. As a result, the candidate with the same Ru as the head of the company was hired. Later, I found out that all of us had been asked about our Ru clans during the job interviews."* (Bagila, 22 years old, Shymkent)

Furthermore, according to interviewees from Aqtau (Junior Zhuz), employers in the city tended always to ask questions about clan affiliations in job application. One interviewee even said: *"Employers always ask Ru clans in job interviews in Mangystau region, and even they first ask our Rus then our full names"* (Aizhan, 22 years old, Aqtau). Another interviewee said that Qazaqs could benefit from Ru clan affiliations not only in job applications but also in workplaces and business trips: *"Employers accept you as a 'little brother' with kindness, mildness and a desire to help at work if you are the same Ru member as the employers are. Besides, when you are on a business trip, your Ru helps to build a good relationship with your local colleagues"* (Yerzhan, 25 years old, Aqtau).

The vast majority of interviewees from Nur-Sultan (capital city/Middle Zhuz) and some interviewees from Shymkent (Senior Zhuz) claimed that their clan affiliation could affect their chances of getting a job in the public sector. This stands in contradiction to the above statement by Middle Zhuz interviewees about the absence of clan-related questions in job interviews. The Middle Zhuz

interviewees explained this contradiction by pointing to the lack of job interviews in the selection process, as a rule, as well as the different application process for public sector roles than those in other employment sectors. One interviewee said that it was highly possible that the public sector sought to hire Senior Zhuz members, explaining the phenomenon with the following Qazaq proverb:

> *"Ұлы жүзге қамшы бер де малға қой,*
> *Орта жүзге қалам бер де дауға қой,*
> *Кіші жүзге найза бер де жауға қой."*
> *(Майқы-би)*

> *["Give a whip to Senior Zhuz and let it manage domestic animals,*
> *Give a pencil to Middle Zhuz and let it solve disputes,*
> *Give a spear to Junior Zhuz and let it defend [us] from the enemy."*
> *(Maiqy-bi)]*

(Serik, 19 years old, Nur-Sultan).

In this proverb, the management of domestic animals means the public administration of the Qazaq Khanate, which was based on a pastoral economy of nomads at the time of Zhuz and Ru emergence. According to this interviewee, human resources managers in the public sector still base their decisions on clan affiliation and give preference to Senior Zhuz members in Nur-Sultan, the capital city of Qazaqstan. This conclusion supports the results of Minbaeva and Muratbekova-Touron's (2013, pp. 109, 125-126) analysis, that is, state-owned companies are strongly affected by clannism. Likewise, Liyassova et al. (2013, pp. 35-36) argue that a special form of protectionism occurs in the selection and placement of personnel in modern Qazaqstan, especially in the southern part, which is the Senior Zhuz region. Suleimenov (www.bsblog.info, 2013) makes a similar argument about the domination of the southern clans (Senior Zhuz) in the most powerful economic and political positions in Qazaqstan.

In contrast, all Junior Zhuz interviewees from Aqtau stated that their clan affiliation did not affect their chances of being hired in the public sector. One of them had the experience of working in *Gossluzhba* [public sector] and said he did not feel his Ru had any influence.

Overall, despite the minimal evidence (10%) in online surveys of the use of clans in workplaces, the results of interviews were very interesting and somewhat surprising. Respondents from the Middle Zhuz (Nur-Sultan) said they had received no questions about their clans in job interviews. However, they simultaneously claimed that their clan affiliations could influence their chances of getting a job in the public sector because there is a different application procedure for public sector roles. Conversely, respondents from the Junior Zhuz region (Aqtau) perceived an opposite pattern: they thought that their clan affiliations did not affect their chances of being employed in the public sector, but did influence other kinds of job interviews. Last, young Qazaqs in the Senior Zhuz region said that they thought clan affiliations could affect both job interviews more generally and their chances of being employed in the public sector. Taken together, these responses suggest that young Qazaqs believe Zhuz and Rus might influence employment in modern Qazaqstan, with their effects varying across Zhuz regions and employment sectors. These results also demonstrate the perception that clans have continued their legacy by adapting to modern conditions and becoming a 'grey' part of employment in Qazaqstan. By differentiating the significance of clan effects across various Zhuz and employment sectors, one can more clearly see why certain young Qazaqs emphasised the importance of clannism in employment in particular.

4.2 Blood purity and progeny health

Many respondents (strongly) supported following the rules of clan affiliation in their marriage (Table 4). Less than one fifth of all 200 respondents did not (strongly) support these rules.

Table 4: Do you support the idea of using clan belonging in marriage?

Zhuz affiliation		Strongly do not support		Do not support		Neutral		Support		Strongly support		Do not know		Total	(%)
Senior		7	3.5%	10	5%	6	3%	43	21.5%	27	13.5%	4	2%	95	47.5%
Middle		4	2%	8	4%	6	3%	30	15%	16	8%	3	1.5%	68	34%
Junior		2	2%	2	1%	2	1%	13	6.5%	5	2.5%	0	0.5%	25	12.5%
Non-Zhuz		4	2%	1	0.5%	1	0.5%	1	0.5%	2	1%	0	0%	9	4.5%
No answer		0	0%	1	0.5%	0	0%	1	0.5%	1	0.5%	0	0%	3	1.5%
Total	(%)	17	8.5%	22	11%	15	7.5%	88	44%	51	25.5%	7	3.5%	200	100%

Source: Own design based on fieldwork

Furthermore, all online survey respondents were asked if they had been married and, if so, whether they followed the rules of clan divisions, especially Ru rules, in their marriage. Very few participants (11%) indicated that they did not abide by clan rules in their marriage, while more than half (55%) of all married respondents revealed that they had in fact followed clan rules in their matrimony. The other 34% of respondents found this question difficult to answer. Another question asked unmarried respondents whether they planned to follow Ru rules in marriage. The overall response to this question was quite positive: the overwhelming majority of single respondents (80%) indicated that they planned to follow the clan rules, that is, not to get married to a person from the same Ru, counting back seven ancestors on both their fathers' and mothers' lineages.

Turning to the results of the interviews, all interviewees except one stated that Ru had (would) impact(ed) on their marriage and they had (would) ask(ed) about clan affiliation of their partners as a necessary question. One respondent said that Rus directly affected not only marriage, but also building a relationship, because Ru affiliation is asked along with the name of a partner at the first meeting (Aizhan, 22 years old, Aqtau). She further added, *"We, the people of Mangystau, immediately ask someone's Ru name, because what if I do not ask and then fall in love? It is better to ask it right after I become interested in that person"*. Some interviewees believed that it was better to have a marriage with a representative of a different Zhuz than Ru, while others claimed that it was acceptable to marry people with the same Ru if the ancestors of the male and female sides were separate for at least seven ancestors on both the fathers' and mothers' lineages. All respondents except one based their positions on the effects of clans on blood purity.

The interviewee who did not have similar views as other respondents asserted that he would not ask his future partner about her clan affiliation, but instead he would look at her human dignity (Nursultan, 24 years old, Shymkent).

Finally, all participants of online surveys were kindly asked to indicate whether they find Ru to be an effective 'tool' for preserving the purity of blood among Qazaqs. Almost three-quarters of online survey respondents (strongly) agreed that Ru is helpful for preserving blood purity amongst Qazaqs. Throughout the course of the interviews, all respondents except one stated that they believed that Ru is an effective 'tool' to preserve the purity of blood among Qazaqs. They claimed that if they did not follow clan rules, they might have unhealthy offspring with a mutation. One respondent shared an acquaintance's experience: *"One of my acquaintances from the same Ru got married and later all [one's] children were born with some diseases. This proves the role of clans in the purity of blood"* (Bagila, 22 years old, Shymkent). Many interviewees believed that if one did not follow the rules of clans in one's marriage, then one would have mutated children and hereditary diseases in future offspring.

However, one person was not on the same 'bank of the river', that is, he contested the view of blood purity by saying that same-Ru marriage did not affect the likelihood of offspring diseases (Nursultan, 24 years old, Shymkent).

In a similar vein as the majority of respondents indicated, a strong relationship between clans and blood purity is reported in the Qazaq-language literature. Many scholars (e.g. Medeuov, 2011; Qozhambetova, 2013; Yergali, 2014; Abdibekov, 2015; Bolsanbek, 2016; Ospan, 2017) assert that Qazaq clans' use of the 'seven ancestors' system provides blood purity and genealogical cleanliness. Otherwise, as Abzhan (2014, p. 56) argues, Qazaqs might face genetic disorders and hereditary diseases. Even Abdibekov (2015, p. 27) proposes reaching '40 ancestors' in order to have spotless blood and allow marriages between the same Ru representatives. The findings of this research highly support the prevalence of these assertions, especially the results of semi-structured interviews.

It can be concluded that all interviewees except one believed in blood purity, which they argued should be followed by Rus because they believed mutation and other blood-related diseases could affect their future descendants if they did not follow clan rules. That is why, as they mentioned, they preferred to know their partners' Rus before their marriage. It would give them a reason to decide whether their partners are the right choices or not. These results were further supported by online survey findings. It is also obvious that clans play a significant role in marriage for many participants, because, as shown above, they find clan affiliation and rules as effective 'tools' to preserve blood purity.

In conclusion, all interviewees but one believed in the importance of following marriage-related clan rules in order to maintain blood purity, which they and many Qazaq academics have argued will lessen the likelihood of genetic mutations in offspring. That is why, they said, they preferred to know their partners' Rus in advance of their marriages; it would give them the opportunity to decide whether their partners were the right choices. These results were further supported by online survey responses, with many individuals supporting the use of clan rules to determine marriages and preserve blood purity.

4.3 New platforms for modern Qazaq clans

Of the 200 respondents to the online surveys, 14 young people indicated that they had ever participated in online political events or discussions related to clan divisions, whilst 11 found it difficult to say. More than half of the interviewees and 19 respondents of online surveys indicated that they used the 'Zheti Ata' application regularly. These findings show that online platforms are useful venues for studying clan relations, especially given the growing trend of internet users in Qazaqstan.

Some interviewees stated that both clan members and non-members could generate political activism, within certain limits. They supported only legal activism and opposed tribalism if they thought it violated people's rights since, as they said, tribes were not officially registered and lacked legal status. One respondent asserted that clans could cause diverse consequences, such as the emergence of new cleavages, noting, *"I have found a group in VKontakte, which is called 'Aday' [a Ru inside of Junior Zhuz]. They call others with slogans such as "If you are Qazaq, be as Aday" or "If you are Qazaq, you are Aday" [...]"* (Bolat, 22 years old, Nur-Sultan). This assertion and quote match those observed in western Qazaqstan – Qazaqs there self-identify themselves first as 'Junior Zhuz' people, not as Qazaqs (Mitskevich, 2013). He further pointed out that he would not personally go on strike but would rather try to solve any kinds of discontent either legally where appropriate or using clan contacts if needed.

Additionally, some interviewees (e.g. Bolat, 22 years old, Nur-Sultan) argued that clans might generate political activism by gathering to a Kurultai [local political 'meeting'], whilst others (e.g. Aizhan, 22 years old; Yerzhan, 25 years old, Aqtau) thought it can be done via online platforms such as social networks. For example, one of them further explained:

> *"I think that clans can generate political activism through Facebook against recent land disputes, because it is difficult, even impossible, to raise dissatisfaction with the recent amendments of the law on land, living in remote areas of Qazaqstan. Clans can be effective [ties] to unite people against these kinds of political decisions."* (Aizhan, 22 years old, Aqtau).

It seems that Qazaqs find themselves more united by clans and use their clan belonging to oppose political events; at least, they attach their own clans to political issues as a supporting institution. In reviewing the literature, no data were found on the association between clans and political activism. However, the results of semi-structured interviews show that Zhuz and Ru affiliations might generate political activism in the forms of political discussions and civic engagement. The chances of these activities occurring depends on the context, and they are most likely to take place online. This means that clans might assist young people's online political activism, but whether they can cause offline political participation is ultimately an empirical question, as there is a distinction between virtual political activism and real political offline actions. The internet's role in young people's political activism is particularly relevant in this case, as the findings of Kim et al. (2017, p. 899) show the positive potential of online political activism in the political lives of young people. According to the findings of this research, we can infer that online platforms such as the 'Zheti Ata' application, Facebook, and VK might assist in generating online political activism among young participants on clan issues.

To summarise, both online survey and interview results show that young people say they already participate in political events and/or discussions raised by Zhuz and Ru divisions, particularly on online platforms, which might result in increased political activism. The power of online activism and its implications should not be underestimated. Many studies (e.g. Naumov, 2014; Halupka, 2014; Wilkin et al., 2015) have shown that online political activism is not always the final part of political participation, but rather is just the beginning of the political 'repertoire' in the internet era, 'especially for younger people' (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2014, p. 627). Collins (2004, p. 245) also asserts that inexpensive mobilisation and political participation could be reached by clan elites using clans 'in 'crowding out', a process by which they participate politically through their network and effectively crowd out non-clan forms of association or participation'.

5. Conclusions

This is the first empirical study that explores young Qazaqs' perspectives on how Zhuz and Ru clan divisions affect their lives. This work focused on three cities, using an exploratory sequential mixed-methods research design to understand young people's clan-based experiences and attitudes, as well as their assessments of the role of generic criteria. The study found that clan divisions are seen to affect marriage, employment, and online media use.

In the course of the research, young people explained that they felt Zhuz and Ru clan identities strongly affected job interviews, although the strength of these effects varied in Zhuz regions and across employment sectors. Perceived impacts were particularly significant in the case of Junior Zhuz members. Further findings showed that clan identities were seen to impact young people's chances of being employed in the public sector, especially among Senior and Middle Zhuz members. The overwhelming majority of young respondents also said they did not use Zhuzes and Rus in their workplaces. One possible explanation for these results is that clan affiliations are seen to play a role in the job application process, but are less significant in the workplace itself. Another possible explanation is that the online survey respondents concealed discriminatory clan practices because all of them were either employees or students at the time of their participation. This finding illustrates that the concealing of clans is a legacy of Soviet times that exists still in present day Qazaqstan.

This study has also found that Rus are seen to have a profound influence on the marriages of young Qazaqs, and even on pre-marriage relationships. A possible explanation for this might be that young Qazaqs accept Rus as the only proper 'tool' by which it is possible to preserve the purity

of blood. This means that young Qazaqs still learn Rus, and consequently also Zhuzes, by heart and practice them in their marriages because the vast majority of Rus belong to Zhuzes. Thus, this study contributes to our broader understanding of the development of clan relations in the XXI century.

Moreover, the results of the research and literature review have shown that the internet and social media provide modern Qazaq clans with new online platforms, at least in clan debates, political discussions, and, possibly, online political activism. The potential role of clans in political participation needs further investigation, as politics was not the primary focus of this study and so it did not delve into the question in great detail. The fact that Zhuzes and Rus are discussed widely on the internet and the record-breaking clan-oriented 'Zheti Ata' application proves that modern Qazaq clans have new platforms to utilise. Further research is needed on the clans' relationship with these online platforms.

Overall, these results suggest that young people believe clans affect them both negatively and positively in the contexts of the workplace, online media, and marriage. While some individuals might see themselves as suffering from 'clan clientelism', which they say occurs across power hierarchies in workplaces, others might perceive themselves as benefiting from effective kinship ties. This tension results in both positive and negative consequences. Moreover, marriage that is in accordance with set clan rules is widely seen as important; this might play a role in shaping and perpetuating the persistence of Ru clans in modern Qazaqstan. It is possible that Zhuz clans and their practices persist in large part because of the continued significance attributed to Rus, given that most Rus belong to Zhuzes and they are generally practiced together.

6. Recommendations for future research

The author recognises that this research study deals with a small number of respondents living within the boundaries of three cities, thus leaving significant space for further research. First, the participants under examination were young Qazaqs aged from 18 to 29 in three big cities in Qazaqstan, which makes it difficult to generalise to the perceived effects of clans on all young Qazaqs. Although there are sound reasons why these three cities were chosen, it would be worthwhile to expand research to, for instance, other cities in west, central and east Qazaqstan, as well as to villages, in order to gauge how clans affect youth on a broader scale.

Second, it would be particularly helpful to evaluate the attitudes of 'non-clan members' of the Qazaq society – that is, other nationalities – toward clan-based divisions, as non-clan members account for 35% of the overall population of Qazaqstan (National Statistical Committee, 2018).

Third, to draw a complete picture of the perceived clan influences on young people, it would be useful to study employers, elites and/or policymakers too. In so doing, the question of how Zhuz and Ru clan-based kinship divisions are seen to affect youth in Qazaqstan would need to be answered by a triangulation of young Qazaqs, young non-Qazaqs, and potential employers/policymakers.

Finally, this research could be extended by including quantitative methods such as content analysis of relevant keywords in online media and/or discourses. This would not only provide us with an understanding of the specific discourses' relative frequency, but would also give further depth to the research field. This, in turn, would allow researchers to make broader and more detailed conclusions, paving the way for new research on topics such as concealed clan relations as well as the relationships between clan affiliations and political activism among ordinary citizens.

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