

Dina, The Mother of Kyui: Women in Kazakh Musical Tradition

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the place of women in traditional Kazakh musical culture, focusing on the life and creative work of Dina Nurpeisova (1861–1955). Dina was a distinguished dombra^[i] player, a pupil of the renowned kyushi^[ii] Qurmanghazy, and a great kyushi in her own right. The article reexamines Dina's life in light of archival records that only became available after Kazakhstan became independent. From the 1930s through the 1990s, Soviet media decried the oppressed status of women in pre-revolutionary Kazakhstan. It maintained that the women of the "savage" Kazakh nation, which lacked both a government and a culture of its own, achieved happiness only after the formation of the USSR. Print media focused particularly on the figure of renowned kyushi Dina Nurpeisova (1861-1955), casting her as a Kazakh woman liberated thanks to Soviet rule. This vision of Dina has since been cast aside, but this mistaken opinion of women's position in pre-revolutionary Kazakh culture has become the norm. As a result, Dina is treated as a unique phenomenon in Kazakh musical culture. Yet although she undeniably had exceptional gifts (people even call her "the mother of kyui," analogous to calling Qurmanghazy "the father of kyui"), Dina was not the only woman to achieve public recognition in traditional Kazakh culture. Female kyushi were common, and women enjoyed a very high status in traditional society, as evident in the sheer number of names of outstanding female singers, poets, akyns, kyushi, and warriors that have been preserved to this day. At the same time, Dina Nurpeisova occupies a special place among these eminent Kazakh women. This study aims to free Dina's biography from obsolete and false interpretations, and to present her artistic path based on more accurate data.

^[i] Dombra is a two-string lute, a traditional Kazakh instrument.

^[ii] Kyui is an instrumental musical genre. Kyushi is the musician performing and creating kyuis.

Keywords: dombra, Kazakhstan, folklore, traditional music

INTRODUCTION

In 1938, the "Socialistic Kazakhstan" newspaper published a special issue for March 8th, International Women's Day. The following was in the article: "The Great Socialist October Revolution, the Soviet rule and the Party of Lenin and Stalin have granted women their true rights; have given them true freedom and happiness". Another article said: "Dina's dombra used to stutter, as if it did not know how to speak. It was full of grief and suffering; many instruments of that time could only sigh, as if the kyui's spring was filled with black sand of numbness. Gracious and young fingers of female players were hardened to such an extent that prevented all of the beautiful melodies from streaming from the instrument. The dombra of that time was lacking in joy and was depressed." Such publications were commonplace practically in all of the Soviet mass media. They created an image of the pre-revolutionary Kazakh women as choked, lacking in happiness and rights. One of these women is Dina Nurpeisova. According to the Soviet mass media, her art has started to

Article History: Received 30 August 2018 ♦ Revised 23 November 2018 ♦ Accepted 19 December 2018

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bloom only after moving to Almaty (1937) at the age of 76. Only after that did her dombra start to sound clear and bright.

Dina has gotten several government awards ¹ and has won big music competitions. Her orders and medals, her wins in the arts, the grateful reviews that were published in newspapers and magazines were all presented as a significant achievement made possible by the Soviet rule. How close is this to reality? In order to answer this question, let us review some of the historic materials that became available only after Kazakhstan has gained its independence. The mass media gave a significant attention to Dina as a creative personality, but that cannot be analyzed without taking into the account her private life that was far less known at the time.

Dina Nurpeisova lived through major social and political change. The whole period was turbulent for Kazakhstan as the following events took place during her lifetime: the National Liberation Uprising of 1917, the Civil War (1918–1921), the years of forced famine (1920–1922, 1929–1933), the Collectivization (1920), the establishment of the Soviet rule in Kazakhstan (1920), the years of repression (1930–1938), the Second World War (1941–1945) and other events which drastically changed the life of Kazakhs. These events were brightly portrayed in the traditional musicians' compositions.

Dina has kyuis dedicated to political themes of the time: "About Stalin", "30 years of Kazakhstan", "Victory" and others. It is quite clear that she, just like the other kyuis, was forced to respond to these timely themes. It is largely due to this practice of writing about what was asked of her, that the legacy of our ancestors did not get interrupted and survived to this day. The meaning of these events of the Soviet era that was once hidden from the public eye is slowly revealing itself now.

While the above mentioned social and political events affected all of the people, the personal tragedies and struggles of Dina are less known as they were not covered by mass media. It is possible that Akhmet Zhubanov has edited Dina's biography in order to save her from trouble or even persecution. For example, he hid the fact that after Dina's husband's passing, she married his brother. This traditional Kazakh rule was banned during the Soviet times. In his book, "Strings of the centuries", Zhubanov writes that Dina only had one son named Zhurynbai, who was called up for military service to the home front in 1916, and later to the frontline in 1941. Zhubanov completely skips the fact that Dina had 13 children, many of whom have died during the forced famine years of 1920–1922 and 1929–1933.

In reality, Dina had three children with her first husband, Nurpeis: a daughter Zhamal, and two sons Qairosh and Zhurynbai. Zhamal died at the age of 15. Zhurynbai's son, Qozhakhmet (Dina's grandson), died during the Great Patriotic War, while her other grandson Tilekkabyl died in 1945 after the war. Zhurynbai himself died in 1946 because of the wounds inflicted during his service. He is buried in the village of Azau of Astrakhan Region (a part of Russian Federation). His wife Kaisha and their daughter Akzhan, Balzhan and granddaughter (late Qozhakhmet's child) Gulzhan remained living in that village after his death. They were taken to Dina's house in Almaty in 1937 by one of Dina's sons, Toremurat (Murat) after he came back from the war. Since then Dina lived together with her youngest son Toremurat, her daughter-in-laws Orynzhan and Kaisha, grandchildren Akzhan and Balzhan and a great granddaughter Gulzhan.

¹ Honored artist of Kazakh SSR (1938), Order of the Red Banner (1941), People's artist of Kazakh SSR (1944)

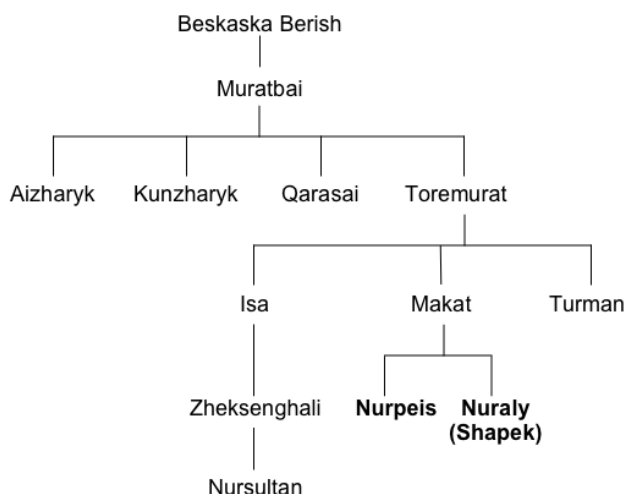


Figure 1. Family tree of Dina’s first and second husbands

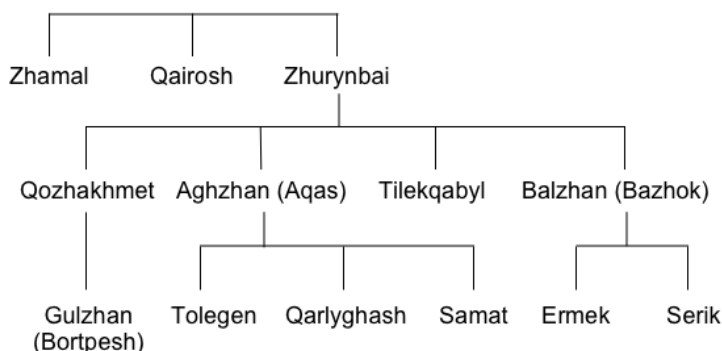


Figure 2. Dina’s descendants with Nurpeis

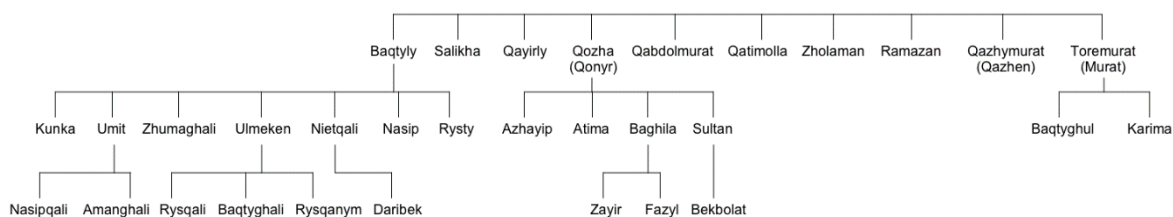


Figure 3. Dina’s descendants with Nuraly

Kazakhs know their ancestry up to the seventh generation. While the genealogy of many traditional artists is known, Dina’s ancestry remains a mystery. Many different views about Dina’s ancestry were published in newspapers and magazines. Some mark her as a part of the Tolengit tribe, some say that she is from Tore tribe, other say that she is a Tore from Tolengit tribe. A.Shamgonov gives an example of Dina’s words: “I am from the Tolengit tribe”, but despite such a straightforward statement, Shamgonov reasons that Dina was forced to say that out of the fear of being persecuted by the Soviets. The Tore tribe is known to be the direct relatives of Genghis khan, which makes the members of this tribe special in the sense that the Kazakh ruling class of khans and sultans were only chosen from this tribe. Tolengits, on the other hand, served as the sultans’ hand and because of that they used Tore tribe’s seal. After the fall of the Kazakh Khanate Tolengits became a separate tribe, but kept Tore’s seal. During the Soviet rule (especially in 1920–1940’s) the people from the Tore tribe became persecuted. Because of that, many Tores started calling themselves Tolengits, since the

tribe's seals were the same. The author also writes: "...it is possible that Dina, like the other representatives of the Tore tribe, was calling herself a Tolengit out of the fear of persecution" (Shamgonov A., 2015).

Culturologist Zira Naurzbaeva agrees with this opinion. In her article "Dina: the gold sets at the bottom of the patience cup" she writes that in the Soviet time the most hidden aspect of Dina was her ancestry. The author also draws attention to the fact that A.Zhubanov in his "Strings of the centuries" book gives a genealogic tree of all of the traditional musicians except for Dina. The meaning of ancestry is very important to the Kazakhs. "Evidently", Naurzbaeva writes, "Dina really is from the line of Genghis khan. Akhmet Zhubanov along with the dombra players who came from the same region as Dina and played in an orchestra purposefully kept silent about this fact in order to protect Dina from repressions. By the time Dina arrived to Alma-Ata (now Almaty), many musicians from the orchestra's founder to the orchestra's artists who were the descendents of Genghis khan, including close relatives of Dauletkerei, were already repressed. Based on Dina's birthplace, she belongs to the same dynasty. By going on stage in Alma-Ata she risked to be noticed by chekists [KGB servicemen]. There are other misalignments in Dina's biography, which, evidently, was "edited" by herself and Akhmet Zhubanov in order to go along with the ideology of that time" (Naurzbaeva, 2017: 312).

Composer Balnur Kydyrbekova expresses a similar view: "One more question regarding Dina's ancestry: her biography was written in accordance with the Soviet ideological reality. To this day it is known that she got married late, that when she was little her father had made a dombra for her by hand out of the wood taken from the neighbor's shed. Dina is a Tore! Her father's name was Kenzhe ...he was a pretty wealthy man. In order to marry his only daughter to a worthy young man, he personally chose the groom, that is why Dina did not get married until her twenties. In the present peaceful time we must fill out this gap and gather the relevant materials for our national history" (Kydyrbekkyzy, 2015: 118).

Alipkali thinks that Dina, who was popular among people, was brave and valiant, and was not one of those, who would be afraid of persecution. If she herself stated that she is one of the Tolengits, then she should be trusted.

Therefore, the question remains unanswered: was Dina really a descendent of the Tores and did she hide this fact? Given the historical situation of the time, this argument has its merits. For example, Dina has said: "In the past, in the aul [village], either we did not know such divisions, overall, I never asked about my tribe's ancestry" (Zhuryubaikyzy, 2012: 273). It is unimaginable for a person in the traditional society to not know they ancestry or to have never heard of it from the elders. Therefore, there are two possible reasons for Dina to have said so. The first reason is connected with the act of hiding her ancestry in order to avoid persecution, the second reason might lay in her words "either we did not know". During the Soviet rule any talk of belonging to a tribe was understood as an attempt to divide the unity of the people. Only after Kazakhstan has gained independence that we are able to treat our roots and national traditions with more care. In the question of her ancestry, I believe that we should listen to Dina's own words: "My tribe is Tolengit". The important aspect that needs to be given a special attention to is the fact that the people have protected Dina as an exemplary representative of the art of the dombra.

Dina Nurpesiova was born 1861 in Zhanakala region of Western Kazakhstan. She started to play the dombra at the age of three, and by the time she was nine, her name was well known. As a child, Dina grew up free and was spoiled by her parents; she was tall and of big stature, she dressed like a boy and played only with boys. There are stories of her participating in all-male wrestling competitions. Dina learned the dombra from the great kyuisi, "father of the kyui", Qurmanghazy. She got married at the age of 19, but does not stop playing the dombra. "Being 19 years old and sitting at her own wedding, Dina got tired of the commotion around her, she strummed the strings of her dombra and a melody started to stream that was so divine that it made the groom's excited aul to become quiet. She called this kyui "Ottin dauren" ["The end of the happy time"] to express with sadness the momentous nature of youth, and the irreversibility of time" (Tulepbergenova, 1977: 4). Later, in one of the meetings with Qurmanghazy, he recommended that Dina, who was 27 years old at the time, to start writing her own kyuis. Her first compositions were kyuis named identically to the ones written by famous representatives of the Western Kazakhstan dombra tradition — Qurmanghazy, Dauletkerei and Turkesh². It was a brave act on Dina's part because the technical difficulties that a player encounters while performing such kyuis as "Baizhuma" are not easily mastered, let alone composed.

There might be a couple of reasons why Dina decided to create namesake compositions. First of all, she was brave in life and in art, therefore, she decided to try out her own capabilities on difficult kyuis. Secondly,

² Kyuis named "Bulbul", "Zhiger", "Bozsholaq", "Qosalqa".

simply performing other people's kyuis was not enough for her to express her own thoughts and feelings, so she might have decided to compose her own version of those kyuis.

Going back to the theme of women's status in Kazakh society, we can ask a new question: How can a woman be called rightless and dependent when in her youth she would compete with men in wrestling, when she did not leave the dombra even after getting married, and when she was challenging her teachers by composing namesake kyuis? Dina is an outstanding kyuishi and composer, mother of 13 children. The last fact alone is evidence of her tenacity as not every woman in those difficult times was able to combine the raising of 13 children with the high level of art. By using her music she was able to protect her children from the inevitable death by hunger. The people valued her art to such a degree that they put every effort into making sure that her family survived. This is evidenced by a memory of a famous dombra player Kali Zhantleuov, who comes from the same region of the country. He and Uakhap Kabigozhin were 12 and 13 years old when in 1914 (or 1915) a competition between Dina and famous Mamen took place at a bazaar in Taipak aul. "Dina was sitting with her dombra decorated with eagle-owl's feathers on top of a felt blanket that was placed in a cart. People were bringing her money folded into handkerchiefs. That evening Uakhap and I came to the house where the competition was to take place. Dina performed first; she astonished the audience with unusual techniques of the right hand. After some time, Dina had to leave to attend to some family matters. Such was her destiny as a woman. Mamen, on the other hand, had stayed in the house until the following morning and played his kyuis to the public's delight", says Kali (Akhmedyarov, 2002: 16). After that evening Kali and Uakhap, who up until then were really interested in singing, decided to take up the art of the dombra instead.

This memory points to the fact that despite the difficult forced hunger times people still valued the art of the kyui. In traditional society there was no gender division between the artists. The people appreciated the artist's personality, independent of their sex. If that was not true, would Dina have been allowed to compete with such a famous kyuishi as Mamen?

Instrumental competitions among the Kazakhs were treated as the highest type of musical art. As such, it is equally accessible to both men and women. There are many names of women, whose art was not just on par with that of their male colleagues, but also exceeded theirs. For example, there is a story of a competition between famous kyuishi Tattimbet with a woman from the Naiman tribe, who was known in her region as a wonderful dombra player. When the two have played all of the kyuis, Tattimbet instantly comes up with a new composition and ends up winning the competition. He calls this kyui "Sylqyldağ" ["The laughing one"] and dedicates it to his opponent. It is unclear from this story if the young woman, in fact, was unable to compose one more kyui or if she chose to not perform another kyui as a way of showing her respect to the famous kyuishi. The story ends with the following: after some time passes and the woman gets married, she plays that same kyui at her own wedding.

Young women who were brought up in a traditional way often declared themselves defeated in competitions in order to maintain their opponent's honor. Men, in turn, used this to their advantage at times. For example, they would win by performing illicit techniques, such as playing the dombra with their toes. Of course, women could not repeat that same technique.

Competitions between young men and women were widespread in Kazakhstan. To this day people talk with delight about competitions between Kulshar and a woman from the Tabyn tribe, kyuishi Baganaly and a woman named Matkarima, between Abiken and Akkyz, Sugur and Mafruza. There is also a woman named Nausha, who was a magnificent player due to the fact that she bravely competed with two famous kyuishis at once—a 60 year old Esbai and a 40 year old Togyzbai. There is a saying: "Talent does not look at the age". Famous Kulshar had to compete with a young woman and an old lady at the same time. He could not withstand this trial and had to run away.

Dina's family lived from the proceeds of her art for a long time. In the early years of the Soviet rule the situation in the society was only getting worse. Multiple factors played into this: the injustice of local authorities, the unreasonably high taxes, the free-will of local representatives of the Soviet rule. One of Dina's relatives, Bagila Bishaeva remembers the following: "The Soviet rule was established in 1920. At this time the persecution of Dina and her kids also starts. Because of that, she and her large family had to move to Astrakhan region". (Kazhymuly, 2006: 5). The 1920's is not just the establishment of the Soviet rule in Kazakhstan, but also the time of the Civil War. In addition, another reason for Dina to move to the shore of the Kaspian sea was the beginning of the forced famine. Dina and her family settled in Azau locality of Kyzylzhar region that borders Russia.



Figure 4. Kumarshyk plant

The move from her native land was difficult for Dina, but it was more important for her to save her children from the famine. In the sands of her new home “Dina saved her children by collecting the seeds of a plant named *kumarshyk*³ and making porridge and bread out of it. This was the time of Collectivization”, witnesses Kapashev (2012: 89).

After some time Dina’s family moves to a small aul. According to Kapashev, “The place where Dina lived was about 1,5 kilometers away from Kozlov aul; later this locality started to be called in honor of the famous kyuishi “Dina’s aul” (or Dianovka)” (Kapashev, 2012: 90). This is echoed in the words of Edige Nurpeisov, a dombra player from that region: “Prior to moving to Almaty, Dina Nurpeisova lived in a place called Dianovka of Volodarskiy region, which was named in honor of the kyuishi. To this day, only Kazakhs live in this aul” (Nabiev, 2018).

The name “Dianovka” surfaces in memories of other people: “My grandmother, my Dad’s mother, was born in Dianovka, in her youth she was able to listen to the performances of Dina Nurpeisova, a pupil of Qurmanghazy Sagrybayev’s” (Abulgaziyev, 2016: 2).

According to Kapashev, “Dina’s eldest son, Zhuryrbay, becomes a member of the “Kyzyl Tu” kolkhoz and works there as a livestock farmer. ... My grandmother was also a part of that co-operative association of workers. The local entertainment club becomes active in the 20’s and 30’s. One of the highlights of my grandmother’s 67th year was her performing on the stage of that club. After a long work day she went up on stage and performed for the members of the co-op. This is told by Amir Ybrashev, one of the residents of that aul” (Kapashev, 2012: 89–90).

“Her sons Zhuryrbay, Qozhakhmet (Zhuryrbay’s son), Murat, daughters Salikha, Kaiyrly all work at kolkhoz “Stalin”. Kaiyrly becomes one of the leading milkmaids of that kolkhoz. Dina, performing in the evening in front of the kolkhoz’s workers, dedicated her kyui “Sauynshy” (“Milkmaid”) to the milkmaids” (Kapashev, 2012: 89–90).

“...And to the first lesson in the Campaign against Illiteracy, the teacher, Najmeden Ismagulov, who was also the director, invited all of the village’s residents. It was a true holiday. What is more, the kolkhoz’s chairman invited the famous domra player Dina Nurpeisova from Dianovka, who became the People’s Artist of KazSSR, the Honored Artist of the Republic of Kazakhstan, and who received the order of the Red Banner twice.”⁴

For a long time Dina’s first major performance was considered to be the one that took place at the all-Kazakhstan convention of folk performers in Almaty. In reality, Dina performed at a regional olympiade in Volodarovka city in 1936, which gathered over 200 Kazakh musicians, who came from all of the regions and auls. There, Dina took the first place (Sarybayev, 1963).

³ Kumarshyk is a prickly plant that blooms in August. Its little rounded seeds are pretty fatty. During the years of famine it saved the lives of many people, as the bread made out of these seeds was filling.

⁴ Volodarski region’s municipal education website <http://regionvol.ru/index.php>

Presently, one of the streets in Volodarskiy's regional centers is called after Dina. Kozlovo village also uses her name for a street as well as in the title of the local community center. The center's director, Orazaliev Kimadi, who is also the conductor of a dombra ensemble...has put a lot of effort into opening of the museum of Dina Nurpeisova. In the museum, there is information about the fact that Dina was awarded honorary certificates from the regional committee in 1934, and from the committee of people's representatives in 1937 (Kapashev, 2012: 91–92).

Cardinal changes in the life of Dina are connected with the name of Kali Zhantleuov. It was he who initially told A.Zhubanov that the famous pupil of the great Qurmanghazy was alive and that she lived in the Astrakhan region. Based on Zhubanov's instructions, Smagul Koshekbaev went to find Dina and in 1937 he brought her and her family to Almaty.

It was difficult for the 76 year old Dina to move to Almaty. However, she remembered her teacher's request to pass along the art of the kyui to the younger generation and she could not have let this opportunity pass her by: "By accepting the dombra of the great Qurmanghazy, I swore to him that I will do as he requested. I now see that the time has come to make Qureken's (i.e. Qurmanghazy) and other kyuishis' dream come true. I firmly agreed to be a teacher of the young talents" (Bisenova, 2012: 43).

The rest of Dina's life was connected with the city of Almaty, the cultural capital of Kazakhstan. She dedicated herself to the propagation and distribution of her teacher's legacy. Akhmedyarov writes: "Prior to leaving [for Almaty], Dina gather the whole aul and nervously announced: "I am not going for myself, I am going for Qureken's spirit".

After the move, Dina missed her home, but she never came back there. She said: "...I got the awards, have recorded all of my kyuis, have gone to Tashkent, Moscow, have seen Zhambyl, let them return me to my home now. I miss my home. The only dream that I have left is to walk on the earth of Baibek, to drink the crystal clear water from a well in Naryn Kum".

Art is a special talent. There is a saying: "Art is a gift from above". It is not given to everyone, and even if a person possesses such a gift, not everyone is able to recognize and develop it. The ability to have a live connection with the master was a fundamental requirement for an artist's development in the traditional society. Only through this connection could kyuishis, akyns, singers and other artists enrich their repertoire. The coming of famous singers and kyuishis to an aul would be treated as sort of a holiday. Every Kazakh considered it to be a great honour to host such guests.

Unlike men, women had more difficulties going on such trips not because they were prohibited to practice their art, but because they also had the responsibility for the children and the household. Despite the fact that women could not freely travel to different auls, they did have a connection with other artists. Based on this limited traveling ability, people who did not know the traditional Kazakh society, could assume that "in Kazakh society women had no rights, were dependent on their husbands, like slaves". Such opinions are formed due to the lack of knowledge of the specifics of the traditional Kazakh society.

Kazakhs treated their women with a special sense of respect because they were the bearers of the future generations. There is a saying: "A son grows up by looking up to his father, a daughter grows up by looking up at her mother". Since young women would leave their homes and join their husband's auls and their families, Kazakhs treated girls with the same amount of respect as would have been given to a representative from a different tribe. Brothers were always ready to protect the honor of their sisters. That is why girls grew up surrounded by love and care. Kazakh women never covered up their faces and never wore hijabs. Instead, they wore headscarves. This scarf was not worn as a symbol of Islam, but instead was required to be worn by the traditions, as a sign of respect to the self and the others. This tradition exists to this day. It is thought of as bad luck when a woman's hair would fall on the ground. Therefore, the fallen hair was meticulously collected and burned so that other people would not step on it and cause the owner to have a headache. There is a saying: "A young woman's beauty is in her hair", which is why Kazakh women would decorate their hair with metal pendants, that also doubled up as a protection from the evil eye. There is also a hygienical reason to wearing the headscarves.

Dina always wore a large headscarf, called "aq zhaulyk or kimeshek". She treated this headscarf with great care and would tie it up on her head herself before every concert. In traditional society such large headscarves were worn by older women who were free of house work. Women in such headscarves were treated with queen-like respect.



Figure 5. Dina wearing her favorite headscarf

Kazakhs paid a lot of attention to the upbringing of young women. They were required to be humble, respecting of the elders, tender and caring. This is how girls were prepared for the next part of their life, the marriage. Ever since a girl was little, her parents would prepare a dowry for her, which included everything necessary for her new family life.

Another saying goes: “Two halves make one whole”, which points to the equality between a man and a woman getting married. Nonetheless, the wife would never argue with her husband and would always show him respect, but when it was called upon (like when the husband would go to war), women would have no problems using guns to protect themselves and their children from enemies and from wild animals.

This equality is also seen in the process of making a yurt. Traditionally, the master does not make a door for the yurt as it is thought of as an omen of misfortune. If the parents of the bride are providing the newlyweds with a yurt, then the groom’s side was responsible for providing the doors. By doing so, the two tribes connect their fates together. The inner part of the yurt is also divided into a male and a female part.

It is known that nomads invented pants, but Kazakh women did not wear them, even though it would have been much more comfortable to sit on a horse while wearing pants. Little girls were only allowed to wear boys’ clothes in certain cases, when, for example, there were no boys in the family or when the girl was especially spoiled by her parents. But when the time to get married would come, women would change into female clothing.

Researcher Dmitri Madigozhin in his article titled “The end family?” explains why women were not allowed to wear pants. Based on the rules of the steppe, the enemies would not kill women and children. This rule worked in times of war as well. The victors would take women and children with them. Every tribe was interested in growing their population, as the more people were in it, the more authority they had over the other tribes. That is why one of the priorities of the traditional society was preservation of women and children (Madigozhin, 2018).

A woman’s role in the Kazakh society was not concentrated just on the house work. They often were advisors to men, and when necessary, were also fighting alongside men against the enemies. There were also tribes that were ruled by women.

Women played a big part in the development of the art of the dombra. Such women were: Akzhelen, Altynai, Sakbike, Nurkyz, Konyrsha, Orynsha, Barsha, Sharipa, Malkara, Balzhan, Balbike, Ulbike, Akbikesh, Ulbosyn, Mafruzha, Arshyn, Altyn, Aisha, Nausha, Akkyz, Apike, Zamzam, Dina and others. Let's briefly describe some of them and their legacy.

There once was a young woman named Akzhelen. She lived in the Western region of Kazakhstan. She is attributed with composing 62 versions of a kyui named after herself. She was a magnificent dombra player and a beautiful woman. The ability to perform all 62 of these kyuis was used as a measure of a dombra player's artistic maturity and composing their own kyui in this genre was an honor. Distinguished dombra players such as Bogda, Dauletkerei, Kazangap, Musirali, Esbai and other have continued the Akzhelen tradition (Ysmagulov, 1983; Zhubanov, 1975; Baktygalieva, 2008).

Another well-known female kyuishe was Altynai, who lived in the middle of the 19th century in the Atyrau region of Kazakhstan. After the death of her father she was brought up by her brother. Her most famous kyui is called "Altynai Akzhelen". It is told that at her own wedding during the ceremony of unveiling of the bride's face, she opened up her veil and performed this kyui. We also know that she along with her 18 year old female student named Nausha competed with famous Esbai. At that time he was 60 years old and did not feel confident at the competition, which tells us about the mastery with which the two women performed.

Another example of a famous female dombra player is a woman who went by the nickname of Sakbike. In her kyuis she mixes Kazakh and Kyrgyz motives. When her son started to gather forces to attack the Kyrgyzs, his mother said: "I am your mother, there is Kyrgyz blood in my veins, which means that Kyrgyzs are your relatives. Do you want to go against your blood?". She then played one of her kyuis. Having listened to the kyui, her son decided against the attack (Esenuly & Eleusizkyz, 1997: 93).

A member of the Argyn tribe, a woman named Nurkyz lived in the 18th century. Nurkyz and another famous dombra player named Baizhigit were in love. Nurkyz, however, was promised to another man from a wealthy family ever since she was little. After Baizhigit found out that Nurkyz was taken to her groom's aul, he gathers his friends in order to go and return her. But clever Nurkyz stops him: "You are the kyuishe who has conquered the White Horde of Abylai Khan with your music. Are you going to become a bandit now? Forget about me, go back". After saying this, she plays her kyui named "The mournful kyui of Nurkyz", in which she pours out her dreams and suffering. In response, Baizhigit performed his own kyui named "Qosh zhanaghan", in which he says goodbye to his loved one (Esenuly & Eleusizkyz, 1997: 59).

There are many kyuis named "Baizhuma" in the Western region of Kazakhstan. Famous kyuishe such as Qurmanghazy, Dauletkerei, Alikei, Turkesh, Makash and Dina have all composed kyuis with this name. Despite a certain level of similarity between the kyuis, each one is its own original composition. According to the legend, the founder of this tradition is a kyuishe named Baizhuma, who was the first one to compose an unusual kyui that later became known under his name. However, Mustafa Ysmagulov, a research of Kazakh music, thinks that the original kyui named "Baizhuma" was composed by a woman named Konyrsha. Later on, another woman named Orynsha also composed a kyui with the same name, to which she brought her own original contribution (Seidimbek, 2002: 100).

There was a famous woman dombra player named Balbike, who lived in the 19th century in the Mangystau region. She grew up in a wealthy family and has developed an interest in the dombra since childhood. She married the man that she loved. The only thing that saddened her was the fact that she had no children. She expressed this sadness in her playing of the dombra. Having heard her play, one old man told her: "My dear, your sadness is seeping through your fingers like honey". Since then, her kyui was called "Balbyrauy" ("bal" – honey, "byrau" – the tuning of the dombra) (Mergaliev, 1972: 309–310).

Kyuishe Akbikesh lived in the 19th century in the Ural region. She was known for her mastery of the dombra playing and for her extraordinary beauty. The artistic connection that she had with the famous kyuishe Eszhan has grown into a strong and deep feeling of love, but the two were not meant to be together. Before departing for the groom's aul, she plays a kyui named "Ainam qaldy" ("My mirror that was left behind"). Eszhan understands the meaning of her kyui immediately and plays to her a kyui named "Qosh, aman bol, Akbikesh" ("Goodbye, Akbikesh") (Mergaliev, 1972: 296–297).

One of the successors of the famous Tattimbet is a woman named Akkyz (her real name was Mugilisin), a kyuishe and a singer. She was always welcomed with joy at all of the gatherings. She performed with famous singers such as Kali Baizhanov and Manarbek Erzhanov. Besides that, she was a beautiful kyuishe and a composer of her own kyuis, which were: "Zhetim kyzy" ("An orphaned girl"), "Myndy kyzy" ("A saddened girl"),

“Anama” (“To my mother”), “Kairan elim” (“Oh, my people”), as well as a few versions of “Kosbasar”. Akkyz taught many extraordinary dombra players like Magauiya Khamzin and Apike Abenova.

Apike Abenova is a close relative of Akkyz. Besides playing Akkyz’s compositions, she also performed kyuis of Kyzdarbek, Abdi, Abiken, and worked as a soloist at the Republican Radio Committee and at the Philharmony (“Kazaktyn dasturly 100 kyui” antologiyasi, 2009: 96).

There were two women named Ulbolsyn and Altyn living in the 19th century in the Western region of Kazakhstan. There is only one kyui from each one of them that has survived: Ulbolsyn’s “Akzhibek” and Altyn’s “Kosalka”.

Another famous kyuis from Atyrau is Zamzam Eszhanova. She learned the dombra from her father and her sister. Her kyuis were “Kaspil tolkyny” (“The waves of the Caspian Sea”), “Ak zhayyk” (“White Ural River”), “Shattyq” (“Happiness”) (“Kazaktyn dasturly 100 kyui” antologiyasi, 2009: 101).

In summary, it is clear that it was not the Soviet rule that gave the Kazakh women their freedom. Women were always free in the traditional society and they freely expressed their talents in all of the facets of art, they performed in epic singing and instrumental competitions alongside men. Their especially expressive and insightful dombra playing is their contribution to the development of the art of the dombra.

Among the above-mentioned dombra players Dina takes a special place as a pupil of the great Qurmanghazy, and a People’s Artists of Kazakhstan. With her creative work she not only summarized the achievements of the Western Kazakhstan’s dombra tradition, but also managed to create her own unique school of performance.

Dina’s creative work is a sort of a bridge that connects the contemporary development of the dombra music with its classical past. Besides that, her work exemplifies the high level of female performance of the past. Presently, Dina’s art not only inspires, but also serves as an example for contemporary female dombra players⁵. The recordings of Dina performing kyuis of Qurmanghazy, Dauletekerei and the others is of a special value to us.

Dina Nurpeisova was a recognized master kyuis and a people’s favorite. Despite the attempts of the Soviet rule to use her name for the purposes of propaganda of the Soviet ideology, she was and remains in the eyes of the people the queen of the national culture.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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⁵ Z. Eszhanova, A.Izmukhambetova, B.Karabalina, R.Aidarbaeva, A.Ulkebaeva and others.

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