History politics in Kazakhstan

The 550th Anniversary of the Kazakh Khanate: Geopolitics or nation building?

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«Нам необходимо вглядеться в прошлое, чтобы понять настоящее и увидеть контуры будущего»

Н. А. Назарбаев

«We need to look into the past in order to understand the present and foresee the future»

N. A. Nazarbayev

1 Source: http://e-history.kz/ru
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IV
Abstract

This thesis investigates how history become subject to national elites’ political goals, who use the promotion of certain interpretations of history as a means to forward their political agenda. It examines a case of history policy in Kazakhstan, where the government through a mass celebration argued that Kazakhstan has existed as a state for 550 years. Based on a combination of field observation, semi-structured interviews, document analysis and a review of traditional and social media, I investigate the immediate and long-term factors influencing Kazakhstan’s history policy, the means by which the policy is carried out and the response it received in society. I discuss the room that elites have for influencing perceptions of history, and what implications the history policy has for nation building in the country. I find that although the celebration of the 500th Anniversary of the Kazakh Khanate portrays Kazakhstan’s history in exclusively ethnic Kazakh terms, within the context of balancing ethnic and civic nation building policies, it still serves as a careful history policy. My findings suggest that geopolitical concerns influence Kazakhstan’s history politics to a larger extent than theories of national identity would suggest.
Preface

This master thesis would not have seen its conclusion without the help and support of many people. My deepest gratitude goes to my supervisor, Pål Kolstø, for his patience and guidance through the daunting task of a master project, and for seeing potential in me when I only saw my own insecurities. I want to thank NUPI, and especially Helge Blakkisrud, for providing me with an inspiring working environment, and amazing colleagues, during large parts of the writing process. I would also like to thank my institute, ILOS, at UiO for awarding me with funding towards my fieldwork. A big thank you also to my informants, for being so welcoming and sharing their time and knowledge.

I would not have pulled through without the support of my family and friends. Thank you for bearing with me. Special thanks go to my friends in Kazakhstan for cheering me on during my field research, to Sofia and Anniken for both academic and moral support, and to Vegard for his constant love and excellent proof reading skills!

All shortcomings in this thesis are my own responsibility.

Notes on transliteration and translation

I have used the US Library of Congress system for transliteration of Russian. I have made some adjustments, however. I have used the popular Western transliterations for names well known in the West. I have also removed diacritical marks for the sake of easy readability.

Shorter quotes within the running text are translated for better flow of reading, while longer quotes are set off from the running text and kept in the original language. Where I have translated from Russian, the original quotes are given in the footnotes.
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1 Introduction

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, several new countries emerged on the world map, and with it several new nation building projects. These countries did not emerge out of a void, but carried with them historical legacies and identities connected to previous “golden eras”, war and conflicts, independence struggles, colonialism, and the experiences of Soviet rule. As they endeavour to assert their legitimacy at home and abroad, national elites build upon the common memory of old to forge a present and a future. In the process of revising the old Soviet historiography and write new national histories, what should be considered the “right” interpretation of history often become subject to political motives, influenced by power struggles within countries and with the outside world. Even though the post-Soviet countries share many similarities when it comes to historical hardships, the way history has been incorporated into nation building and national identity narratives has varied from country to country (Kuzio, 2002; Miller & Lipman, 2012; Suny, 2001). This thesis is an investigation into the factors that motivate elites to use the past for political goals, and the methods they have at their disposal, with Kazakhstan as the case under study.

Kazakhstan faced an especially challenging situation when it came to constructing a consolidating national identity due to its ethnically heterogeneous population. It was the only republic emerging out of the ashes of the Soviet Union where the titular ethnic population was a minority within its own borders. Much of the scholarly literature written in the years after independence looked at the challenges these ethnic divisions could pose, describing Kazakhstan as a bipolar or fragmented society (Kolstø, 1999), and exploring the potential for ethnic conflict, especially linked to the large Russian population in the country (Peyrouse, 2007). Many scholars described how the Kazakhstani elite seemed to carry out multiple, seemingly contradicting policies of defining the nation both in ethnic terms and in civic terms (Burkhanov & Sharipova, 2015; Dadabaeva & Adibayeva, 2010), or even in addition in Eurasian or transnational terms (Laruelle, 2015b). The question was whether Kazakhstan was carrying out policies that could be successful at creating a consolidating national identity for its fragmented population, or whether their policies were actually examples of “kazakhization” in practice, despite the multinational rhetoric (Karin & Chebotarev, 2002; Kolstø, 1998).
In addition to the official nation building policies of the Kazakhstani government, much has been written about other, sometimes more subtle, forms of nation building in Kazakhstan since independence. Studies have for instance looked at the role that the building of a new capital city, Astana, has played in nation building and nation branding (Anacker, 2004; Fauve, 2015), or have looked at the role of TV-series (Laruelle, 2015a) and films (Isaacs, 2015) in the narration of national identity in Kazakhstan. Fewer works focus specifically on the use of history in nation building in Kazakhstan. Within Western scholarship, some works that have pointed to the tendency of post-Soviet countries to claim “centuries old state traditions” (Kolstø, 2000; Suny, 2001), and challenging and rewriting the soviet historiography (Kuzio, 2002), have included analyses of Kazakhstan. Within Russian language scholarship, some studies have been done looking at developments in Kazakhstani post-Soviet historiography mainly within academia, but sometimes also touching upon political influences on the historical sciences (Bezvikonnaia, 2004; Kadyrzhovan, 2014; Remnev, 2011; Shablei, 2009). Not many works published focus directly on the state’s history policy, although some do exist, of which Kundakbayeva and Kassymova’s study of Kazakhstan’s policy of memorialising Stalin’s repressions is an excellent example (Kundakbayeva & Kassymova, 2016). With this thesis I give my contribution to the development of this field, by giving an analysis of Kazakhstan’s history policy concerning state formation, more specifically the tracing of Kazakh(stani) statehood back 550 years in time to the establishment of the Kazakh Khanate. In addition, inspired by Laura Adams’ work “The Spectacular State”, that looks at how the state expresses national identity through mass spectacles in Uzbekistan (Adams, 2010), I explore the methods that the state use when carrying out their history policy.

The study of history politics seem to be a relatively new field, considering how little consensus there is on theory and conceptualisation. Studies concerning memorialization, historiography, politics of history and social and political memory all touch upon the same issues, but there is no clear cut conception of what history politics is or how it is carried out, what motivates it, what implications is has and what actors are involved. I will discuss this in more detail in the theory chapter of this thesis. Several studies have been done with the intent of understanding how post-soviet states deal with the historical legacy of the Soviet Union and how they attempt to rewrite their history to suit their current identities (see for instance Gorenburg, 2010a; 2010b, two special journal issues on history politics in Russia and history politics in the former Soviet Union). Fewer studies have looked at the overall picture of history politics in the post-Soviet space, to see if there are any patterns. Of the few, Evgeny
Finkel argues that there is a tendency of post-soviet states to capitalise on “genocide stories” in their history politics (Finkel, 2010). Kazakhstan, however, diverges from this pattern. Even though Kazakhstan shares a historical past of oppression and suffering with for instance Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan has emphasised to a much smaller degree than its neighbour. This therefore begs the question of what factors influence the policy decisions made within history politics. This thesis suggests that geopolitics influences history politics to a much larger degree than expected if one views history politics solely as part of identity and nation building.

To explore some of these issues, I decided to conduct a case study of a mass spectacle of history politics – the 550th anniversary celebrations of the Kazakh khanate that took place in Kazakhstan in 2015. This is an interesting case because it can be seen through various analytical lenses in the study of nation building in Kazakhstan. It was on the surface an immediate response to geopolitical developments, at the same time as it fits into longer term developments of Kazakhstani interpretations of history. It brings up important questions of legitimacy for modern Kazakhstan as a nation, and for the balance between civic and ethnic statehood that Nazarbayev has pursued since the beginning of the country’s independence. And given the extent of celebratory activities, it is a great case for investigating the form and strategies employed by the Kazakhstani elite in their efforts to manipulate public conscience. The case is relevant for the scholarship on national identity and history politics in the post-soviet region, as in contents it deviates from the common picture described above, while in form it shows how legacies of the Soviet Union are influencing the way politics is communicated in modern day Kazakhstan.

Building upon theories of national identity and nation building, and the role of history in those processes, I carry out a case study with the use of multiple methods and approaches. I combine field observations, semi-structured interviews with key informants, document analysis and a survey of online and social media to gain a thorough understanding of the topic from different angles.

I have defined three strands of research questions that I will be focusing on in this thesis:

(i) Why did the Kazakhstani government decide to celebrate the 550th Anniversary of the Kazakh Khanate in 2015? I.e. what factors motivated this development in history policy?
Does it fit into a longer-term policy or does it represent a break with Kazakhstan’s history policy on statehood?

(ii) How was the celebration carried out? I.e. by what means did the government try to reach their political goals with the celebrations?

(iii) Was the anniversary of the Kazakh Khanate effective as a case of history policy? Did the elites manage to shape public identity? How did the public respond?

My aim is that by answering these questions we will achieve a broader understanding both of the motivations behind and factors that decide history policy, the process by which it is carried out, and the room that the policymakers have for influencing the identity of the recipients of the policy. In short, my intention with this thesis is that it will contribute to a better understanding of the nature of the politicized use of history.

The chapters of this thesis logically fall into two parts. The first four chapters provide an introduction to the topic of the thesis and the theoretical and methodological framework for the analysis. Chapter 2 gives the reader a brief contextual introduction necessary to understand the current identity politics of Kazakhstan. Chapter 3 details the theoretical framework and defines key terms and concepts applied in the thesis. Chapter 4 explains the methods used to gather and analyse the different kinds of empirical material, as well as methodological challenges encountered. The last four chapters constitute the analytical part of the thesis. Chapter 5 explains the case under investigation and how it should be understood as a case of historical politics. Chapter 6 investigates the long-term developments in the history politics of Kazakhstan relating to the question of historical statehood. Chapter 7 looks at the societal response to the case. Lastly, the conclusion sums up the findings of the thesis, explain their relevance to the study of identity politics in Kazakhstan. The appendices contain a list of my respondents, the interview guides used, and a detailed list of empirical material used for the analysis in Chapter 6.
2 Historical background

A great challenge facing the new regime in Kazakhstan on the threshold to independence in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union was the diversity of ethnicities and nationalities comprising its population. The new regime had to build a new identity policy that could provide it with legitimacy, both satisfying nationalist groups that had formed during the late years of the Soviet regime, and calming the fears of the substantial Slavic population who had lived in the republic for a long time.

In this chapter, I will give the reader the necessary historical background for understanding the contemporary context of identity and history politics in Kazakhstan. This includes a brief summary of the history of the Kazakh Khanate (as it is the focus of the case of history politics in this thesis), the legacies of identity and history politics inherited from the Soviet Union, and the developments within the broader context of nation building and identity policies carried out in Kazakhstan since gaining independence.

2.1 A short history of the Kazakhs

The origins of the Kazakhs as an ethnic group is unclear. There is little consensus on whether the Kazakhs of today descend from predominantly incomers, possibly from the 15th century or later, or whether they stem from an ethnic continuum that has existed in the region for thousands of years (Akiner, 1995, p. 8). The lack of written records from the Kazakhs (being nomadic people, they left few tangible traces), means that until the 19th century, the main sources for information were the treaties, chronicles, travellers’ accounts and other such documents written by their sedentary neighbours. Though important for the study of Kazakh history, these sources carry with them substantial weaknesses. Being written by outsiders, they may contain inaccurate information as a result of misunderstandings, lack of first-hand knowledge or outright politically motivated propaganda. In addition, especially when it comes to the earliest period, the material is so fragmented that any interpretation is commonly highly speculative.

This is the framework within which the modern history politics of the Kazakhstani state today operates, and the weaknesses of source materials means that even the study of pre-history becomes a highly politicized issue. As Shirin Akiner amply puts it: “[g]iven that there is so
little concrete, verifiable information, theories concerning the origins of the Kazakhs tend to be rooted at least as much in political concerns as in objective historical research” (ibid.).

As this thesis deals mostly with the history politics concerning the establishment of the Kazakh Khanate, today presented as the first Kazakh state formation, I will not dwell with the different theories of the origin of the Kazakhs as an ethnic group, but rather give the reader an introduction into the formation and lifespan of the Kazakh Khanate.

The consensus, according to Olcott (1987), is that the Kazakh people, or nation, formed in the mid-15th century, when Zhanibek and Kerei, sons of Barak Khan of the White Horde of the Mongol empire, broke away from Abu’l Khayr, khan of the Uzbeks. Taking advantage of Abu’l Khayrs defeat by the Oirats (Mongols), they led the tribes of their supporters to settle in western Semirech’e, in land formerly controlled by the Uzbeks between the Chu and Talas rivers. Here they established a rival Khanate – the Kazakh Khanate -, that continued to expand and by the mid-16th century occupied most of the area around lake Balkash, the lands above and below the Syr Darya river, north to the Turgai river and west to the lands northwest of the Aral sea – largely the areas of contemporary Kazakhstan. The exact dating of the establishment of the Khanate is unclear, as few of the written sources from the time paid much attention to steppe politics (Olcott, 1987, p. 8).

The Kazakh Khanate was a political federation of primarily Turkic-speaking nomadic tribes of different origins. The Kazakhs migrated with their herds, and did not have any sedentary settlements. As the Kazakh khanate expanded territorially, always searching for new pastures for their herds, and because of internal rivalries in the ruling family, the khanate split into three Hordes, or zhuzes in the mid-16th century: the Great Horde, Middle Horde and Little Horde. The territorial spread of these zhuzes corresponded to seasonal migration patterns. The leadership of the zhuzes was not streamlined, at times they were all headed by one Khan, and at other times they each had their own leaders. These separate khans would sometimes come together to decide on common issues or elect a “supreme khan”, but his authority was mostly nominal and most of the time the different khans would pursue the interest of their own horde, in alliance or conflict with the others (Akiner, 1995, p. 17). Occasionally, one khan would be successful in uniting all the hordes for some years, but according to Akiner, none succeeded in building a lasting union. It is therefore difficult to call this kind of community a “state”, at least in the modern sense of the concept.
The period from the late 16\textsuperscript{th} century until the end of the 18\textsuperscript{th} century is considered one of the most significant chapters in Kazakh history, as it marks a critical change in the development of the Kazakh nationhood. At the beginning of the period the Hordes were “relatively well-defined, independent tribe-states”, but by the end of the period they were “weak, fragmented and firmly under the domination of their neighbours” (Akiner, 1995, p. 19). Accounting for this change is the introduction of two powerful actors on the steppe: the Dzungars (Mongol nomad tribes) and the Russians. In the beginning of the 18\textsuperscript{th} century, the Kazakhs were threatened by the Dzungars who had established themselves in Southern Siberia. Hoping to gain help in the fight against the Dzungars, the Small and Middle Hordes sought assistance from the Russian Empire, which had become a powerful player in the Steppe after their victory over Tatar strongholds in Kazan and Astrakhan in the middle of the 16\textsuperscript{th} century. Protection came through two agreements in 1731 and 1740, which are considered the beginning of the expansion of Russian rule over the Kazakh Steppe and the end of the Kazakh Khanate. The interpretation of these agreements is a matter of debate today, as in Russian and Soviet historiography they are viewed as proof that the Kazakhs voluntarily submitted themselves to Russian fiefdom, while many contemporary Kazakh interpretations evaluate them as short-term tactical alliances, and the Russian supremacy over the Kazakh lands as colonization (Bezvikonnaia, 2004; Kuzio, 2002).

Olcott concludes that the Kazakh Khanate “was a relatively short-lived and generally unsuccessful political institution” (Olcott, 1987, p. 27). Nevertheless, the Kazakhs did emerge during the Khanate as a distinct ethnic group, and the end of the Kazakh Khanate did not mean the end of the Kazakh people, but the beginning of a period of conquest and colonial rule under first the Russian Empire and then the Soviet Union.

### 2.2 Legacies of the Soviet nationality and history policies

During the Soviet regime, Kazakhstan faced significant migration flows of Russians and other peoples from the rest of the USSR, strong cultural Russification and limited possibilities to question these policies. At the end of the Soviet rule, when many nationalist republics experienced emerging nationalist movements, Kazakhstan did not experience the same rise in nationalist sentiment, and was literally the last republic to stay in the Soviet Union. In the
following, I will briefly recount the Soviet nationality policies and the way they affected the Kazakh SSR.

The Soviet nationality policy can very simplified be divided into three stages. During the first half of the 20th century, two diverging policies dominated at different times. The first, **Korenizatsiia**, dominated at the beginning of the Soviet period, and was based on the early post-revolutionary internationalist beliefs in the self-determination of nations, and focused on the fostering and developing of local languages and cultures, including codification of ethnicities, creation of dictionaries and the writing of national histories. During the first phase of Soviet Rule, ethnic or national groups that were deemed big enough were given their own titular republics. The second was the policy of **Russification** that was implemented in the 1930s along with several other significant changes in Soviet policy, such as the forced collectivization and political repression. Russification meant that learning Russian became mandatory throughout the USSR, alphabets of non-Russian languages were changed into Cyrillic, and the internationalist rhetoric was replaced by the domination and praise of the Russian culture and history and the referring to the Russian people as “the Great Russian people” and the “elder brother” of other Soviet people. The third stage of nationality policy was developed by Khrushchev and Brezhnev after Stalin’s death, and emphasized the concept of the “**Soviet People**”, as a supra-national identity for the people of the Soviet Union. The goal was to integrate the diverse multi-ethnic population of the Soviet Union into one supra-national group, while at the same time continue with the institutionalization of the local nationalities. The concept of the “great Russian people” as an “older brother” was not removed, however, and the Soviet authorities “did not see any logical problems in simultaneously emphasizing the equality of all nations and referring to the Russian people as the leading one” (Burkhanov & Sharipova, 2015, p. 22).

The nationalities policies also had impact on how the national history of the USSR was interpreted and written. As Velychenko (1994) writes, the official history of the multinational Soviet state sought to legitimize and foster a supranational Soviet state identity, while simultaneously restricting the collective memory and identity of each constituent nationality to the ethnographical and geographical. Thus in practice, the official history of the Soviet Union was Russocentric and conveyed an image of the country as a Russian nation-state with “ethnic minorities”. The history of the USSR became in practice the history of Russia. Politically, within the Marxist worldview, national history was not considered important, as
the significant divisions between people ran along class lines rather than national lines. Nations were only temporary forms of organisations that would disappear together with capitalism. Stalin, however, had a different view on nations, seeing them as permanent, primordial entities. With Stalin’s policies of assimilating non-Russian minorities into a supra-national “Soviet Nation”, which in practice was culturally Russian in its makeup, a “national history” was also called for that would minimise or even omit references to any conflict, differences, oppression or rebellion in relations between Russians and the non-Russian minorities (Velychenko, 1994, pp. 19-20). The result was an official historiography that stressed the positive influence of Russians upon non-Russian people, and later depicted the Russians as historical “elder brothers” and bearers of a superior culture.

Some examples of this kind of historiography in the case of Kazakhstan are, as seen above, the interpretation of the alliances between the Kazakh Hordes and the Russians as a voluntary submission to Russian rule, and the narrative that the Russians brought civilization to the barbaric nomad tribes and thus helped them progress along the stages of development towards a communist society. Such an approach also had its difficulties, leading for instance to contradictory interpretations of rebellions of the steppe nomads towards their Russian oppressors, on the one hand seeing them as class struggle towards Kazakh feudalism, on the other as a national-liberation movement against colonisers (Malikov, 2005, pp. 570-571).

The consequences of the Soviet nationalities policies for Kazakhstan was an underdeveloped national consciousness that had not matured at the point when the Soviet Union disintegrated at the end of 1991. Although it had gained some momentum during the 1980s, in comparison with other Soviet republics, it had not yet developed into a liberation movement, and lacked both organizational experience and the ideological foundation for building an independent state. In the words of Shirin Akiner: “there was no legacy of audacious deeds to celebrate, no emotive slogans and symbols, no heroes, no national myths” (1995, p. 60). In result, all of this had to be built after gaining independence, and the new regime of independent Kazakhstan had to figure out what symbols, stories and cultural references to build their new national identity on. Complicating this matter, was the ethnic situation in the country, which after the years of forced and politically motivated migration during the Soviet time, left Kazakhs a minority in their own titular republic.
2.3 A fragmented society

In 1991, when the Soviet Union collapsed, Kazakhstan was the only of the emerging republics, where the titular population was a minority (Peyrouse, 2007, p. 482). The ethnic and demographic situation in Kazakhstan thus represented a particular challenge for the creation of a nation-building project that could consolidate such a heterogeneous population, as illustrated by the following descriptions.

The sociocultural gap between the titular nation and the Slavic population is large; the Kazakh are Muslims, and many of them were nomads well into the 20th century. The Slavic groups are mainly Christian and came to the area as farmers. The two groups live largely in separate geographical areas, the south of Kazakhstan is predominantly Kazakh, and in the north, the population is predominantly Slav. In addition, the major cities in the country have a larger portion of Slav population. Although the largest ethnic groups in the country are Kazakhs and Russians, the population also consist of several other local minorities. Intermarriages between the groups are rare (Kolstø, 2000, pp. 124-125). In addition, some experts suggest that zhuz identities are still present and important in political relations within the Kazakh ethnic group, further complicating the picture (ibid.).

Furthermore, the language situation in the country is complicated. Russians and other minorities are rarely proficient in the titular language. Russian is still a widely used language in public administration and politics, even if Kazakh is the official state language. A majority of ethnic Kazakhs know Russian, and some, especially in urban areas, are not fluent in their own titular language. Even through the government continues to promote the learning and use of Kazakh, and even setting Kazakh proficiency as a requirement for working in government institutions, Russian is still the dominating language in the country, exemplified by the fact that the President himself gives the majority of his speeches in Russian.

Some changes however, have happened over the period since Kazakhstan gained independence. For instance, the number of Russians living in the northern oblasts of Kazakhstan has continuously declined since the 1990s, with outmigration to Russia as the main reason. In the latest census from 2009, Russians constituted between 36 and 50% of the population in these oblasts, which means they are for the first time not majority of the population here (Laruelle, 2018). Thus, Russians no longer have majority in any oblasts in the country. This means that the dominating subject of the study of Kazakhstan in the 1990s, the
so-called “Russian question”, with its potential for ethnic conflict and secession in the Northern parts of Kazakhstan, might have less importance today.

2.4 Kazakhstan’s national identity building policies since independence

The leaders of the new state of Kazakhstan had the challenging task ahead of them to create an “ex post facto justification for independence” (Holm-Hansen, 1999, p. 163), that would both allow them to remain in power (as they were to a large extent the same people who governed in the Soviet Republic), and that would not alienate the large Slavic part of the population. In addition, it had to satisfy nationalists looking for more radical changes. Attempts to build a common identity for the people of Kazakhstan were therefore done with conciliation as a main priority. The result was to officially define Kazakhstan both as a multiethnic state and as the nation-state of the Kazakhs. The ways that these two concepts are portrayed in official discourse opens for different interpretations. Citizens of Kazakhstan are at the same time encouraged to identify as members of a supraethnicity, as “Kazakhstanis”, and as “representatives of different nationalities”. As many scholars have argued, this is done deliberately by the Kazakhstani government, so as to appease different audiences. However, this does not give clear guidance for official policy-making and leaves the government to carry out a constant balancing-act between seemingly incompatible principles.

This dual balancing act has manifested itself in many different ways in government discourse over the years of independence. Officially, the government demonstrated its commitment to the internationalist rhetoric and solidarity between ethnic groups, by emphasizing the right to development of different national groups’ cultures and traditions in the constitution, by supporting the development of national-cultural centres for minority groups, and gathering them under the umbrella of the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan. The Assembly initially only had a status as a consultative body, but after 2007 was also given dedicated seats in the Parliament (Burkhanov & Sharipova, 2015, pp. 24-25). In addition, official discourse constantly emphasize the fact that more than 130 (the most common number used) nationalities live in Kazakhstan in peace and harmony, and that the country has avoided major conflicts stemming from ethnic grounds.
The regime has also made other attempts at overcoming ethnic cleavages by promoting more over-arching identities, such as portraying Kazakhstan as a Eurasian state and Kazakhstan as a Central Asian state (Burkhanov & Sharipova, 2015, p. 26). These two approaches place Kazakhstan within broader Eurasian and Central Asian contexts, the first one emphasizing the closeness of Kazakhstan to European culture (mainly through Russia) and explicitly states that Kazakhstan is not an Asian state. The second refers to the commonalities with other Central Asian states, arguing that they are less Asian in character because of their Soviet heritage. These identities, however, appear mostly in speeches at foreign policy conferences and high-level meetings, and therefore have little impact on the wider population.

The discourse that the state have tried to promote to a larger extent, although not very successfully, is the Kazakhstan identity, which was an attempt to build a common civic identity for all citizens living in Kazakhstan, regardless of ethnic or national origin. This approach has been criticized by Kazakh-language media, claiming that it risked the disappearance of the Kazakh ethnicity, while the Russian-language media did not pay it much attention (Burkhanov & Sharipova, 2015, p. 26).

Burkhanov and Sharipova argue that Kazakhstan is today showing strong continuity with the Soviet approach of creating a supra-ethnic identity of the “Soviet people” while at the same time supporting institutionalized local nationalities. In today’s Kazakhstan, this is characterized by the contradictory policy of promoting a supra-national “Kazakhstani” identity, while at the same time institutionalizing different nationalities, in identity documents, in government institutions and in official rhetoric emphasizing the numerous nationalities living in peace and harmony. “The Soviet style notion of “one big family”, living in peace and friendship, in which the role of the “older brother” is taken over by the Kazakhs, as opposed to Russians in the Soviet times, seems to be the eventual safe choice that the government of Kazakhstan ended up choosing in the country’s identity politics” (Burkhanov & Sharipova, 2015, p. 26).

In this thesis, I will show how this same tendency of conflicting identities is present also within history policy. It is the same problem of defining whom the national history should be defined upon: a common history of all nationalities living in present Kazakhstan, or the history of the Kazakh ethnicity with the modern republic of Kazakhstan as a historical culmination. My research seem to suggest the latter, and that the history of Kazakhstan is in effect defined as the history of Kazakhs.
3 Theory

This thesis aims to explain the role of history as a political tool in state nation building and identity formation. The breakdown of the Soviet Union provided Kazakhstani elites with the opportunity and challenge of (re)establishing political legitimacy. Part of this process was to figure out the foundations of the nation, the national identity and write a new historiography. In this chapter, I will elaborate on the theoretical framework that will guide my analysis, define central concepts and explain why history plays a particular role in nation building.

3.1 National identity

The focus of this thesis is on the conscious construction of national identity by elites. It therefore seems in its place to go through the main debate within the literature on national identity, which is to what extent national identity is constructed and imagined, or inherent. Although for the members of a nation, their national identity seems as real as it can be, many scholars have argued of its constructedness. A debate on philosophical and socio-psychological mechanisms of individual and group identities is outside the scope of this thesis. I will in the following give a brief outline of some of the main contributions to the study of national identity within the field of nationalism studies.

Benedict Anderson introduced the term *imagined communities* to describe modern nations. Nations are *imagined*, as “the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson, 2006, p. 6). Anderson quotes Ernest Renan to explain this imagining: “Or l’essence d’une nation est que tous les individus aient beaucoup de choses en commun, et aussi que tous aient oublié bien de choses” (ibid.). In the context of this thesis, this is an interesting statement, as the choices that elites make to create an identity that unifies the nation has as much to do with what they choose to remember, as what they choose to forget. Anderson distances himself from Ernest Gellner, who purports that nationalism “invents nations where they do not exist” (ibid.). He argues that Gellner’s statement would imply that there is such a thing as “true” and “false” communities, while in his view “all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined” (ibid.)
Along the same lines, Eric Hobsbawm underlines the createdness of certain aspect of national identity. With *invented tradition* Hobsbawm means “a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past” (1992, p. 1). Hobsbawm argues that understanding the process of invention of traditions is particularly relevant in the study of the nation and its associated phenomena nationalism, nation-state, national symbols and histories etc. These phenomena rely on deliberate and innovative social engineering, as historical novelty implies innovation. Modern nation-states are per se innovative, even though they claim to be rooted in antiquity, since the very concept of territorial states in their modern form is novel:

“[a]nd just because so much of what subjectively makes up the modern ‘nation’ consists of such constructs and is associated with appropriate and, in general, fairly recent symbols or suitably tailored discourse (such as ‘national history’), the national phenomenon cannot be adequately investigated without careful attention to the ‘invention of tradition’” (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1992, p. 14)

What knowledge does a study of the invention of tradition provide us with? Hobsbawm suggests that tradition are important symptoms and indicators of problems which might not otherwise be recognised, and developments that are otherwise difficult to identify. Adams suggest similarly that by studying tradition we might uncover knowledge of the present, as tradition always cater to the present: “Though used as a discursive strategy to legitimate present practices in terms of their continuity with the past, tradition is always an interpretation of the past in terms of the needs of the present” (2010, p. 11). As this thesis aims to uncover the needs of the present through analysing the use of the past, this perspective seems a fruitful one.

Anthony D. Smith on the other hand, opted for a more historical approach to the creation of national identities, underlining the pre-historical ethnic bases for modern nations. Although most modern nation-states are polyethnic, many have been formed around a dominant *ethnie* (Smith, 1991, p. 39). *Ethnies* in Smith's definition are ethnic communities, distinguished by the following attributes: i) a collective proper name; ii) a myth of common ancestry; iii) shared historical memories; iv) one or more differentiating elements of common culture; v) an association with a specific ‘homeland’; vi) a sense of solidarity for significant sectors of the population (ibid., p 21). When these attributes are present to a strong degree, we can
recognise a community of historical culture with a sense of common identity. In this way, Smith distinguishes between the nation-state as a modern construct, and the historic communities, with their myths and memories, cultural assets and territorial attachments, that often serve as bases for modern nation-states.

The concept of ethnicity can, according to Smith, be approached in three different ways. Some regard it as a “primordial”, i.e. as a natural component in human existence. Others view it as “situational”, which means that belonging to an ethnic group is subject to attitudes, perceptions and sentiments, and therefore changeable. Between these two, and also the approach Smith applies, lies the approach that focusses on the historical and symbolic-cultural attributes of ethnic identity, listed above.

Smith argues that nations are not so much “invented” as “reconstructed” upon an ethnic core. Writing about the emergence of new nations out of the previous colonial frameworks, he suggests that there seem to be two ways of creating civic, territorial states outside of Europe. The first is the “dominant etnie” model, where the new state’s ethnic core community becomes the main pillar of the new national political identity. In this model we can speak of a “reconstructing” of the ethnic core to “[integrate] its culture with the requirements of the modern state and with the aspirations of minority communities” (Smith, 1991, p. 111). The second way is to create a supra-ethnic political culture for the new political community. In these cases, Smith suggests there is no dominant etnie, either there are a multitude of ethnic communities, or a number of rival ethnic communities. Unfortunately, he adds, there are few empirical cases where these two ways of constructing new national identities have proven successful. In the first case, the state is often faced with the opposition of minority ethnies that feel left out in new political culture. In the second case, it has proven difficult to detach individuals from their loyalty to their ethnic communities and make them direct it towards the larger state-nation identity.

Writing before 1991, Smith’s analysis naturally does not cover the emergence of new nation-states out of the Soviet framework. His analysis nevertheless seems to be applicable also to post-soviet states, the majority of which have built their identity as independent nations on the ethnic titular core population.

These perspectives, though in the literature often portrayed as opposites of a debate, actually go well hand in hand. Nations are not invented or imagined *tabula rasa*, but build upon
already existing narratives, identities and myth. What is interesting in the context of this thesis is the conscious or subconscious choice of what to include or exclude from national identity, and what this choice can tell us about political motives and attitudes.

3.1.1 Five dimensions of national identity

Putting aside the scholarly debate, also relevant for the understanding of national identity is to explore its different components. Montserrat Guibernau defines national identity as “a collective sentiment based upon the belief of belonging to the same nation and of sharing most of the attributes that make it distinct from other nations” (2007, p. 11). The nature of these attributes is defined by the specific way in which the nation is defined. Guibernau lists five dimensions that constitute national identity: psychological, cultural, territorial, historical and political. In the specific case studied in this thesis, the historical and political dimensions are predominant, but the others also constitute important factors.

The psychological dimension of national identity refers to the consciousness of forming a group, and the feeling of closeness that unites members of that group in a sense of belonging to a nation. According to Guibernau, it is irrelevant whether that bond is subjective or not, as long as it is felt as real by those sharing the common identity. Political leaders know how to appeal to this emotional bond to the national identity, and use it for political purposes, for instance when commemorating historical deeds of the nation.

The cultural dimension of national identity are the values, beliefs, customs, conventions, habits, languages and practices individuals within a particular nation is socialised into. Within the cultural dimension two points are worth noting: Firstly, claims of the antiquity of a culture is often employed as a source of legitimacy for a nation, as continuity over time is one of the key elements of identity. Secondly, a primordialist approach argues that “cultural givens”, such as assumed ancestry, language, customs, religion etc. constitute the cultural “essence” of a nation.

The historical dimension refers to the question of where and when in history one finds the foundations of national identity. The selective use of history provides members of a nation with a collective memory of important moments in the history of a community – those that evoke feelings of self-esteem on behalf of the nation, or of collective sorrow or suffering. “History contributes to the construction of a certain image of the nation and represents the
cradle where the national character was forged” (Guibernau, 2007, p. 20). History can also be used by political leaders for political goals: “Celebration, pride and self-esteem as well as hatred and thirst for vengeance can equally be instilled in people’s minds by appealing to history” (Guibernau, 2007, pp. 20-21).

The *territorial dimension* of national identity is the link between the physical and psychological boundaries of a nation. One image of this is how it is normally considered a tragedy to have to leave one’s home, and similarly seen as a tragedy to leave one’s nation. People view the landscape as embodying the traditions, history and culture of their ancestors, and the territory is therefore also an emotional symbol of the nation evoking a strong sense of belonging.

Lastly, the *political dimension* of national identity is derived from its relation to the nation-state. From its historical foundation point, the policies of the nation-state have been to homogenise an often heterogeneous population, imposing often the culture and language of the dominant group, so as to create one single nation out of the many nations or parts of nations forming it. The Enlightenment ideas of popular sovereignty and democracy led to the shift away from loyalty to the Monarch as foundation for the state, and directed loyalty rather to the nation, the people. The nation, personified through symbols and rituals representing “the people” became the focus of the new attachment, and thus politicised the cultural concept of nationality and national identity.

The political aspect of national identity, when applied to the nation-state, focusses on the states’ strategies to foster a unified, homogenous and loyal citizenry. This process is often called “nation building”, and will be dealt with further below.

Guibernau makes the important point that not all of a state’s citizens, however, may share the national identity promoted by the state. Immigrants, ethnic communities and national minorities may stand in opposition to the national identity promoted by the state. This opposition may, according to Guibernau, be dealt with in different ways. One solution is to create multiple identities, although often these identities are of different scale, such as ethnic, regional, national and transnational, rather than multiple “national” identities. On the other hand, membership of the state may be separated from the sense of belonging to a nation,

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2 The concepts nation, state and nation-state are often, and wrongly, used interchangeably. It is important, Guibernau states, to keep in mind that not all nations have a state of their own.
creating a common citizenship for people with different national identities. This, however, does not solve the problem if the nation is regarded as the source of legitimacy for state power (Guibernau, 2004, p. 140). In the case of a multi-ethnic country like Kazakhstan, this distinction is important, and a challenge for the country’s nation building policies.

### 3.2 Nation building

The understanding of the concept *nation building* has developed significantly since its first introduction in academic scholarship. It first developed among historically oriented social scientists of the 1950s and 1960s, aiming to describe the processes of national integration and consolidation that led to the establishment of the modern nation state (Kolstø, 2000, p. 16). The main scholars included Karl Deutsch, Charles Tilly and Reinhard Bendix. The term nation building, from this political science viewpoint, covers not only strategic initiatives of state leaders, but also unplanned social change, and became a tool to describe and analyse the processes leading to the creation of the modern nation states. Through this process the isolated “top” and “bottom” levels of society that characterized many old traditional types of states, such as feudal and dynastic states, were brought together resulting in a unified state, where sub-state culture and loyalties diminished or vanished all together. Stein Rokkan thus identified four analytically distinct aspects, or phases, of this process, which in Western Europe seemed to follow each other in more or less the same order (ibid. p 17). If these phases were followed in their course, the nation building process would be completed with a minimum of social unrest and conflict.

This approach to the study of nation building was challenged in the mid-1970s, when Walker Connor severely criticized this school of thought of omitting or ignoring what he saw as an essential factor in the question of national integration, namely ethnic diversity (Kolstø, 2000, pp. 17-18). According to Connor, the only way this omission could be justified was by proving that “most states are ethnically homogeneous or that ethnic diversity poses no serious problems to integration” (1972, p. 320). This he goes on to show is certainly not the case, as according to his calculations only 9 percent of states could be described as ethnically homogeneous. In addition, a rising number of states are troubled by ethnic unrest, even the Western European states that Karl Deutsch and his contemporaries built their theories on. Thus, nation building does not necessarily lead to the transfer of allegiances from ethnic group to the state, according to Connor.
Connor further identifies another flaw of nation building theory, namely that the terms nation and state often are interutilized, resulting in terminological confusion. One the one hand the term *nation* is used to refer to cultural groups and on the other hand it is used to refer to political entities i.e. states (such as in United Nations, international relations). He suggests it might be explained as short-hand for *nation-state*, but it still does not solve the problem that most states are referred to as nation-states, although, as pointed out earlier, very few are actually ethnically homogeneous. This terminological confusion in turn complicates the understanding of nationalism, according to Connor. He suggests removing all objective cultural markers from the definition of nation, and instead reserve the term for ethnic groups only, proposing the definition: “a self-differentiating ethnic group” (Connor, 1972, p. 337).

Thus, Connor’s contribution to the understanding of nation building brought the academic debate on the topic away from the study of social cleavages associated with scholars such as Karl Deutch, towards the study of the construction or structuring of national identity by states. Connor’s understanding of nation building was further developed by such authors as Anderson, Gellner, Hobsbawm and Smith, whose understandings of national identity have been discussed above.

### 3.2.1 Particularities in the post-soviet setting

The nationalities policies of the Soviet Union can serve both as an illustrating example of nation building policies, and as background for understanding the context of nation building in post-Soviet republics like Kazakhstan today.

When coming to power, the Bolsheviks had included in its political program a doctrine of ethnic nationalism, with two main principles; that a nation as an ethnic group has a set of inalienable characteristics, including its own territory, economy, language and a distinct mentality. Secondly, the doctrine defined that a “necessary condition for the existence and development of a nation was the existence of an ethnic group declared to be an “indigenous nation” (*korennaya natsia*) within their “own” statehood” (Tishkov, 1997, p. 29). To meet the challenges of regions and peripheries aspiring for autonomy after the revolution, and to meet doctrinal aspirations, the Soviets set about on a great mission of social ethnic engineering, in order to create a categorisation of ethnonations, including inventing nations were necessary. The resulting list of 190 different “national” identities were then, by the work of linguists, ethnographers and historians, redefined in a hierarchy of major and minor nations, deserving
of their own titular soviet republic, autonomous area etc. This process, according to Tishkov, was crucial as it institutionalized ethnicity as “nationality”, and removed any opportunity to link this definition to citizenship. The consequences this decoupling has had is for national identities in the region is still very much present today. For instance, Kazakhstani identity cards, while being documents of Kazakhstani citizenship, still lists the “nationality” of the holder: “Russian”, “Tajik”, “Kazakh” etc.

Marlene Laruelle argues that the importance of the concept of ethnogenesis in the history-writing during the time of the consolidation of the Soviet national identities, has had implications for the development of nation building in the post-soviet states. Ethnogenesis is understood as “the process of ethnic crystallization that made it possible to speak of a specific people existing as such through the centuries” (Laruelle, 2008, p. 172). This principle guided much of the archaeological research and writing of national historiographies in the newly established academies of science in the young soviet republics, and needs to be seen as part of the political issue of consolidating the republics’ identities created in the partitions of the 1920s and 1930s. The principal aim of national histories, according to Laruelle, was to anchor each people to its territory, as well as prove the existence of a state, that contained both the people and the territory. In this way, she states, the independent states after 1991, inherited a ready-made idea for the basis of the nation-state.

### 3.2.2 The importance of history for nation building and national identity

As we have seen, to Connor it was not common religion, common language or any other cultural feature that distinguished nations from each other. The essence of a nation, according to him, was the sense of common ancestry shared by its members. It is hardly possible to prove a common origin of members of a nation, but the belief in a common ethnic origin, even though it can be argued to be a myth, seems to be an existential reason for every nation, according to Connor (Kolstø, 2000, p. 18). Anderson points to a similar paradox: that the phenomenon of a nation in a historian’s analysis is a fairly recent thing, while in the eyes of a nationalist the nation is always ancient (2006, p. 5). Ronald G. Suny explores this tension in his essay Constructing Primordialism. On the one hand – in Andersons wording “the eye of the nationalist” - you have the specific narratives of national histories:
The national history is one of continuity, antiquity of origins, heroism and past greatness, martyrdom and sacrifice, victimization and overcoming of trauma. It is a story of the empowerment of the people, the realization of the ideals of popular sovereignty. While in some cases national history is seen as development toward realization, in others it is imagined as decline and degeneration away from proper development. In either case an interpretation of history with a proper trajectory is implied. (Suny, 2001, p. 870)

On the other hand – the historians’ view -, is the metanarrative or the discourse of the nation, the ideas and understandings that define the concept of the “nation” in modern times, i.e. from 1750 and onwards: “This available universe of meanings allowed for the power of nations and nationalism to constitute collective loyalties, legitimize governments, and mobilize and inspire people to fight, kill, and die for their country” (ibid.).

Drawing on theories of group identity, Suny states that “nations are particular forms of collectivity that are constituted by a process of creating histories” (2001, p. 869). “Just as there are few groups without a sense of continuity, so there can be no nation without a sense of its own history”. According to Suny, history contributes to nation building and identity formation in several ways: by providing ancestry that legitimizes present day loyalties; by distinguishing in- and out-groups; and by providing an effective claim on territory.

Similarly, Jonathan Friedman writes on the relation between identity and the politics of historical construction: “the discourse of history as well as of myth is simultaneously a discourse of identity; it consists of attributing a meaningful past to a structured present” (Friedman, 1992a, p. 194). As a project, the construction of the past selectively organises events in a relation of continuity with a contemporary subject, in this way creating an appropriate representation of the past leading up to the present (Friedman, 1992b, p. 837). This applies as much to individuals, making sense of their own life-histories, as it does for larger entities like social groups or nation-states. For researchers then, studying the construction of history may reveal interesting things about the self-perception and motivations of a subject: “If history is largely mythical, it is because the politics of identity consists in anchoring the present in a viable past. The past is, thus, constructed according to the conditions and desires of those who produce historical texts in the present” (Friedman, 1992a, p. 207).
3.3 History politics

There does not seem to be consensus within academic theory on how to label the role of history within politics and the political uses of history. Terms such as “memory politics”, “historical politics”, “history policy” abound, and seem to describe the same phenomenon of state leaders deliberately using history as a means to realize or legitimize political goals. Furthermore, the boundaries between that phenomenon, and those described as “politics of commemoration”, “politicized history” and “historical revisionism” are blurred. In addition, the concepts are used within several academic fields, such as social psychology, anthropology and political science, and might have different meanings and applications relative to the subject. Since there is no leading definition of these concepts, in the following I will go through some of the scholars who have written on this subject, and at the end give my definition and operationalization of the concept that I will apply in my analysis.

Aleksei Miller tries to tidy up this terminological confusion in his essay on power and history in Russia (Miller, 2010). Politicization of history, to him, is an inevitable process that happens because history is not an objective science. Hence, current politics and political preferences affect both historians and readers of historical works. In addition, politicians might use “historical arguments” in their speeches, although Miller notes that in democratic societies this kind of argumentation is often criticized both by political rivals and by professional historians. The politics of memory refers to the regulation of collective memory by social practices and norms. This includes commemoration (monuments and museums dedicated to past events), and focus on or suppression of attention on certain historical topics. In addition, the state also influences the politics of memory by regulating access to archives, through school curriculums, and through research funding. To Miller all these efforts at regulating the collective memory is as unavoidable as the politicization of history. All societies do it and always have, and the pluralism within the politics of memory is secured by the presence of parliamentary opposition and independent civil society organisations. Through the politics of memory, societies can deal with historical topics in different ways. Debates might be kept “open” or “closed” for discussion, and certain historical topics can be consciously “forgotten” or “denied. Forgetting might also involve “understanding”, when society goes through a process of discussing the event and then decides to “move on” by shifting attention away from it, as with the Nazi past in contemporary Germany. Miller further states about the politics of memory:
Thus, the politics of memory may be more or less open to influence by and dialogue with various social forces and historians, more or less productive in healing the wounds of the past and in overcoming conflicts within and between nations. But it may also give birth to new conflicts and create deliberately distorted images of the past. (Miller, 2010, p. 11)

According to Miller, these problems of collective memory and politicization of history have long been debated within academic scholarship, but today we can observe a new stage within the application of these phenomena. Miller terms these fundamentally new processes “historical politics”:

From my point of view, this term has an important merit: it correctly defines the relations that arise between politics, which appears here as a noun, and history, which serves merely as an attribute. The term emphasizes that this is a specifically political phenomenon that needs to be studied above all as a part of politics, and this is how it differs from the politicization of history and politics of memory as interpreted above. (Miller, 2010, p. 12, emphasis in the original)

The term history politics originates from the German Geschichtspolitik during the Historikerstreit in Germany in 1986-87, where it was used to refer to an “interpretation of history chosen for political – that is, party-political – reasons, and attempts to persuade public opinion of the correctness of such an interpretation” (Miller, 2010, p. 13). The concept was borrowed by Polish historians in the 2000s, who advocated for the need to develop a new version of history politics in Poland. Throughout the 2000s, almost all Eastern European countries have undertaken measures related to history politics, Miller asserts. Although the “advocates” of history politics claim it is not new but a normal practice, Miller disagrees and regards the phenomena called “history politics” as something essentially new and distinct from the practices of the politicization of history and the politics of memory.

Miller writes that the “politics of history” in its strict sense can function only in democratic societies. History politics is nevertheless especially apparent in post-communist states. It is

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3 Although Miller’s work in its English translation uses the term “historical politics”, I have chosen to describe the phenomenon elsewhere in my thesis as “history politics”, as I deem this term more intuitively understandable for readers. Using the word “historical” might for some people imply that we are talking about the history of politics.

4 Miller does not discuss how the politics of history would not be relevant in non-democratic or non-pluralistic societies, which is a limitation to his definition of the concept, as Kaprâns (2013) also points out in his review of Miller’s edited book on the subject Convolutions of Historical Politics. As this thesis will show, politics of history is truly relevant subject of study in a non-democratic society.
precisely because of the communist past, its historiographical “blank spots” (because of
censorship), but also of its legacies of intellectual habits and historiographical baggage, that
historical policy becomes so apparent. Within this new reality of democratic values, freedom
of speech and pluralistic civil society, the new regimes have to invent new ways of
intervening in the history and politics of memory.

Aleida Assmann (2006) proposes a conceptual framework for understanding what she calls
the “memory boom” in society and politics that she says started in the late 1980s and
developed fully in the 1990s. This boom involves a new attention to the past, expressed in a
new wave of memoirs, testimonies, historical films, museums and monuments. She finds that
possible motivations for this new wave are: the breakdown of the grand narratives of the cold
war and the change of political frameworks, especially in post-communist countries; the post-
colonial situation where humans previously deprived of their indigenous history are
reclaiming the past; the traumas of the Holocaust and the two world wars are now surfacing
after a period of paralysis and silence; the need to process and keep the memories of time
witnesses to these events as they become fewer and fewer; and the digital revolution changing
the status of information.

Assmann divides memory into four categories, or memory formats. Individual memory is
embodied within the individual and explained through psychology. Social memory is also
embodied, but created through interaction with others, family and friends, but also our
contemporaries that we have never seen or met. In this way, memory is stored within
generations, and shifts in social memory occur with the changing of generations. Within the
context of this thesis, social memory is particularly relevant in that it can be infinitely
extended in time by symbolic forms of commemoration, materially by the creation of
monuments and museums or procedural as in the establishment of rites and rituals of
commemoration. Through this process, the memory loses its generational value, and becomes
included in national memory and identity. The next two categories of memory, political and
cultural memory, are not embodied, but mediated. Whereas individual and social memory are
diverse and heterogeneous bottom-up phenomena, political and cultural memory is explicit,
homogenous and institutionalized top-down memory. The phenomena have different places
within academic disciplines: social memory is studied by social psychologists, while political
memory is studied by political scientists, who are interested in the role of memory in ideology
formation and construction of collective identities, how it is used and abused for political action.

Of course, institutions and states do not have “memory” as such, like individuals do, but they can have one “made” for them through memorial signs such as symbols, texts, images, ceremonies, monuments etc. This memory is mediated, as the relevant and useful is sorted out from the irrelevant and counterproductive. The extent to which this memory take root in the minds of the individuals of the social collective depends on the efficiency of political pedagogy and the level of patriotic or ethnic enthusiasm.

Furthermore, Assmann states that “[h]istory turns into memory when it is transformed into forms of shared knowledge and collective identification and participation. In such cases, “history in general” is reconfigured into a particular and emotionally charged version of “our history” …” (ibid., p 216, emphasis in original). Collective participation in national memory is carried out differently dependent on regime type; in totalitarian states coercively via indoctrination and propaganda; in democratic states via popular media and public discourse. “In both cases, however, it relies on effective symbols and rites that enhance emotion of empathy and identification” (ibid.). When defining the selective criteria for the memory construction of nation states, Assmann makes it clear that “only those historical referents were selected which strengthened a positive self-image and supported specific goals for the future” (ibid, p 217). Stories that do not fit into this pattern of heroism are deliberately discarded. However, this does seem to depend on the status of the nation within the international system. For what she calls “hegemonic nations” (which I understand as great powers), victories are much easier to remember than defeats. But for “minority nations” (small powers), memories are normally not those of victors, but of losers:

Defeats are commemorated with great pathos and ceremonial expense by nations who founded their identity on the consciousness of victims, whose whole aim it is to keep awake the memory of a suffered iniquity in order to mobilize heroic counteraction or to legitimate claims to redress. (p 218)

Thus, we can see that national memory incorporates historical moments of triumph and defeat, dependent on whether they can be integrated within a narrative of heroism or martyrdom. What cannot be integrated into national memory, Assmann claims, are stories of shame and guilt, as they threaten the positive national self-image. The important distinction
here is between victims of war, that can be seen to “sacrifice” their lives, and the victims of
traumas, that cannot be included in traditional narratives of heroism. Because of this,
Assmann says that apart from the Holocaust, other genocides and atrocities have been hard to
memorialise for those countries that carried out the atrocities. The memory of perpetrators is
virtually non-existent in national memory.

Studying the post-Soviet world, Evgeny Finkel asserts that “[o]ne of the main (if not the
main) aspects of historical policy is the concentration on victimhood and suffering” (2010, p.
54, emphasis in original). He supports this claim with examples of post-communist states that
have presented their past sufferings as genocides and used those narratives to gain recognition
on the international arena. According to Finkel there is a tendency among post-soviet states to
“search for lost genocides”. This tendency might be area specific, and Finkel calls for more
research on why some states choose to portray their tragedies as genocides while others do
not. On an even more general level, one can ask why some topics become subject for history
politics and others are neglected or left untouched. Assmann talks of stories of heroism and
martyrdom, and links these to the status of the nation, hegemonic or minority. She does not
however, define criteria for defining hegemony or minority. In this thesis, I aim to explore
reasons for the selection of historical events within Kazakhstan’s recent history politics, and
hope that this can serve as one contribution to the research Finkel calls for.

3.3.1 History politics as myth-making and myth-cultivating

Another illuminating approach to the use of historical narratives in politics is to see them as
historical myth-making. As Kolstø (2005) explains, historical myth making can be understood
in two ways. Myths might be understood as the opposite of “facts”, and thus presentations of
history that distort demonstrable facts are mythical. When understanding myths in this way,
the historian’s task is to correct these incorrect representations of history, as factually correct
renderings of history are strongly preferred. On the other hand, one might understand myth
making as an inevitable element of human societies, where myths are considered a positive
and enriching aspect of life, as myths contribute to the well-functioning of societies.

Nevertheless, regardless of interpretations, myths have social consequences, for instance as
boundary-making devices, that distinguishes one community from another. Although they
might have factual bases, differences between communities often amount to beliefs, myths.
Myths can be cultivated in order to reach certain groups’ goals: “[P]olitical aspirations are
often fueled by myths and many myth-makers do have a political agenda, myths are regularly produced and propagated in order to bolster specific group claims” (Kolstø, 1998, p. 30). Consequences of governments’, elites’ or other groups’ cultivation of historical or other myths can be serious, as Kolstø and his colleagues have shown in their study of myths as boundary defining mechanisms in South-Eastern Europe. In this thesis, I do not aim for the enlightenment approach of exposing myths as the myths they are, as I am not a trained historian with expertise on the history of Central Asia in the Middle ages. I rather try to uncover the functions that this myth making has in the social space of modern Kazakhstan.

How do we discern between “objective” historical narratives and invented accounts of the past? As noted by Miller above, history is not an objective science. Historians, although they might strive to present the most objective and value-free accounts of the past, are always influenced by some political view, or just by the society and times they live in. The question is therefore not to what extent it is possible to find the “true” history, but to what extent historians and others producing accounts and interpretations of history are following academic scholarly principles of objectivity, or are producing account that are based on ideology and political goals. As Ottar Dahl notes, the urge to construct collective identities and ideologies for social and national groups is often an important driving force behind the study of history. He calls for collective identities to be based on “self-knowledge” and not on “myths”, which implies that perceptions of identities may have to be abandoned or revised when the past is not so glorious as one would want it to be (Dahl, 1986, p. 105). As history as a research based scholarly discipline, an ideological function of history, without the demands for veracity and correct argumentation, is illegitimate, in Dahls view. This is perhaps a description of the ideal situation, but as the topic of this thesis shows, this is seldom the case when politics meets history writing.

### 3.3.2 The toolbox of history politics

What is the toolbox available for history politics to be carried out? Miller talks of essentially new ways of carrying out history politics that are distinct from traditional politics of memory, although he does not specify just what these new methods are. Assmann lists ways that can transform short-lived social memory into long-term collective memory:

- *Emplotment of events in an affectively charged and mobilizing narrative*
Sites and monuments that present palpable relics

Visual and verbal signs as aids of memory

Commemoration rites that periodically reanimate the memory and enhance collective participation (Assmann, 2006, p. 217)

Within the post-Soviet, and perhaps especially within the Central Asian context, the use of mass spectacles and festivities as a means to spread a political message to the population is very prevalent. This however, is not a new practice, but a continuation of the soviet toolbox of political implementation. As Adams (2010, p. 3) points out, the peculiarity of a spectacle is that it enables elites to close opportunities for input from below, but without making the masses feel left out: “Spectacle monopolizes discourse by privileging the definition of truth and reality belonging to the elites and by using technology such as the mass media to create a one-way flow of communication …”.

Spectacles have a special place within the post-soviet repertoire of policy implementation. As Adams and Rustemova point to in their analysis of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, both countries are continuing the Soviet tradition of seeing holidays and festivals as key opportunities to shape the subjectivities of their citizens, when they give a high priority within their nation building to the creation of new holidays or the revival of old (2009, p. 1251). In form these holiday spectacles are celebrated with outdoor concerts and street fairs where people can walk from venue to venue and purchase food and toys. As Adams states that “[t]ypically spectacle is a technique of mobilization, and thus it is used more in totalitarian regimes5 than in other types of states” (2010, p. 5). Adams coins the term spectacular state to describe a state where “more than in most countries, politics is conducted on a symbolic level, promoting the state’s domination over shared meaning of concepts such as heritage and progress” (ibid.). Adams’ study is focused on the use of culture in nation building in Uzbekistan, but as Adams and Rustemova elaborate in their article comparing the styles of governmentality in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, these states share many similarities within their symbolic politics.

The literature on memory and historical policy is in general eschewed towards the abstract and analytic, and less focussed upon the concrete ways a state carries out its historical policies. Some suggestions have been noted here, including the choice of narrative, the

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5 Adams uses the definitions of regime types from Linz, Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes (2000)
creation of monuments, commemorations and rituals and festivals. The educational system is an evident platform for authorities to define official historical narratives. A thorough analysis of educational policies and texts is unfortunately practically not possible within the timeframe and scope of this thesis. In addition, this thesis will me more concerned with how the state projects its historical policies towards the whole, or greater parts of the population, and not only schoolchildren and youngsters within the educational system. As noted before, Kazakhstan is an interesting case in this regard, as it is not outright authoritarian in the way that Uzbekistan is within Adams analysis. Outright indoctrination is therefore not an option. On the other hand, the intellectual and public space for discussing and debating interpretations of historical events is very limited.

3.3.3 Operationalization within this thesis

For the purposes of this thesis, I define history politics as the efforts by national elites, understood as the people who hold political power in a state, to use history as a means to reach political goals. I look at it as a top down nation building process with the aim of influencing the perception of the population, but do not exclude that it might also be a process that aims at a broader audience than only the national population, as the political goals may sometimes be in the field of international affairs. The methods by which history politics can be carried out are many, and we can assume that an authoritarian regime with less checks and balances on their powers, have more ways options to directly influence what understandings of history is communicated. As I am concerned with political efforts to influence the whole population, I have looked less at educational curriculums and more at institutions and events that are open to and directed at the whole public, such as open air mass celebrations, museums, and a broad spectre of media, such as art, film, theatre, TV, internet communications. As an authoritarian government will have more direct control over the media world, I assume that the latter also is a means by which the elites express their history politics.

In looking at the methods employed, I will expand on Assmann’s list of methods to create this (non-exhaustive) list of tools for carrying out history politics:

- Promotion of certain understandings of historical events in a mobilizing narrative, through political discourse such as official speeches and documents, but also indirectly through government supported web pages, museums and art exhibitions, films etc.
- Use of sites and monuments, also including the placement of commemorative celebrations;

- Use of visual and verbal signs as aids of memory, of which some examples are the use of symbols at mass celebrations, in museums, art, films, often mythologizing the historical message;

- Commemorative rites, but not necessarily recurring commemorations;

- Use of restrictive media tactics, to quell discussion and debate over historical interpretations other than the state supported ones.

More on the specifics of how data was gathered and analysed is explained in the next chapter.
4 Method

In the following chapter, I will present the methodological framework that I have used when approaching my data gathering and analysis.

4.1 Case study

Although many aspects of identity politics in Kazakhstan have been studied by other researchers, few studies have been looking specifically at the regime’s use of history within identity politics, i.e. its history politics. It therefore became clear quite early in the process that I wanted to conduct the study partly in an exploratory manner, using different empirical approaches to the topic. Robert Yin defines case studies as the best choice when the goal of the study is to conduct: “[…] an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used” (Yin, 2009, p. 18). In addition, a case study “relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis” (ibid.). Since the object of this thesis is to study the phenomenon of history politics in Kazakhstan, which as we have seen in the theory-chapter encompasses a multitude of different perspectives and implications, a case study seems to be the most suitable approach to answer the research question.

A case studies approach also seems to go hand in hand with the traditions of area studies. Area studies, although they vary according to field and to individual researchers’ preferences, all seem to be characterized by a commitment to language study, in-depth field work in the local language, attention to local histories, viewpoints and interpretations, testing and elaborating grounded theory against detailed observation, and multidisciplinary approaches crossing the boundaries between the humanities and social sciences (Basedau & Köllner, 2007). A case study allows for this attention to complexity in understanding and explaining modern phenomena within area-specific contexts.

A case can be defined as a phenomenon that is limited in space and time (Gerring, 2007). In this thesis, the case is spatially limited to the contemporary state Kazakhstan and temporally
to the time of modern Kazakhstani nation building, i.e. after gaining independence in 1991. As the research question aims to identify whether a break or shift in history politics happened in 2015, it is important to be able to compare with the time period after 2015. The timeframe therefore stretches until the time of writing, spring 2018.

The most common sources of data in a case study are field documents, interviews with key persons or informants and field observation (Swanborn, 2010). In this research I have based my analysis on field observations from a 10-month stay in Kazakhstan autumn 2015 and spring 2016, and a two-week field visit in November 2017, documents gathered both in the field and online, and interviews with key informants. Details on these different sources of data and my approach to interpret and analyze them follows in the next sections of this chapter.

### 4.2 Documents: Idea analysis

To answer the question of developments over time within the official history politics of the contemporary regime in Kazakhstan, I have analyzed key political documents from the period of independence6. I have limited my selection of documents to mainly two sub-genres of presidential speeches, with additional individual texts also included where relevant. The criteria for selection of documents have been their relevance for questions of national identity and ethnic/nationalities policies. Nazarbayev’s annual Address to the People of Kazakhstan are relevant because it is aimed at a wide audience and is where new governmental programs are usually introduced to the public and important priorities for the future politics are spelled out. The venue and audience of the delivery of these speeches have been subject to change, sometime addressed to the Parliament of Kazakhstan, sometimes to members of the Nur Otan party, and sometimes only published in print on the official website of the president. When given live, they are streamed online and broadcast on TV, and they are always published widely in newspapers and online news journals. Addresses to the Assembly of the People are relevant as their content deals with ethnic and nationalities questions. The audience of these speeches are the members of the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan, who are representatives of the different ethnic minorities in the country. In addition, other texts or speeches have been included where they seem relevant, because they deal directly with

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6 Unfortunately, documents from the early years of Kazakhstan’s independence are not easily available, and my analysis of the beginning of the 1990’s is therefore limited.
historical topics. A list of these documents can be found in the Appendix to this thesis. Those documents which I have quoted in the text will also be listed in the regular bibliography.

I have applied a qualitative content analysis approach to the reading of these texts, with the aim to discover what ideas predominate the official discourse about the role of history within the state’s policies on nation and identity building, and whether these ideas have changed over time. Qualitative content analysis is a form of textual analysis where interpretation of formulations and concepts is the focus of the analysis, rather than tracking frequency as in quantitative textual analysis. Øyvind Bratberg calls this approach idea analysis, where ideas are thought constructions that, in contrast to impressions and attitudes, are characterized by a certain continuity (2014, p. 21). An idea analysis focusses on contextual interpretation, where the context ideas are expressed within is important. The researcher aims to identify what sets of ideas dominate, and to what extent the balance between these is changing.

The aims of idea analysis can be many, but one of them is to map what ideas are prevalent in a selection of texts, by sorting out and identifying key ideas from the text, evaluating them in light of the context and author, and comparing them over time. To make sure that the analytic work is solid, Bratberg emphasizes the need for the analysis to be rooted in established knowledge of the purpose of the text, and the ability and willingness of the researcher to contextualize the evaluation of the text. The theoretical and conceptual framework spelled out in the previous chapter will be the rooting of my analysis, and the contextualization will be informed by secondary literature as well as my own observations in the field and my interviews with key informants. When studied in their empirical and theoretical context, idea analyses are particularly suitable for understanding text in context and explaining ideological changes (Bratberg, 2014, p. 63).

Often, an idea analysis is carried out with an analytical framework that is guiding what one is looking to identify in the texts of study. This framework might be based on political ideal types, dimensions along a scale of ideologies or other more context specific discourse frameworks taken from other studies (Bratberg, 2014). However, Bratberg also makes clear that one can approach texts in a more inductive manner, with the intention of identifying key concepts and ideas. As there is little literature systematizing the history politics of Kazakhstan, I will carry out my analysis of key texts with the aim of identifying what ideas are prominent in Kazakhstan’s history politics. Based on the theoretical discussion in the previous chapter, have approached these texts looking for:
- Ideas concerning the role of history in Kazakhstani politics and national identity, as pictured in political and public discourse,

- relations between ethnicity and history – what ethnic group(s)’ history is defined as the national history of Kazakhstan,

- what historical events are mentioned (and indirectly what events are not mentioned), and in what way they are mentioned – do they assign blame, are they used to unify the population, are they used to legitimize political action etc. Key elements to look for are ancestry, homeland, victimhood, heroes and foundation myths.

- the importance (priority, space, pathos) of historical narratives in relation to other subject matters in the texts.

### 4.3 Field observations

Direct observation often serves a complementary purpose in a case study, but a very important one, as it gives insight that is not accessible through documents or interviews (Swanborn, 2010). Observation focuses primarily on human behavior, but observation of physical artifacts, material resources and people’s surroundings can be equally insightful.

My field observations were gathered during two visits to Kazakhstan, the first while I was working there during the autumn of 2015 and spring of 2016 and the second a two-week field trip in November 2017 when I also conducted interviews with key informants. In the first period I had the opportunity to witness first-hand how government political programs were rolled out to the public, especially how they were visible in cityscapes and present in media, and how big public events in the capital were carried out. The celebration that dominated the cityscapes in autumn 2015 has become a major part of the argument of this thesis.

During my field visit in November 2017 I was able to more systematically observe manifestations of history policies, through visits to history- and national museums, art galleries, and observation of monuments and streetscapes. The latter is particularly interesting in Kazakhstan, as whenever a new state program is introduced, posters and banners carrying its symbols and slogans are visible everywhere in the big cities. Observing the “atmosphere” that these symbolic measures create in cities is only possible through direct observation in the
field. It should be noted however, that the impact this has on the population should not be exaggerated, as most of them will have grown accustomed to this kind of imagery.

In addition, I participated at a history conference organized by Nazarbayev University in Astana, devoted to the topic of the 100-years commemoration of the Bolshevik revolution, and was therefore able to observe academic practice within the field of history in Kazakhstan. This I found to give important insight in forming an understanding of the role of history as an academic subject and practice in Kazakhstan, and giving contextual knowledge to understand the relations between academia and politics in Kazakhstan and the working environment for academics in a society where many topics of research carry political tension.

4.4 Interviews

Carrying out interviews is an important part of case studies, but can have many different applications depending on the goal of the research. Either the data one is looking for is the informants’ personal stories and attitudes, or secondarily the information and knowledge that the informants have which is not available otherwise (Andersen, 2006, p. 281). In the latter situation one wants to interview key informants, that is people who are assumed to have good knowledge of and insight into questions that the researcher wants to study (Andersen, 2006). Sometimes these informants are also called elite informants. In the context of my thesis, I wanted to carry out interviews with key informants for several reasons. For instance interviews can be used to corroborate what has already been collected from other sources (Tansey, 2007, p. 766).

Documents and secondary sources provide an initial overview of the events and issues studied, and interviews with key players can be used to confirm the validity of these early findings: “[i]n this way, interviews contribute towards the research goal of triangulation, where collected data are cross-checked through multiple sources to increase the findings’ robustness” (Tansey, 2007, p. 766). For instance, evaluating the importance, impact and reception of public discourse in Kazakhstan is very difficult, as the only sources are that said discourse and local critical or oppositional media is very limited. Doing interviews with local academics gave me an opportunity of assessing my impressions and therefore make better evaluations of my data. Secondly, elite interviews can “shed light on the hidden elements of
political action that are not clear from an analysis of political outcomes or other primary sources” (Tansey, 2007, p. 767).

Through my informants, I got information about political debates preceding official decision-making, responses in society and other knowledge that is not possible to acquire through for instance media sources. Finally, in cases where there is abundance of information, interviews can help the researcher distinguish between important and unimportant data and prioritize what is most significant. In my case, speaking to my informants helped me cut through the wealth of information on political programs and strategies that the Kazakhstani government has produced over the period since they became and independent country, and focus my attention on the most significant ones.

I conducted 12 interviews during my field visit in Astana and Almaty in November 2017. The criteria for selecting respondents was a combination of positional criteria and the snowball method. Positional criteria are used to identify desirable respondents, by specifying a set of positions or occupations of key elites that are the focus of the study (Tansey, 2007, p. 770). My specifications were that I wanted to talk to historians, political scientists, and government representatives from relevant ministries, as I assumed that people in those positions would have knowledge and insight in the topic of research, but view it from different perspectives. From there on, I would ask informants for referrals to other possible informants. This chain-referral (snowballing) method has the danger of only leading to informants with similar outlooks, but as I had several referral chains starting from different points, this weakness was hopefully mitigated (Tansey, 2007, p. 770). As I had been working in Kazakhstan before, I did have some knowledge of institutions and some network that I used to establish initial contacts. A historian I knew from my year working in Kazakhstan introduced me to possible informants, and secured me a place at a history conference dedicated to the 100-years commemoration of the Bolshevik Revolution, where I would be able to meet other historians from leading Kazakhstani universities and research institutions. NUPI was also very helpful in putting me in touch with researchers that could give me further leads on who to contact. In this way, I was able to meet my goal of talking to three different categories of people: historians, political scientists and governments officials. Furthermore, the academics I talked to came from different institutions and backgrounds, both more liberal with experience of working in the West, and some from more conservative, older institutions in Kazakhstan. The hope was that this would provide me with a wide range of different viewpoints.
Four interviews were carried out in Russian and the rest in English. All were recorded with the consent of the informants, and later transcribed. Recording can contribute to strengthen the reliability of the data as one is not relying on one’s memory or limited notes taken during the interviews, and quotes can be used with a high degree of accuracy (Mosley, 2013, pp. 24-25). There are disadvantages to recording, as informants might feel uncomfortable and limit their replies. During the interviews I did not, however, detect any nervousness or constraint on the part of the informants once the conversation had started. To protect the confidentiality of informants, transcripts were kept protected at a password-protected PC, and informants were notified that the gathered data would be anonymized after the completion of the research, and their names not used in the report without their consent. All but one of my informants agreed to be quoted by name.

One interesting experience relating to language was that more than one of my informants asked what language my final report would be written in, and explicitly exclaimed that they could be more frank with me knowing that it would be written in English and not in Russian (and I assume therefore not being read by their superiors).

Contrary to the experience of Rivera et al (2002) and Roberts (2013) of carrying our research in the challenging environment that the post-soviet world is, I found that most of my respondents were easily contacted by email, agreed to a time and date, and kept to that agreement. Perhaps this shows that culture is changing among a younger generation of post-soviet people. One difficulty I did have though, was in finding contact information in the first place, as many institutions, especially the older and more conservative ones, do not have contact information about their employees on their website. I therefore had to rely mostly on being referred to people, by people I already had spoken too. A positive side effect of this was that building rapport with the informants was not difficult, as they already knew I had been referred to them through someone they knew.

When interviewing elite informants being well prepared and conscious of one’s role as a researcher is necessary, as informants are often resourceful and independent, and might highjack the conversation for their own purposes (Andersen, 2006). It is a challenge to retain analytical control – and consequently securing the validity and reliability of the data gathered through the interview. On the other hand, interviewing elites can provide for a conversation where both parties, both the researcher and the informant, together develop interesting and possibly new insight about the research topic, as they are both operating on a more or less
equal level. Aiming at achieving this balance between control and openness, I developed an interview guide with questions that I wanted answers to, but during the interviews moved quite freely between the different questions, making sure at the end that I had the information I wanted. Another asset of elite interviewing, especially when interviewing academics, is that the researcher can use the interviews to test her own presuppositions as well as the presuppositions of the informant’s observations, descriptions and evaluations, and actively develop hypotheses and arguments relating to the research question (Andersen, 2006, pp. 280-281). As I interviewed many academics and historians, I actively used the interviews to test my understandings and hypotheses during the interviews, in this way using the interviews to develop and find possible ways of answering my research questions.

Being aware of the fact that some questions might be contentious in the political context of Kazakhstan, and that my informants had different roles, I prepared two different interview guides, one for my academic respondents and one for government representatives. This was to make sure that the wording of the questions was appropriate and would not provoke hostility or discomfort. One risk here is of the researcher practically self-censoring herself to fit into the political context, and thereby losing out on valuable data (Roberts, 2013). To try to counter this, I some places included alternative versions of a question, or follow-up questions, that I could use if I sensed that the respondent was open to more direct questions. The interview guide was translated into Russian with the aid of a native Russian speaker, making sure that the concepts would be understood in the right manner. Both versions of the interview guides used can be found among the Appendices.

### 4.5 Methodological challenges

The obvious methodological challenge when studying Kazakhstan is the question of languages. The official state language in Kazakhstan is Kazakh, while Russian still has a privileged status, and almost all state activities are carried out in both languages. Having knowledge of Russian, I had access to that state discourse that is carried out in Russian. Not knowing Kazakh is an obvious shortcoming of my study, which I tried to mitigate in some ways. I have spent time getting as much insight into Kazakh language discourses as I could through secondary sources, through my interviews with academics who have conducted studies on Kazakh language discourses, and through what media reports I could find that translates Kazakh media reports into Russian. Furthermore, the case that is the centre of my
study is an example of theme that usually has its place within Kazakh language discourse, but that in 2015 got nation-wide importance and therefore entered the Russian-speaking sphere too. Despite the language policies of promoting Kazakh language, many ethnic Kazakhs still use Russian as their first language.

A second challenge was the acquisition of documental material for the study. My case covers a period from the 1990s until today, and therefore stretches into a pre-internet age, and therefore not all empirical material is easily available online. This has affected for instance on my selection of speeches, where there are some periods in the 1990s I have not been able to find source material from. I did not have the time or resources to access archives during my field visit to acquire this material. A second challenge relating to this is the lack of quality of .kz websites, where many places information about authors, institutional affiliation and publication dates is absent, which makes it difficult to evaluate the quality of the information. I have in most instances taken a sceptical view of information found online whenever I could not find information about the source.

Similarly, another challenge is the lack of opposition or critical voices in media, and thereby sources that one as a researcher can use to evaluate the reliability of information from government or government-affiliated sources. Critical and oppositional media outlets face repression and prosecution and threats of forced closure, as happened to one of the media outlets I had relied on as a Russian language source covering developments within Kazakh-language media, when ratel.kz was closed down in April, 2018 (Kumenov, 2018). I did manage to find other internet journals to mitigate this loss, but as government repression on media continues, this research challenge is certainly not becoming smaller in the future.

Furthermore, studying the media, and especially social media, proved a challenge. Many social media sites are driven by algorithms, showing contents differently to different users, and do not have good functions for searching among the contents. The simple fact that the social media world consist of a vast amount of information is a challenge in itself. Many social media groups require membership to access their content, and slang and insider knowledge also restrict the access and understanding of an outsider researcher. Considering this, I have been careful what conclusions I draw based on social media data in Chapter 7.
5 A case of history politics in practice: The celebrations of the 550th Anniversary of the Kazakh Khanate

The initial starting point of this thesis was my own observations in the field. I was in Kazakhstan at the time when a nation-wide, year-long celebration of nationhood took place, and was amazed by the scale of the celebrations. It was visible everywhere, especially around the dates of big official events, and all manners of institutions organized events linked to this anniversary celebration. What is significant with this celebration is the fact that at first sight it seemed to have appeared out of thin air. I will deal with the question of whether the event fits into a longer-term strategic history policy in Kazakhstan, or if it was rather a tactical, short-term decision, in the next chapter. In this chapter, I will outline the background for and contents of the celebrations and how they can be interpreted as measures of history politics and identity building.

5.1 Background and context

The celebrations in 2015 captured the attention of international commentators when it happened, because the decision to celebrate seemed to appear out of nowhere just months before the celebratory year started. The mainstream explanation of the decision to celebrate is that it was a reaction to a comment Russian president Putin had made about Kazakhstan’s lack of statehood history (Lillis, 2015a; Michel, 2015). At a youth camp in Russia President Putin had replied to a question about the growth of nationalist sentiments in Kazakhstan with a rather curious response. Among other praise for the Kazakh president Putin exclaimed that “[Nazarbayev] has performed a unique feat: he has created a state on a territory where there has never been a state. The Kazakhs never had a state of their own, and he created it.” (Kremlin.ru, 2014). How widespread this way of explaining the event was was confirmed to me when I carried out my fieldwork, as practically all my respondents explained it in the same way, as a reaction to Putin’s comments, even without me prompting the question of outside influence.

Putin’s comments were made at a time of increased anxiety about threats to the territorial integrity of Kazakhstan. Many Russian irredentist claims to the Northern parts of Kazakhstan
have been made over the years, but the situation in 2014 was particularly tense because of the recent Russian annexation of Crimea and the conflict on the border between Russia and Ukraine. In early 2014 Russian nationalist Eduard Limonov expressed a desire for Russia to occupy the Northern territories of Kazakhstan, on the claim of them being historically Russian (Voloshin, 2014). Duma-member Vladimir Zhirinovsky expressed similar ideas a couple of days after Limonov, saying that Kazakhstan and the other Central Asian states should become federal districts of Russia (ibid.). Even though both Limonov and Zhirinovsky are controversial figures in Russia, these statements provoked anger among the public in Kazakhstan.

Within this context, the comments made by Putin in the autumn of 2014 were interpreted by some as threats, with the need for a strong response. Several of my informants, even though they themselves allowed for the remarks to be interpreted as a compliment to Nazarbayev, said that many members of the elite in Kazakhstan felt insulted by the remarks. One respondent even said that Putin’s remarks “opened the eyes” of the elites to the power of definition over history. Contrary to many of my respondents, Zhaksylyk Sabitov, who, with his connections to Kazakhstani think tanks said he “knew the situation a little bit from the inside”, on the other hand, said that Putin’s comments were not what triggered the decision to make the year 2015 a celebration of the Kazakh Khanate. According to Sabitov, the decision was already made earlier that year, and the crucial factor was Russia’s annexation of Crimea: “Crimea frightened our elites a lot, and that is where [the decision] came from”. Putin’s comments, in Sabitov’s view, were just coincidental to a plan that was already in place.

Whatever way one looks at it however, it seems plausible that geopolitical factors and perceived threats to the territorial integrity of Kazakhstan, led the authorities to realize the importance of having the power of definition of history. Either Crimea or Putin’s remarks, or the combination of both, were some sort of catalyst of the decision to raise the story of the Kazakh Khanate to a national level as a foundation story of the modern Kazakh state.

Thus, in October 2014, Nazarbayev announced that 2015 would be celebrated as the 550th anniversary of Kazakh statehood, defining the establishment of the Kazakh Khanate by Kerei and Zhanibek in 1465 as the first Kazakh state. Nazarbayev did acknowledge that “it may not have been a state in the modern understanding of this term, in the current borders”, but made clear that “it is important that the foundation was laid then, and we are the people continuing the great deeds of our ancestors” (Tengrinews.kz, 2014). The symbolism of the event clearly
portrayed a direct connection between the historic statehood and the present state of Kazakhstan, and the focus on the Kazakh-ness of the Khanate gave the celebration an unprecedented ethnic component as a nation building measure.

## 5.2 Spectacular history politics

The celebrations were remarkably broad-spectred in form and content to be planned only a few months in advance – if we allow for the main interpretation of them being a response to Putin’s remarks. Throughout the year, numerous events were held to mark the occasion in all regions of the country, as well as major events taking place in September and October. Events included exhibitions, historical performances, street festivals, conferences and productions of TV-series to name just a few. More than 22,79 billion tenge (at the time equivalent to almost 110 million Euro) was allocated to carry out the different components of the celebrations, among them 13 billion to the planning and carrying out of the main celebratory event, a mass sport and cultural event in the city of Taraz (Tengrinews.kz, 2015). In addition to the afore mentioned events, included in this sum were also funds for major scientific expeditions and archeological projects. The event can in this regard be compared in form and scale with big national celebrations in other countries, such as the 200th Anniversary of the Norwegian Constitution in 2014, which also lasted a year, and included festivals, TV-shows and concerts among its activities, and which played an important role in Norwegian nation building. The amount of money spent on the celebrations in Kazakhstan led some to question the importance of the event in relation to other more well-known and integrated historical commemorations in the country. The Kazakhstani government allegedly allocated almost four times as much on the celebrations of the 550th Anniversary of the Kazakh Khanate, than on the celebrations the same year of the 70th Anniversary of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War, an event much closer to the lives of ordinary people in Kazakhstan (CAMonitor.kz, 2015). And some questioned how the government could spend so much money on the anniversary of the Khanate, when they failed to find any funds to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the birth of Alikhan Bukeikhanov, one of the most important figure in the Kazakh independence movement of the early 20th century, and the founder and leader of the Alash Orda independence movement, the year after (Akkuly, 2016). It seems therefore fair to

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7 For a simple overview, see the factsheet of the Embassy of Kazakhstan in the US (kazakhembus.com).
8 The Second World War is known under this name in the former Soviet countries.
say that the scale the celebrations of the Khanate took was surprising, considering how little space it has had in Kazakhstani nation building previously (more on this in the next chapter).

I had the opportunity to observe one of the main events of the celebrations, a festival-like street fair in Astana that lasted for three days, and took place at one of the main squares of the city, between the Palace of Peace and Reconciliation and the Palace of Independence, on the square of the monument to the Eternal Land (Kazakh Eli). The festival space consisted of a number of yurts, dedicated to the different regions of Kazakhstan, two big stages with continuous speeches and musical performances and numerous stalls with traditional handicrafts for sale and different exhibitions and activities. I found it particularly fascinating that the men dressed up as traditional Kazakh warriors, batyrs, were all over two meters tall and must have gone through a selection process based on height. They were an impressive sight as they strolled around the festival area. The event seemed to be focused on portraying the differences in ethnocultural markers, costumes, patterns and ornaments of the different regions of Kazakhstan. Even though the regional divisions were based on the modern regions of Kazakhstan, the event was remarkably mono-ethnic with only Kazakh costumes and cultural markers represented (e-history.kz, 2015b). This stands in contrast to other mass celebrations in Kazakhstan, where either civic nationhood (Independence Day) or ethnic diversity and the “friendship of the peoples” (Nauryz celebrations a.o.) play a large role (Adams & Rustemova, 2009).

The celebrations carried many of the characteristics of history politics that was described in the theory chapter above. In Assmann’s conception, authorities can manipulate collective memory through using emotionally charged and mobilizing narratives about historical events, use sites and monuments as tangible relics, use other kinds of visual aids of memory and enhance collective participation by creating commemorative rites (Assmann, 2006, p. 8). The narrative of the celebrations was one of grandiosity and victory, idealizing and glorifying the history of the Khanate, portraying an image of a Golden Age of Kazakhs, and underlining the strength and unity of the (ethnic) Kazakh people. The two-meter-tall batyrs are illustrative examples. The focus on aesthetics that characterized the celebrations also contribute to idealization and emotional appeal. And the rhetoric of the event appealed to the Kazakhs’ pride in their country and history. At the unveiling of a statue in the Southern city Taraz, Nazarbayev said: “The 550th anniversary of the Kazakh khanate shows that the Kazakh nation
Figure 1 Taking selfies with the batyrs at the Astana celebrations of the 550th Anniversary of the Kazakh Khanate. (photo by author, 2015)

Figure 2 Central stage at the celebrations in Astana, with the Kazakh Eli Monument in the background. (photo by author, 2015)
and the Kazakh state have a long history. We are showing the world our great history.” (Inform.kz, 2015). The celebration also had a special attention to sites and monuments, placing the biggest event in the city Taraz, where allegedly khans Kerei and Zhanibek founded the Khanate (Lillis, 2015b), and erecting a new monument there dedicated to the anniversary (Urankayeva, 2015). The celebration was in many ways aided by visual devices, not just at the street festivals, but spread around the cities on posters and banners, and not the least in the TV-shows and movies filmed for the celebration. And lastly, although it might not become a repeated commemorative rite, the celebrations were to a high degree participatory, with its many street fairs, festivals and concerts and other public events.

Institutional continuities can to some extent explain the spectacular form of the celebrations. In a study on Uzbekistan’s cultural policies and celebrations, Adams (2010) suggests that the same government officials who are organizing events in that country today, did the same under communism, and that this might explain the reproduction of Soviet discourse, practices and cultural forms. The same might be said for Kazakhstan, as the form of the celebration resemble the way that mass public holidays were celebrated during Soviet times, with its use of mass spectacles, street fairs, dramatized concerts where the actors mingle with the public, and decorative art that adorn public places and buildings, enhancing the political messages of the ceremonies (Lane, 1981, pp. 156-158). At the same time however, the Kazakhstani government does try to use more modern means as part of the celebrations too. The money invested in movie and TV-productions, one of them even anticipated as a Kazakhstani Game of Thrones (Lillis, 2016), is clearly an attempt to appeal to the younger generations with the historical narrative of the Khanate.

Additionally, and in relation to institutional influences, several of my respondents mentioned corruption as a factor in the celebrations. Many people see possibilities of earning money from these events, and the attention to detail or quality, or the overarching aims of the projects, are not necessarily the priority of the people carrying them out. The tv-series produced promising Game of Thrones-like thrills for example, did everything but that. As my informant Sabitov said, “it is both boring and historically inaccurate. If they had made it like the TV-series Vikings… of course I know that Vikings might also be criticized [for being

9 There were several TV and cinematic films produced connected to the celebration of the Anniversary of the Khanate: a children’s cartoon
10 Popular Irish-Canadian produced historical drama television series. A sixth season is currently in production, and it has a score of 8.6 out of 10 on IMDb at the time of writing.
historically inaccurate], but at least it is interesting to watch”. The efficiency of these nation-building measures in reaching out to the population can therefore be questioned. How the population perceive them, and whether they actually make a difference, is an entirely other topic worth investigating, that I give my interpretation of in Chapter 7.

5.3 Mythologization of national history

Besides the immediate effect of being a tactical response to geopolitical threats, the celebrations can also be interpreted as a mythologization of national history, with the aim of legitimizing claims to territory and sovereignty. This is of course a component of the response, as a demonstration of the right to disputed territories, but may also have a more lasting effect. The historical myth cultivated in the anniversary of the Kazakh Khanate is what Kolstø terms the myth of antiquity (Kolstø, 2005, pp. 21-22). When a territorial area is disputed, a common approach to assert claims for control over the area is to prove that one “got there first”. There are two ways of asserting this claim, according to Kolstø, one is the cultural-archeological, where pottery and other relics belonging to one group and not the other is found in the ground, the other is political, to assert that an old state controlled the territory in question, and that was the national state of our group. The Anniversary of the Kazakh Khanate did both of these things, as money was allocated to archaeological excavations, and the Khanate was expressly described during official events and speeches as the first Kazakh nation-state. It is worth pointing out that nomadic people are at a disadvantage in this “scramble for territorial legitimacy”, since nomads leave far fewer traces on the ground than sedentary people.

This assertion of territorial priority is not new in Kazakh historiography. A central goal of Kazakh historiography has been to portray the Kazakh ethnos as united, ancient, and inherently connected to the contemporary territory of Kazakhstan, as Diener (2002) and others have stressed. The anniversary of the Kazakh Khanate further strengthens this historiographic tendency, and puts the Kazakh Khanate at the forefront of the narrative, overshadowing, for instance the Golden Horde, which at other times has been an important anchor-point for asserting claims of antiquity of the Kazakh over their territory\(^\text{11}\). The narrative of the

\(^{11}\) See for instance Nazarbayev’s vision of the history of the Kazakh people in his 1999 book V potoke istorii, and the discussion of historical references in official discourse in the next chapter of this thesis.
Anniversary places these other historical events as precursors in a chain of connected events leading up to the establishment of the Khanate (fig. 3) (e-history.kz, 2015a).

*Figure 3 The process of the formation of the Kazakh Khanate, as presented on the official site of the History of Kazakhstan e-history.kz (a zoomed-in version with readable text can be found in the Appendices).*
Another mythologizing tendency is the tendency in Kazakh history writing to present periods of unification within various khanates as the rule, rather than the exception (Diener, 2002, p. 640). This is for instance done through presenting the rule of different khans as a continuous timeline, not taking into account subdivisions, rivalry and cleavages between the different subdivisions of the Kazakh ethnic groups, known as the zhuzy or Hordes. Examples found in museums (fig. 4) and school textbooks (Artykbaev, 2013, pp. 187-188) show that this is a common representation of the history of the Khanate. This representation is a mythologizing, glossy picture of history, as the Khanate since its inception was riven by internal feuds and power struggles. It was not uncommon for two or more rival khans to be ruling concurrently, or for khans to rule over followings that cut across the conventional tribal or territorial boundaries. From time to time, the khans might come together to elect a “supreme khan”, but his authority was mostly nominal: “the khans of the hordes acted as heads of independent states, pursuing their own interest, in conflict or alliance with one another, as often as with their ‘foreign’ neighbours” (Akiner, 1995, p. 17).

![Image](image_url)

Figure 4 “Timeline of Kazakh Khans”, Central State Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Almaty. (photo by author, 2017)

Historical accuracy did not seem to be a concern for those planning the celebrations. According to one of my informants, posters at bus stops around the city of Astana advertising some celebratory event were actually depicting the image of an Uzbek palace in the background, as well as fields of corn, a crop that only was introduced on the steppe on Kazakhstan during the Virgin lands campaign of USSR Communist Party leader Nikita Khrushchev (McCauley, 1976). The cinematic film about the Khanate abounded with
historical errors (Sabitov, 2017). For instance, a flag was used to represent the Khanate which according to one researcher did not exist until the 20th century, and was then drafted as a Pan-Turkic nationalist flag (365info.kz, 2015). This flag also appears other places, for instance on the Kazakh language Wikipedia article for the “Kazakh Khanate”, as the official flag of the Khanate (Wikipedia), and on stage at an official celebratory ceremony in Astana in September 2015 (Aleksandrov, 2015).

Another myth-making device that the Kazakhstani government has made broad use of as part of the anniversary celebrations is art. Art has an advantage over other myth-making devices by its ability to engage the mind not only through speech and writing, but by appealing to other senses and emotions. In this way, art is not merely a spin-off from myth production, but active myth-producers in their own right (Kolstø, 2005, p. 29). By depicting mythical history, artists actively re-present it, making it “real” for the spectators. The Kazakhstani government has actively made use of this device, by supporting and promoting the production of art with historical content. Even though the nationalities policies during the Soviet Union promoted the development of art symbolizing national themes, in parallel with the history policies, the art policies of the Soviet Union meant that certain historical topics and events were not considered “correct” for artists to portray. The result of this policy was a lack of artworks portraying Kazakh historical themes at the time of independence (Bartlett, 2017). The celebration of the Kazakh Khanate seems to have started the work on filling this vacuum with new artworks. Several exhibitions on the topic of the 550th Anniversary of the Kazakh Khanate were organized at the national art gallery in Almaty, the A. Kasteev State Museum of Art, with artworks specially commissioned for the exhibitions (e-history.kz, 2016; Tatilia, 2015). In addition, a competition to produce historical art under the theme “Chronicle of the Great Steppe” was launched, with the results showcased in an exhibition in 2017 (Bartlett, 2017; Tatilia, 2015). Many of these artworks are now a part of the permanent exhibition of the Kasteev Gallery, which I visited during my field work. Many of the works depict historical figures such as khans and batyrs, but some also deal with more modern issues, such as the mass hunger of the 1930s, a topic the Kazakhstani state that has been kept low on the official historiographical agenda (Volkava, 2012).

The most symbolic myth making piece of art made in relation to the Anniversary was, however, the triptych suitably titled “Mangilik El” which was revealed as part of the celebrations in 2015 (National Museum of Kazakhstan, 2015). The paintings occupy the main
hall of the National Museum in Astana and are the first thing that visitors see when entering the museum, giving the main hall an aura of ceremony (fig. 5). The paintings consist of “The Kazakh Khanate”, portraying the founders Kerei and Zhanibek, on the left, the “First President of Kazakhstan and Elbasy12 Nursultan Nazarbayev 21.c” in the middle, and the “Zhety Zhargy”, the seven laws codified by Tauke Khan at the beginning of the 18th Century on the right. The triptych conveys at least two important messages, firstly they define the Khanate and its foundation, as well as the codification of the laws of Tauke Khan13, as important elements in Kazakhstani history. Secondly, it places the figure of Nazarbayev on the same historical level as these, as creator of modern Kazakhstan, and guarantor of future stability and prosperity. Together they form a vision of the “eternal land” (Mangilik El) of Kazakhstan.

![Triptych "Mangilik El" in the main hall of the National Museum in Astana. (photo from nationalmuseum.kz)](image)

The idea “Mangilik El” was launched in 2010 as “the national idea” of Kazakhstan, and emphasizes the values that lie behind the multinationalism paradigm of Kazakhstani identity, values of “stability, tolerance and equality of all people”, portraying the Kazakhstani people as a collection of different ethnic groups united by common history, culture and language

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12 Elbasy is Kazakh for “Leader of the Nation”, a title given to Nazarbayev in 2010, awarding Nazarbayev lifelong privileges and immunities (Ma-Shan-Lo, 2010).

13 In my conversation about the history of the Khanate with the Deputy Director of the Nazarbayev Centre, he emphasized the existence of laws as an argument that the Kazakh Khanate must be considered a state, which suggests that this is an important component of the Kazakhstani government’s portrayal of the Khanate.
The rhetoric of the Mangilik El idea, however, mythologizes the Kazakhstani nation and people in the way that it emphasizes the eternal character of nation, as if it has always existed and always will exist. The concept is often used in the context of the government development plan “Strategy 2050”, which in result gives the impression that the strategy is the key to the eternal stability of Kazakhstan. At the basis of these ideas is the character of Nazarbayev, portrayed as the creator and guarantor of the prosperity and future of Kazakhstan.

Thus, the support by the state to artists creating art based on themes from pre-soviet Kazakh history contributes to promoting a mainly ethnic Kazakh element to the development of the modern Kazakhstani art scene.

5.4 Monoethnic (and exclusive) narrative of nationhood

What is interesting about the narrative of the Kazakh Khanate in the context of previous Kazakhstani nation building is that it is exclusively focused on the Kazakh ethnic group. Adams and Rustemova (2009) argue that the Kazakhstani government has not seen ethno-nationalism as a practical, rational strategy, and that to overemphasize Kazakh culture could have consequences for the economic stability that they have worked hard to build. Because of this, cultural policies and celebrations in Kazakhstan have focused on multiculturalism, economic prosperity and “friendship of the people”, delivering the narration of events in both Kazakh and Russian, and trying to include non-Kazakh speakers in the “national idea”. The narration and speeches at events of 2015 were bi-lingual (although the speech Nazarbayev delivered at the celebration in Taraz stands out from the common pattern of being mainly in Russian and having some parts in Kazakh that characterize the majority of his speeches, as it was mainly given in Kazakh and had only a small part in Russian), and Nazarbayev did emphasize that the celebration was for the whole country (Inform.kz, 2015). Nevertheless, many of my informants expressed that it is hard to see how the story of the Kazakh Khanate would appeal to others than ethnic Kazakhs.

Sabitov emphasized the monoethnic nature of the Kazakh Khanate as a factor in its exclusive appeal to Kazakhs. It is often seen as the point in history when the Kazakhs as an ethnic group was formed, and therefore an important event in the historical “ethnogenesis” of Kazakhs.
Much of the official rhetoric around the celebrations also emphasize the Khanate as the roots of Kazakh nationhood, the start of the Kazakh statehood traditions, etc. When connecting the modern Kazakhstani state to a 550-year-long state tradition built on the Kazakh ethnic group, other ethnic groups of today’s Kazakhstan are consequently excluded from this statehood tradition. According to Sabitov, other historical “states” that have historical links to modern Kazakhstan, could have provided alternative, and more ethnically inclusive, historical narratives of statehood. He mentioned the Golden Horde as such an alternative narrative, as it was more ethnically heterogeneous compared with the Kazakh Khanate. One may therefore ask whether it was a conscious choice by the Kazakhstani government to choose the more ethnically exclusive narrative, or whether it was just convenient chronologically, as it provided a relatively round number (550 years) to celebrate. Even though portraying modern Kazakhstan as the successor to the Golden Horde could be considered more far-fetched than the Kazakh Khanate, this is an idea that I heard mentioned during my field work in Kazakhstan.

5.5 Concluding remarks

In relation to theory on history politics and identity building, it is interesting to see such a massive celebratory political measure, with an identity narrative that had not previously been so high on the agenda, being spurred by outside factors. Few theories on history politics and national identity mention outside factors, or geopolitical influence, as factors influencing the national identity. Theories of identity do underline the importance of “us” and “them” as images constructing identity, but these mechanisms are often understood in more abstract terms, and less as practical politics. The celebration of the 550th Anniversary of the Kazakh Khanate must, however, be seen within a geopolitical framework of symbolic politics. In the case of the 2015 celebrations in Kazakhstan, a measure of practical history politics was used to state an example on the international arena: to take a stand against (perceived) Russian threats, and assert that Kazakhstan has a state tradition, and was not a creation of the Soviet system. The result of this geopolitically motivated political action was a turn in national identity rhetoric, which I will explore further in the next chapter.
6 Developments in Kazakhstan’s history politics since independence

A central aspect of nation building in states that have achieved their independence from previous colonial empires is to reclaim the past and create, or revive, a national historiography that helps to consolidate the new national state (Kuzio, 2002). In Kazakhstan the regime has been in the difficult position of trying to cultivate a patriotic identity that at the same time unites a range of different ethnic Kazakh sub-identities (regional identities, traditional tribal identities), and also accommodates increasingly insecure non-titular ethnic groups (Diener, 2002). In this chapter, I will look at what place historical arguments have taken in national identity discourse, to see how history politics has developed since independence and how it has been affected by the national identity projects of the Kazakhstani regime.

A comprehensive and deeply thorough mapping of all historical narratives used by the state, other elites and opposition, and historical celebrations and commemorations in Kazakhstan since independence is outside the scope of this thesis. Based on the presumption that Nazarbayev has used speeches and texts to communicate the official take on ideas about national identity and that these ideas have shaped and shape the political priorities and outcomes, I have concentrated my analysis on key speeches and texts where such ideas are assumed to be present over the course of the years of independent Kazakhstan. My analysis of developments will be complemented by accounts of these developments by my informants, who experienced these changes in policies from different perspectives, and from the works of other academics, working both within Kazakhstan and internationally. My focus will be to identify patterns and trends in the history politics in official discourse since independence, as described in more detail in the Methods chapter of this thesis.

6.1 A note on presidential speeches

As mentioned in the Methods Chapter, I have concentrated my analysis on two sub-genres of speeches delivered by the President of Kazakhstan: Annual Addresses to the Nation and Speeches to the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan.
Transcripts of Presidential Addresses to the People of Kazakhstan are available from the President of Kazakhstan’s official website, akorda.kz. They range back to 1997, and are given annually, though in 2012 and 2014 they were biannually, and in 2013 there was no speech given. The transcripts used for the analysis in the following are the official English translations where available (not all speeches have English translations on the Akorda website), and where no English translation is available, the Russian versions. In some of the recent speeches, the text has parts in Kazakh and parts in Russian. In these, I have only been able to look at the Russian parts. The reason for not reading all speeches in Russian has been a combination of time pressure, and the wish to read as many speeches in English translation as possible, to capture what is in Kazakh in the original transcripts, where the speech was given in a combination of Kazakh and Russian. Where uncertainties of the accuracy of the English translation or terminological questions have arisen, I have consulted the Russian text on the corresponding paragraphs.

Annual Addresses to the People of Kazakhstan are relevant because that is where the main direction of state policies is formulated, and new political programs introduced. As Nazarbayev himself says about the annual addresses: “My annual addresses to the people of Kazakhstan are always aimed at an analysis of our past accomplishments and future challenges, and, most importantly, at our joint search for the best way to achieve our great common goal” (Nazarbayev, 2008). This means that most of the speeches are rather similar: they are mostly devoted to listing how much progress has been made since independence, especially on developing the economy and achieving recognition for this internationally, and laying out the plans for the years ahead. Some of the speeches are longer than the usual format, mainly those that introduce new state projects, such as the “Strategy 2030”, and the “Strategy 2050”. These strategies also mainly consist of priorities within economic development, although there is also considerable space for social welfare policies and democratic development of government and administration, as well as foreign policy and regional cooperation.

14 Akorda is the name of the Presidential Palace in Astana, but also refers to the historical Ak Orda, or White Horde, which was the eastern part of the Golden Horde, another example of the use of historical references when constructing national symbols.
The Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan\(^1\) (Assambleia Naroda Kazakhstana) was established in 1995 as a “personal initiative” by Nazarbayev in preserving ethnic harmony in the country. Though gathering over 300 representatives of different ethnic groups, it lacks juridical status, legislative powers and political influence. Instead of being a channel for minority claims, it is a rather empty institutional framework for symbolic representation: “A crucial obligation of the Assembly is to display loyalty to the President, support his ethnic policy, and refrain from political activity or any form of ethnic entrepreneurship” (Dave, 2007, p. 132). Regardless of its lack of political influence, in the context of this thesis the Assembly of the People is a valuable source for information about Nazarbayev’s ethnic policy. As Dave points out, the Assembly is a place where Nazarbayev seeks to gather the support for his policies from the ethnic minorities in the country, or rather, where he informs them about his policies so that they can support them. I have looked at speeches given by Nazarbayev at the openings of the sessions of the Assembly in the years 1997 and 2006-2017, as these were available online, either at the websites of the Akorda or the Assembly, or from online newspapers. These speeches share the pattern of the Speeches to the People of Kazakhstan in that they usually have introductions and conclusions in Kazakh, but the main part of the speech is in Russian. I have read all of these speeches in their original language, as official translations are not available.

### 6.2 The use of history in presidential speeches

As already mentioned, most of the space in Nazarbayev’s speeches is devoted to future related politics, economic and political reform, or accounts of past successes (and by past here is meant the years since independence). When identity issues are brought up, it is usually the story of the success of the multiethnic policies of Kazakhstan, which it is claimed has secured peace and stability in a country of numerous ethnic groups and confessions. This story is repeated in the majority of speeches I have looked at. Historical narratives, arguments or events, on the other hand, are hardly ever used in the same mobilizing manner. With a very few exceptions, they never make up larger parts of speeches or major arguments in speeches.

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\(^{15}\) The name of the Assembly was changed in 2008, from the Assembly of the Peoples of Kazakhstan to the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan. This change from the plural to the singular has been interpreted as a change in the official conception of the Kazakhstani nation, not so much the assimilation of minorities into the Kazakh nation, but as an expression of the conception of the multi-ethnic Kazakhstani people, i.e. the integration of a variety of ethnic groups into a civic Kazakhstani nation that Nazarbayev often boasts as one of his accomplishments (Davenel & Yim, 2016; Oka, 2009).
Looking at the references to history that are present in the speeches, it is difficult to detect an overarching pattern or consistent developments, which is an interesting finding in itself. Using history actively as a nation building device or as legitimizing arguments for policies, does not seem to have been a priority. Nevertheless, I have tried to formulate a framework of what patterns I have detected. There is always the risk of oversimplification, and thereby losing out on some aspects, but as this thesis is limited in space and scope, I believe this framework at least highlights some important aspects of the Kazakhstani state’s relationship with historical topics in the context of national identity questions.

The patterns of ideas related to history and national identity questions in the speeches and texts of Nazarbayev that I have analyzed can be grouped around two dichotomies;

- the question whether the national history is described in ethnic (Kazakh) or multinational terms,
- and the question whether the Kazakhstani state is founded in modernity or in history.

In addition to these, history is mentioned several times as an important component of Kazakhstani patriotism. And lastly, there is the question of what historical events or narratives become object of official discourse, and which do not. Very few events are mentioned in the official speeches I have looked at, and no events stand out as important national consolidating narratives over time, thus making it hard to say that there is a consistent policy on the interpretation and use of historical events. Nevertheless, we shall see that there seem to be certain guidelines for the history politics of Kazakhstan, that are actually described in the texts I have been looking at.

The patterns of ideas on history in Nazarbayev’s speeches seem to follow a similar pattern to the general ideas on national or state identity in Kazakhstan. The two dichotomies that I have identified seem to correspond fairly well to the narratives of “Kazakhstanness” and “Kazakhness” defined by Marlene Laruelle in her study of discursive paradigms of state identity in Kazakhstan (Laruelle, 2015b). In very simplified terms, Kazakhstanness is the discursive paradigm of Kazakhstan as a multiethnic nation, while Kazakhness defines Kazakhstan as “the political entity of the Kazakh nation and its historical accomplishment” (ibid., p. 2). Laruelle’s third paradigm, “transnationalism”, seems not to manifest itself in relation to history politics, perhaps because its focus on modern condition for nation-states.
within a globalized world makes history less important, or irrelevant. Laruelle concludes that these three paradigms co-exist but “live in parallel spaces and interact rarely” (ibid., p. 16). I find, however, that they are present in the same texts, even in the same paragraphs, without contradicting or overpowering each other. As a reader, this seems rather paradoxical. In Nazarbayev’s speeches, it is possible at the same time to say that Kazakhstan is the historical culmination of the struggle for independence of Kazakhs and therefore the nation-state of Kazakhs, and at the same time state that it is a multinational country with a civic national idea. The regime seems able to flexibly and pragmatically shift between the different strands of identity discourses, dependent on audience and goals, and even talk to several audiences in the same speech act.

There are certain patterns though, such as that the Annual Presidential speeches to the People of Kazakhstan have more of a future oriented and multinational perspective, being focused mostly on economic and political reforms, and underlining the example Kazakhstan sets to the world in that it has managed to stay stable and peaceful despite having an ethnically very heterogeneous population. The Addresses at the Sessions of the Assembly of the People also underline the multiethnic character of the state, but at the same time talk about the need for shared identity and patriotism built on traditions, history and language.

6.2.1 Multinational vs ethnic definition of national history

The Kazakhstani government has throughout the years of independence engaged in a seemingly dichotomous project of cultivating both civic-patriotic and titular-nationalistic national identities: “[W]e strive to preserve and develop the ancient traditions, language and culture of the Kazakh people while also providing interethnic and intercultural harmony and progress of the single nation of Kazakhstan” (Nazarbayev, 2006). This seemingly self-contradictory project manifests itself in different historical narratives of statehood and nationhood. Firstly, multinationalism has clear implications for what historical events, narratives, and interpretations of history are considered appropriate in nation building discourse. Secondly, a very titular-nationalistic approach is used to legitimize Kazakhstan claim to territory and sovereignty. The following paragraph from a speech from Nazarbayev at a session of the Assembly of the People devoted to introducing the Strategy 2050 (Nazarbayev, 2013), highlights this dichotomy in an illustrating manner. I quote at length, as there are many important points to consider in Nazarbayev’s speech:
“На новом этапе на первый план выходят задачи укрепления роли казахского народа в процессе национального единства. Во-первых, казахский народ выступает как мощное историческое ядро национально-государственной общности для всех этнических, социальных групп Казахстана. Мы знаем, что казахский мир исторически никогда не был узко моноэтничным и монокультурным. (...) Современные казахи, следуя традициям предков, должны показать пример единства, толерантности и патриотизма. (...) Во-вторых, нам необходимо общенациональное историческое сознание. Наше восприятие истории должно быть целым, позитивным и объединять общество, а не разделять. Чтобы поднять на должную высоту национальный дух, надо четко осознать, какова наша реальная история, культура, религия. Национальная история казахов, их этногенез, должны рассматриваться как единый неразрывный процесс на протяжении тысячелетий. В этом контексте современный Казахстан закономерно представляет одним из ключевых исконных наследников великих степных цивилизаций. (...) Поэтому в истории, как учебной дисциплине, должны быть достойно отражены процессы культурного и экономического взаимодействия казахов и других народов, вклад различных этносов в историю страны. В результате, историческое сознание казахстанцев должно работать на сплочение, на формирование патриотического отношения к своему прошлому, настоящему и будущему.»

Firstly, Nazarbayev here underlines the leading role of (ethnic) Kazaks in the process of developing national unity, and even describes them as the historical core for national unity. But he also tries to mitigate this priority of Kazaks, by giving a historical argument that the Kazakhs have always lived in an ethnically pluralistic society, and that today, as before, they show tolerance to other ethnicities. Secondly, he expresses the need for a common historical understanding, and describes what the goals of this understanding should be: it should be holistic, positive and unite society, not divide it. This reads as a straightforward principle or guideline for how official history should be used in Kazakhstan - the historical narratives of the state should be those that do not trigger controversies between the national groups, but can be used to unify them.

Thirdly, Nazarbayev expresses that the national history of Kazaks should be seen as an uninterrupted process that has lasted thousands of years, and that because of this modern Kazakhstan will be seen as a natural successor to the steppe civilizations. We can read this
last point in two ways. On the one hand this rhymes with what Kadyrzhanov (2014) describes as “aggrandizement” (vozvelichivanie) and “ancientification” (udrevnenie) of national history, patterns that characterize history writing in most post-soviet countries. The aim is to instill pride in the population and to show other countries (especially the previous colonial power) that the country has a great and long history. In addition, arguments that connect a country to an ancient past is often used to legitimize claims to territory, and thereby legitimize the present state, not just in a symbolic manner, but also linked to sovereignty over concrete territories.

The above paragraph is perhaps the most direct definition of history politics that can be found in Nazarbayev’s speeches, but the ideas expressed are not exceptional for this speech. The dichotomy of ethnic and multinational definitions of history seem to be a recurring pattern throughout Nazarbayev’s speeches.

Multinationalism, for instance, provides clear guiding principles on how the Soviet history should be memorialized. In his speech to the Assembly of the People in 2009, which was dedicated to the topic “National Unity – our strategic choice”, Nazarbayev described one of three foundation pillars for national unity as “our common history” (the other two being the common values of all Kazakhstani ethnic groups and their common future) (Nazarbayev, 2009). He goes on to say the following:

Да, был голод, репрессии, война, депортации. Но эти факты мы не используем для огульной критики того времени и людей, которых уже нет. Тем более что пострадали все народы бывшего Советского Союза. (...) Память об этих трагических событиях не разделяет наши этносы, а наоборот, укрепляет нашу дружбу. Мы все страдали от тоталитарной машины того времени. (Nazarbayev, 2009, emphasis in original).

This idea of using the oppressions and suffering of the Soviet experience as a unifying narrative was described already in 1997, when Nazarbayev dedicated one fourth of his lecture to the Assembly of the People to “historical memory” (istoricheskaya pamyat). Describing the lessons to be learned from the time of totalitarianism (uroki totalitarizma) he exclaimed that “not one people were guilty for the ethnic Apocalypse of the past century. The system was
guilty16» (Nazarbayev, 1997, p. 6). He especially warns against assigning blame to the Russian people for their role in the repressions, as they themselves experienced an ethnic tragedy as great as that of the Kazakh people. This can be seen as an attempt just years after the breakdown of the Soviet Union, when Kazakhstan still had large majorities of Russian populations in certain areas, of calming down possible conflict between Kazakhs and Russians over the legacy of the Soviet Union., but this perspective continues to be important also in later speeches.

At the same time, and clearly illustrating the fact that contradictory ideas often are present in the same text, Nazarbayev underlines the idea of the ethnic Kazakhs as the core of the state based on historical reasoning:

Прежде всего надо сказать о роли казахов как государствообразующего этноса. Независимость Казахстана - не подарок судьбы казахам, а выстраданное, заслуженное право строить свою государственность на своей исконной земле. Этот безусловный исторический и политический факт никто не должен подвергать сомнению.» (Nazarbayev, 1997, p. 42).

This emphasis on the importance of the Kazakhs as state-forming ethnus is described in detail in Nazarbayev’s own book In the flow of History (V potoke istorii) from 1999. One of my informants described this book to me as the source of Nazarbayev’s official historical interpretations. Although Nazarbayev does underline in the beginning of the book that the prioritized national identity should be the civic and political unity of the Kazakhstanis, the focus of the book is delineating the history of the Kazakh ethnicity and its role in the formation through history of the modern state of Kazakhstan. The aim of the book seems to be to solve the question of what should be the national identity for Kazakhstan, as the title of the first chapter implies: “To safeguard one’s national ‘I’” (Sokhranit’ svoe natsional’noe Ia), but when describing the ‘history of our people’, what Nazarbayev presents is exclusively the history of the Kazakh ethnic group. This seems to support the notion expressed by Kadyrzhanov that nation builders with primordialist views of ethnicity, confuses ethnic history with national history. The first seeds of national thinking and nationalism among the Kazakhs can be traced to the middle of the 19th century, while the history of the Kazakhs as

16 «не один народ не является виновником этнического Апокалипсиса уходящего столетия. Это вина системы.”
an ethnic group is of course older. (Kadyrzhanov, 2014, p. 139). Nevertheless, the tendency to present the ethnic history as national history seems to be very attractive to nation builders that feel the need to legitimize their claim to sovereignty and territory with references to the past. Interestingly, the Kazakh Khanate is absent in Nazarbayev’s presentation of history, only perhaps implicitly mentioned as part of “the creation of peoples with their own ethnonyms (self-named) and state formations of Turkish-speaking peoples”17 (Nazarbayev, 1999a, p. 109). He traces the initial foundation of the Kazakh nation- and statehood further back in history, by claiming inheritance from the ancient Turkic and Mongol empires.

Even though these examples are drawn from sources from the early years of Kazakhstani nation building, the idea of modern Kazakhstan as the historical culmination of the Kazakh ethnic group’s strive for a nation-state has not become less important over time, and I would even suggest that this idea is one of the drivers for Kazakhstani demographic politics. In 2014 a handbook (spravochnik) accompanying the “Strategy Kazakhstan – 2050”, was published, with the aim of explaining the main terms and concepts of the Strategy to politicians and bureaucrats carrying out the policies. Among other terms, the term “Restoring historical justice”18 (Vosstanovlenie istoricheskoi spravedlivosti), which in the actual text of the strategy is limited to one sentence without further details, is in the handbook is deliberated at length. The restoration of historical justice is defined as “linked, first and foremost, to the restoration of Kazakh statehood”19, understood as the restoration of demographic majority of Kazakhs within the territory of Kazakhstan:

В результате лишений и тягот XX в., казахи оказались в меньшинстве на своей исконно исторической земле. (…) Однако независимость позволила восстановить историческую справедливость. Сегодня доля казахов в структуре населения составляет 63%. Это — около 11 млн. чел. из 17-миллионного населения. (Kasymbekov, 2014, pp. 287-288)

17 «[Образование] народностей со своим собственным этнонимом (самоназванием) и государственном оформлении тюркоязычных народов.»
18 There is quite a substantial difference between the original Russian text and the English translation available on akorda.kz on this point. The Russian text refers to restoration of historical injustice, while the English does not refer to any injustice: “Мы восстановили историческую справедливость по отношению к казахскому народу, нашей культуре и языку”(Nazarbayev, 2012b)/ “We have worked to restore our historic Kazakh culture and language after many years of decline” (Nazarbayev, 2012a).
19 «связано, в первую очередь, с восстановлением казахской государственности.»
Other restorations of historical justice mentioned in the handbook include the creation of a unique model of ethnic harmony among the people forcefully settled in Kazakhstan, the closing of the nuclear testing site, the rehabilitation and memorialization of victims of oppression, and the victims of the hunger of 1932-33. These are nevertheless devoted less space than the demographic injustice, and more space is consequently devoted to the politics of rehabilitation of Kazakhs living abroad, with the result that the Kazakhs now “play the role of the consolidating ethnic core on their historically intrinsic territory in the republic of Kazakhstan” (Kasymbekov, 2014, p. 290)

To sum up, both multinationalism and ethnic (Kazakh) perspectives on the national history of Kazakhstan have been present in Nazarbayev’s speeches in the whole period of independence. There is however a tendency to equate national history with the history of the Kazakh ethnic group. Both of these ideas, multinationalism and ethnic foundation for the nation, can be traced to Soviet traditions of thinking about nationalities, spurring the question of whether the new Kazakh official historiography is just a continuation of old patterns.

6.2.2 Kazakhstan – a modern or an ancient state?

It must be noted that history and historical explanations do not constitute a major part of most of Nazarbayev’s speeches, for the simple reason that most of them are future oriented, focused on Nazarbayev’s vision for the state of Kazakhstan and plans, reforms and programs for the future. Interestingly, this also has some implications for the frameworks of situating modern Kazakhstan in history. Within this narrative framework of the state there is a focus on delineating the history of Kazakhstan as beginning in 1991, thus encompassing only the years after gaining independence from the Soviet Union. For instance, in the Strategy “Kazakhstan – 2050” speech, Nazarbayev describes the progress Kazakhstan has made since independence, and at the same time defines independence as the starting point of the national history:

On December 16, 1991 we, the people of Kazakhstan, chose sovereignty, freedom and openness to the world as our founding principles. Today these values have become a part of our daily life. As we began our journey as a nation things were vastly different. Now thanks to our joint efforts we have transformed our country into a wholly different place. Today we are

20 «Казахи стали играть роль консолидирующего этнического ядра на своей исконной исторической территории в Республике Казахстан.»
a successful state with our own characteristics, perspectives and identity. We have paid a great price to achieve these milestones. For over 20 years our country has worked to strengthen its sovereignty and political influence - a goal which we have accomplished. The formation of our nation has been successfully completed. (Nazarbayev, 2012a)

Similarly, one of my informants told me that the history school curriculum in the prestigious Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools only teaches the history from 1991 as the national history of Kazakhstan. Students are apparently taught the different reform programs and economic and political developments since Kazakhstan became an independent country. Taraz Kuzio points out that Nazarbayev created a “new founding myth” when tracing the country’s struggle for independence back to the 1986 nationalist riots in Almaty in a speech at the fifth anniversary of independence (Kuzio, 2002, p. 258). This perspective on the formation of Kazakhstan as a nation-state is closely tied to the president, seeing him as a founding father and eternal leader of the Nation. Within this perspective, the history of Kazakhstan is essentially the history of Kazakhstan under Nazarbayev’s leadership.

Creating of a narrative of national history for Kazakhstan that only counts the years from gaining independence from the Soviet Union, seems to be one solution to the creation of a unifying national historical narrative that the Kazakhstani authorities has employed at some instances. However, it has not been given priority to such an extent to not be overshadowed by the emphasis on the ancient history of the Kazakhs. As the nation-state tradition of the modern world is often built upon claims of one nation having historical ties to a territory, it could prove more difficult to legitimize a state that only has existed for 27 years.

Perhaps because of that, there is on the other hand a tendency, as we have already seen described above, of tracing the history of Kazakhstan to the past, and often the very ancient past. I will not repeat what has already been described above, but note that before 2015 there did not seem to be consensus on exactly where the starting point of Kazakh state tradition should be placed. With the celebrations in 2015 it was defined as the Kazakh Khanate.

The state foundation story that is absent in Nazarbayev’s speeches, and pretty much elsewhere too, is the influence that the Russian empire and not the least the Soviet Union had on state formation of the Kazakh state. If we define a state as a territory with defined borders and political institutions, the formation of the Kazakh state should rather be placed somewhere within the early years of Soviet rule, when the borders of Central Asia were delineated by the
Soviet authorities, and institutions were set up. The need to take a stand against the Soviet historiography makes this narrative impossible within modern Kazakhstan history writing, which then needs to either look into the past, further back than the Soviet Union (and the Russian empire), or the recent history after the Soviet Union, for a foundation story for the state of Kazakhstan. Written already in 1995, Akiner’s observations still brilliantly sum up why the need to connect modern Kazakhstan with pre-modern Kazakh history is so important for the Kazakh state today:

To Kazaks (...) re-establishing a sense of continuity, in their own eyes as well as in the way in which they are perceived by others, is a matter of vital importance. Without this, they would be rootless, nothing other than the products of Soviet social and cultural engineering; by extension, they would have no historical legitimacy and thus no legitimate territorial or national claims. Far from being a romantic fantasy, their current preoccupation with the whole sweep of Kazakh history, projected back over some 2000 years, is therefore of very real political relevance, relating to immediate concerns regarding national and territorial survival (Akiner, 1995, p. 2).

6.2.3 The place of the Kazakh Khanate in official state discourse

The story of the Kazakh Khanate has not figured greatly in the official discourse on history, it was only mentioned once in the speeches I looked at for this analysis. We should not conclude too hastily that it was not important, as not many other historical events are mentioned either. In 1999, however, Nazarbayev devoted a third of his Annual speech to the People of Kazakhstan to history. Reflecting on the Millennium, Nazarbayev titles the first section of his speech “History and Independence”. He underlines the importance of remembering the experiences of the past, so that it will not repeat itself in the future: “To those who do not remember their past, it will return as their future”21 (Nazarbayev, 1999b). He narrates the history of Kazakhstan as a series of tragedies that the Kazakhs have survived because of their strong “national energy” (natsional’no energii). Among other events, like the Mongol invasion, the conflicts with the Dzungars, the Russian colonial period and the

21 «Кто не помнит своего прошлого, к тому оно возвращается в качестве его будущего.»
‘tragedy of totalitarianism’, the emergence of the Kazakh Khanate in the 15th Century is seen as part of a process of emerging national consciousness:

Возникновение в пятнадцатом веке первых казахских ханств это только последняя точка в осознании народом своего особого места в истории и пространстве. Великие Керей и Жанибек оформили это политически. Последние пять столетий национальной истории это история борьбы за свое жизненное пространство. (Nazarbayev, 1999b).

This is the only time in the speeches I have looked at that Kerei and Zhanibek figure as national heroes, and there is no direct reference to this being the first statehood of Kazakh people, as we see in later discourse around the celebrations of 2015. Actually, later on in the same part of the speech, Nazarbayev refers to the present Kazakhstan as the first time in the national history that they had the opportunity of establishing an independent state: “ In this difficult and dramatic decade we created what had been missing so long for hundreds of generations – an independent state”22 (Nazarbayev, 1999b). Thus, even though Nazarbayev here delivers a teleological view of the strive for national independence of the Kazakh people through history, the story of the Kazakh Khanate seems not play any special role within this path to independence in relation to other events in Kazakh historiography.

The Khanate has, nevertheless, existed as a story of the foundation of the state throughout the years of independent Kazakhstan. In 2010 a statue was inaugurated in Astana depicting the khans Kerei and Zhanibek23 (Akorda.kz, 2010). Furthermore, Shirin Akiner suggests that the interpretation of the Khanate as the birth of Kazakh statehood was promoted already in 1995 (Akiner, 1995, p. 62). Interestingly, she also suggests that the 540th Anniversary of the Khanate was celebrated in 1995. The observant reader will notice that the dates do not match with celebrating the 550th anniversary in 2015. When asking my informants about this, nobody remembered there being a celebration in 1995, suggesting that it cannot have carried much importance at that time. My conclusion would therefore be that the prominent position

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22 "За это тяжелое и драматичное десятилетие мы создали то, чего не хватало так долго сотням поколений - независимое государство”

23 One of my informants told me there was so much public debate and discontent about this statue, that it had to be placed in Astana instead of the planned placement in Almaty. The reasons for discontent were apparently that the statue was produced in China, that the faces of the two khans therefore did not resemble Kazakhs, and that the positioning of the khans was unfair, as one was standing and the other sitting, implying that they were not equal.
that the narrative of the Khanate as foundation or birth of the Kazakh statehood gained with the celebration in 2015 was unprecedented.

6.3 Managing a minefield of history

In Jonathan Friedman’s view, the way the past is interpreted and portrayed today reveals a lot about the present: “politics of identity consists in anchoring the present in a viable past. The past is (...) constructed according to the conditions and desires of those who produce historical texts in the present” (Friedman, 1992a, p. 207). Those who write historical texts in Kazakhstan are monitored and controlled by the government, much like how the media is controlled, and we can thus expect that the conditions and needs of the government is represented in the way history is written. This section explores some political considerations that can be read from how history politics is carried out by the Kazakhstani government.

6.3.1 Assessing trends and breaks in historical policy

It is difficult to identify a change, when the politics seem not to have been consistent over time. Aziz Burkhanov, one of my informants who has been following the identity politics of Kazakhstan over time, told me that in his view there has not been any consistent history policy in the entire post-1991 period. Dependent on the people in power, in the cabinet, in the ministry of education, who have had different visions, there has been constant fluctuations and no consistency in policies on identity, language or history. A case in point is the fact that Kazakhstan now is counting their fourteenth minister of education in the post-independence years, giving each an average tenure of less than two years. Although the ministry of education apparently has an exceptionally high turn-over of people, in Burkhanov’s view, this inconsistency can be seen across the board in most policy areas of Kazakhstan. The politics is to a larger degree based on tactical responses to immediate concerns, rather than consistent strategies over time.

Others of my informants detect more of a change happening. Kadyrzhanov identifies a turn to more nationalistic policies happening in 2012 with the introduction of the “Strategy Kazakhstan – 2050” document. The handbook explaining the terms of the strategy clearly describes a shift from multinationalism to a higher focus on Kazakhs as state-forming nation:
Если на этапе становления государства главной задачей была консолидация общества на основе межэтнической толерантности и общественного согласия, то на новом этапе развития страны стратегическим приоритетом становится достижение Национального Единства, основанного на признании общей для всех граждан системы ценностей и принципов. (...) Независимость и развитие государственности, созданной на исконной казахской земле, – наша главная ценность. В новых исторических условиях перед казахским народом, давшим свое гордое имя стране, стоит новая историческая миссия: стать консолидирующим центром объединения Нации. (Kasymbekov, 2014, pp. 234-235).

The annexation of Crimea happening shortly after this turn in Nazarbayev’s policies, however, required the nationalistic turn to be expressed in more cautious ways, according to Kadyrzhanov.

In a similar fashion, my informant Zhaksykyk Sabitov also detected changes happening in around 2013-14. According to Sabitov, for the first time the narrative portraying the Golden Horde as the ancestors of the Kazakhs was mentioned by a politician on government level as something that would be positive for the nation building of Kazakhstan, when the Secretary of State Marat Tazhin said this in a speech. Nazarbayev has often used this narrative more in the form of slogans in speeches, but according to Sabitov, in recent years there have been attempts to use it as an instrument in nation building.

Despite these apparent historical turns in policy, Kazakhstan’s historiographical politics seem in general rather to be characterized by what Diener calls “hegemonic historiography”, than a comprehensive strategy. Diener defines this as the “”mining” of history for symbolic events, groups, personas, and socio-political paradigms that can be promoted in the interests of a contemporary political agenda” (Diener, 2002, p. 632). Thus, what historical topics appear on the agenda is not consequent, but a matter of what political interest is there at the time. The result is a multitude of historical references, heroes and symbols, not necessarily making up one comprehensive story. One example is the many different stories relating to the where the Kazakhs, or the Kazakh state tradition, originates from, with both the Golden Horde, the White Horde (Ak Orda, used as the name for the presidential palace), and the Kazakh Khanate being references to as ancestral foundations for the modern Kazakhstani state. Another strategy employed by the state which supports Dieners view, is the tendency to tell history in a very individualized manner, through the stories of notable historical figures (Bezvikonnaia,
Thus, through the years of independence, there have been many years devoted to different historical characters, the 150th anniversary of Abai in 1995, the 100th anniversary of Zhambyl in 1996, the 100th anniversary of Mukhtar Auezov in 1997 etc. In this way, Bezvikonnaia argues, the attention has only been places on those figures, who’s lives can be interpreted “in the spirit of national ideology” (ibid., p. 497).

So, what guides the government in their selection of historiographic narratives? And why was it the Kazakh Khanate that ended up being the object of massive celebration?

### 6.3.2 Why the Kazakh Khanate?

There are many events in Kazakh history that could be used within nationalist historical narrative. Kazakhstan share many of these with other post-soviet countries, sharing both the history of becoming vassals of the Russian empire and enduring the hardships of the Soviet period. Kazakhstan however seems to have chosen a different path when it comes to which historical narratives have been used at the government level, and which have not. Why does older history seem to be more convenient to focus on than contemporary events? And why focus on the particular old historic event of the Kazakh Khanate? Some answers might be found by looking at what other events have been commemorated in Kazakhstan.

Evgeny Finkel (2010) argues that there is a tendency in post-communist countries to present their past sufferings as genocides. He goes as far as saying that “one of the main (…) aspects of historical policy is the concentration on victimhood and suffering” (Finkel, 2010, p. 54). Finkel includes Kazakhstan in the group of countries using “genocide rhetoric”, as this was allegedly a subject of high attention in the 1990s, with “historians, demographers and politicians […] debating the topic extensively” (Finkel, 2010, p. 56), and actively using the word “genocide” to describe the famine of 1930-33. I, however, have found, as mentioned above, that Nazarbayev has consequently used consolidating rhetoric when talking about the suffering of the Soviet period, emphasizing the shared suffering of all people of the Soviet Union, and strongly advising against assigning blame. Neither do I find the word “genocide” used about the event in the schoolbooks I have had access to, contrary to what Finkel writes is common (Aiagan & Shaimerdenova, 2013; Artykbaev, 2013). Kundakbayeva and Kassymova find the same in their study of the memorialization of Stalinist repressions in Kazakhstan; the government employs non-nationalistic rhetoric, not using the suffering of the Soviet period to portray the heroism of the Kazakh people or their struggle as a struggle for independence.
from the Soviet Union, but rather portraying the Stalinist history as a universal history by focusing on the idea that Kazakhs were not the only victims.

As historical cases of suffering, we can compare the famine of the 1930s with the suppression of the Central Asian revolts of 191624. The strategies of commemoration applied by the Kazakhstani government are, however, very different. While the suffering of the Soviet period fits into a de-ethnicised, unifying narrative, and is used as such, the events of 1916 were passed with little notice on government level at the centenary of the event in 2016 (Nurmukhanbetov, 2016). In neighboring Kyrgyzstan however, the events of 1916 has a very different position in national consciousness, officially announced a “genocide” (Eurasianet.org, 2016). The centenary was commemorated at the highest level, with a statement by President Almazbek Atambayev (Rickleton, 2017). Kyrgyzstan does however not share a border with Russia, and has not had the same experience of being a bi-ethnic country in the years after the breakup of the Soviet Union as Kazakhstan.

According to Finkel, too few studies have been done on why some states choose to portray their past suffering as genocides and why others do not, but he says in general, there are two patterns. Either a state focusses on a dominant historical myth of military strength, such as Russia does, which is not reconcilable with a narrative of powerless victimhood. Or they capitalize on recognizing their tragedies as genocides. Having a diaspora that promotes the search for a past genocide, and relations to the state or nation that perpetrated the genocide, also play a role. In Finkel’s logic, “the higher the level of external threat experiences or perceived by the state and the bigger the elites’ need for popular legitimacy, the more likely it is to capitalize on belonging to the second category” (Finkel, 2010, p. 57). Kazakhstan has however, experienced a high level of threat over time, especially towards its northern territories. Regardless of this, they have not sought recognition for their past sufferings as genocide. Even when this threat was perceived as increased after the Russian annexation of Crimea, Kazakhstan did not emphasize stories that could confront Russia on past

24 The revolts of 1916 against the Russian colonial regime, were sparked by a decree calling for Central Asians to join the Russian forces on the Eastern Front of World War 1. The rebellion spread from the areas of today’s Uzbekistan and Tajikistan to other parts of Central Asia, including Semirechie, which is today’s southern Kazakhstan and Northern Kyrgyzstan. The rebels targeted mainly Russian settlers, and the revolt ended up being brutally suppressed by Russian forces. The event has been interpreted in different ways, dependent on contemporary political priorities. In the early years of the Soviet Union, it was interpreted as proof of the “revolutionary consciousness” of Central Asian people, and later as a “class struggle”. In contemporary historiography it is often claimed as an example of an early “national-liberation” movement. (Morrison, 2016)
wrongdoings, which suggests that having good relations with the neighbor is still a priority for the Kazakhstani government.

My informants support this view, arguing that the relations to Russia play a great role in the choice of historical topics to build upon in nation building discourse. My informant Gulnara Dadabayeva told me that the government deliberately have not played the issues of the 1916 uprising, claiming it is too sensitive, considered anti-Russian and anti-colonial. In addition, she said, there were atrocities made from both sides, both the Russian and the Kazakh. The same she said could be said of the famine and collectivization period. The government seems reluctant to take up issues that might mean that they need to reconsider dark pages of Kazakh history too. For instance, Sovietization and collectivization of Central Asia is a contentious topic to bring up, as it might mean revealing the stories of local collaborators who benefited from and collaborated with the oppressors, some of whom might still be alive, or have relatives who are alive today.

Thus, the older history of the khans seem to be a safer choice for history politics for the Kazakhstani government than the more recent history, simply because those topics are less contentious for people of today, both within the country, and for relations with the big neighbor Russia. As Aziz Burkhanov said in my interview with him: “it is fairly safe to portray the Dzungars\(^{25}\) as an enemy, as they are not around anymore”. So even if there is a discernable new trend of moving away from multinational historical narratives, towards more focus on Kazakh historical narratives, the Kazakhstani government still seems to be wary of the reactions of Russia, and Russians within Kazakhstan. Thus, the focus is directed towards the safer parts of Kazakh history, the older history where there is less risk of provoking reactions from present day actors.

### 6.4 Concluding remarks

Overall, history has not played a major role in the official discourse on nation building in Kazakhstan, that rather has focused on mobilizing around narratives of future economic successes and international prestige. Among the historical topics that do occur, there are some detectable trends. The theme of common historical suffering is used consciously within the

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\(^{25}\) The Dzungars were a confederation of Turkic tribes from present day Western Chinese areas, that the Kazakh Khanate fought wars with in the 17th and 18th centuries.
fragile ethnic landscape of the country. At the same time, the history of the Kazakhs figures greatly within the legitimization discourse, to such an extent that it is possible to say that the national history of Kazakhstan in practice seems to be the history of the Kazakh ethnic group. Thus, we can see that the same dichotomy that is present in the national identity discourse in Kazakhstan, which at the same time defines Kazakhstan as a multi-ethnic society and as the nation-state of Kazakhs, is present also within the attempts to define a national history of Kazakhstan. If it is possible on these limited grounds to define an official history policy, it must be that contentious historical topics have been avoided where they can create conflict, and used cautiously where it has been possible to play out a unifying narrative.

So far, the regime seems to continue this balancing-act between the different discourses, but it has been pointed out that this might become a point of tension in the future, if the leadership for some reason should lose its ability to manage this delicate issue in a good way. As Sarsembayev states

“the official idea of civic nation-building based on the patriotism of all Kazakhstanis seems to be in conflict with the ongoing covert policy of ethnic nation-building based on the concept of Kazakhstan as an ‘ethnic centre’ of all Kazaks, as ‘the form of statehood of the self-determining Kazakh nation’. Thus, if Kazakistani patriotism and Kazak nationalism appear to be incompatible in contemporary Kazakhstan, it may create a potential source of conflict” (Sarsembayev, 1999, p. 330).

For this reason, not using historical narratives might be a conscious tactic by the regime, as it is difficult to build upon historical topics that might alienate important minority groups, or provoke reactions from important foreign partners. Whether this tactic has had success or has met criticism with the home audience will be explored in the next chapter.
7 Public response to history politics

Understanding the state’s motivation for history politics would be incomplete without looking at the public that is one of the main audiences for that policy. So far, we have looked at the state apparatus’ motivations for using history as a political tool. But how effective is this tool at changing the perceptions of the audience, the public? If the motivations for celebrating the 550th anniversary of the Kazakh statehood was primarily as a geopolitical positioning tool, what consequences might it have for the home public, which is very much divided along the question of what it means to be Kazakh(stani), and thereby also in their perception of the country’s history? To what extent does the Kazakhstani government narrate a history that meets the requirements of forging a unifying identity for its nation?

A substantive answer to all these questions would require a much more expansive research than what is possible within the framework of a master thesis, for instance by doing focus group interviews or conducting large-N surveys. However, since very little research has been done on the topic of public response to policies in Kazakhstan and since I have found some interesting public responses during my research, I will in this chapter outline some of the ways public response to the celebration of the 550th Anniversary of the Kazakh Khanate have been visible in internet media. Hopefully, this can inspire others to do further research on the topic of public response and effectiveness of identity and history politics. Surprisingly, this might also show that there might be more legroom for (critical) commentary of state policies than could be expected when considering that Kazakhstan is known to have a very limited media environment.

In this chapter I will concentrate on the question of what kind of response the case of history politics examined in this thesis has incited, and whether this response can tell us something about whether the government is in alignment with public moods or not. The analysis will be limited to response in online media in the timeframe 2014-2016 (from the announcement of the celebration, throughout the celebratory year, and also the following year to compare with celebrated or uncelebrated anniversaries in 2016).
7.1 Comments on the media landscape in Kazakhstan

The media landscape in Kazakhstan does not lend itself to widespread open discussion of state policies. With its continuing oppression of free media outlets and independent journalism, the Kazakhstani government keeps strict control on any public commentary and response to their policies. This makes it difficult to gauge the public response for instance to history politics. Kazakhstan consequently ends up among the most unfree countries on rankings of press freedom and freedom of the internet. In Freedom House’s Freedom of the Press Report of 2017, Kazakhstan gained a score of 85 out of 100 (where 100 is Least Free), making them rank as number 182 out of 201 countries covered by the report (Freedom House, 2017a). The government continues to shut down independent media outlets, using for instance a 2015 law against the spreading of false information to prosecute independent journalists (Kumenov, 2018). The news journal ratel.kz was for instance shut down in March 2018, during the research for this thesis, closing down one of the most interesting sources I had used in my research.

The situation for internet media is similarly controlled by the government. Freedom House gives Kazakhstan a score of 62 out of 100 in their Freedom on the Net 2017 Report, writing that social media and communication apps are regularly blocked or slowed down, especially during national celebrations, that dissidents are targeted by malware attacks likely orchestrated by the government and that activists trying to organize protests using social media have been imprisoned by authorities (Freedom House, 2017b). Regardless of this, social media is popular in Kazakhstan, with the most popular platforms being YouTube, Facebook, VKontakte and Twitter (StatCounter GlobalStats, 2018). Self-censorship is widespread, however, as people have been known to lose their job, be expelled from university, or even jailed for expressing their opinion online (Amnesty International, 2017).

In this environment, one cannot expect a wide array of critical opinions being voiced in media, neither online nor in print, social nor conventional.

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26 Interestingly, Facebook has for most of the time during the last decade been more popular than VKontakte in Kazakhstan, according to StatCounter’s data. This is remarkable as VKontakte traditionally is the platform preferred by the Russian-speaking world.
7.2 Public response in Kazakhstan to the celebration of the 550th Anniversary of the Kazakh Khanate

7.2.1 Critical coverage in traditional online news journals

The event did get a lot of media attention. Of course, a lot of this was generated by government-aligned media, and consisted of general reporting about events and happenings, including much coverage of the production of entertainment TV-series about the establishment of the Khanate. I will not go into the details of the government sponsored media coverage, but instead devote this section to the coverage in what is left of more independent media outlets, to see in what way criticism of the celebrations took place.

Although the coverage was overwhelmingly positive or neutral, as is the case with a lot of coverage of political events in Kazakhstani media, some of the more independent news outlets did provide platforms for a wider array of opinions on the celebration of the 550th Anniversary of the Khanate. As far as I can see, this often takes a specific form of interviews with academics and other commentators, and not as op-eds by the journals. In this way, the journals can get different views expressed, without risking being seen as being too critical themselves. For instance, Central Asia Monitor had a number of these articles, with titles such as “70-years Anniversary of the Victory and 550-years of the Kazakh Khanate: What Anniversary was more important?” (CAMonitor.kz, 2015) and “The celebration of the 550th Anniversary of the Kazakh Khanate: What was successful and what was not?” (Tatilia, 2015), where experts were asked about their opinions on these topics. These interviews, and similar interviews in other news outlets, give us a perspective on the range of opinions in academic and political circles that disagree with the state sponsored view of history or disagree with how resources are spent on history politics. For instance, one academic expressed wishes that more money was rather used on developing the historical sciences, than “on feasts”27, saying that he had not seen anything of the money promised to be allocated to historical research as part of the celebration (Mamashuly, 2015).

This critical angle on events was not unique to the Russian-language news outlets. A scandal surrounding the contest held to design the logo for the Anniversary celebration, which gained

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27 “на пиршества»
attention in different media, blogs included (Yvinews, 2015), was covered also by the Kazakh language news outlet Turkystan.kz (Matrekov, 2015). The contest was purportedly won by a top official with links to the organization that commissioned the logo, and organized with only a week to prepare submissions, leading blogger Bakhytzhan Bukharbay, who also submitted designs, to claim that the winner was already decided before the contest was announced (Bukharbay, 2015).

Going into the year following the Khanate celebrations, many commentators questioned the importance given to the Anniversary of the Khanate in relation to other historical anniversaries. For instance, the question arose why the 150th anniversary of the birth of Alikhan Bukeikhanov, one of the founding fathers of the Alash Orda independence movement, was not celebrated, when “the 550th anniversary of the Khanate was allocated 23 billion tenge” (Akkuly, 2016). The lack of attention on government level given to the 100th anniversary of the 1916 uprising also did not go unnoticed. Experts interviewed by Central Asia Monitor said that more should have been done to commemorate this event, but that it is highly politicized and might therefore have been avoided (Nurmukhanbetov, 2016). One commented however about the risks that “while we are avoiding the tragedies of 1916 and 1932-33, our people will be doomed to mass historical ignorance, the domination of myths, complexes and prejudice” (ibid.).

Speaking on the same topic, Kazakh historian Radik Temirgaliev commented that when looking at historical commemorations through the lens of state ideology, it should not come as a surprise that the 550th Anniversary of the Kazakh Khanate was prioritized over the 100th anniversary of the 1916 uprising. Temirgaliev explained that since the consolidation of society is a major task of the state, it will tend to focus on historical events that can unite the people. The 550th Anniversary “emphasizes historical continuity, strengthens patriotism, and at the same time does not cause any sharp discussions, speculation etc.”30, while, although it is necessary to remember events like 1916 in order for them never to happen again, it is not necessary to “raise them to the national level, since it does not meet the national interest. The

28 “на 550-летие Казахского ханства было выделено 23 миллиарда тенге”
29 “Пока мы так и будем избегать обсуждения трагедий 1916 и 1932-33 годов, наш народ будет обречен на массовое историческое невежество, гос-подство мифов, комплексов и предубеждений”
30 “подчеркивает историческую преемственность, укрепляет патриотизм, и в то же время не вызывает каких-то острых дискуссий, спекуляций и т.п.”
heterogeneous domestic audience, foreign policy interests and the difficult economic crisis needs to be taken into account”31 (Tulindinova, 2016).

The questioning of the government’s prioritization of historical events was also present within the Kazakh language press32. The fact that the government could not find enough funds to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Alikhan Bukeikhan, with the prime minister stating that “in connection with the difficult financial and economic situation and budget cuts in 2016, funds for jubilee events have not been allocated” (Matrekov, 2016), led the Kazakh language outlet Qamshy.kz to question whether the government was overlooking the importance of the independence movement figures from 1917 in the foundation of modern Kazakhstan: “It seems that our government wants to build the “Mangilik El”33 with history from after 199134” (Matrekov, 2016).

### 7.2.2 In comments sections

Commentary fields in articles are a good place to look at public engagements on topics, and shows that the celebration of the 550th Anniversary did provoke quite some interest among the readership. The Radio Azattyk (RFE/RL’s service covering Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan) article from October 2014, which stated that Nazarbayev with his announcement of the 550th Anniversary contradicted his previous statements about the roots of Kazakh statehood (Mamashuly, 2014) was “the most commented on article on the Azattyk website”(Radio Azattyk, 2014). Interestingly, several people reported that the article was not possible to access in several areas of Kazakhstan just a week after it was published (ibid.). The comments on the article are prime examples of the diverse opinions regarding the interpretation of Kazakh history as exemplified in the 2015 celebrations. Some commentators ridicule the president:

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31 “но поднимать широкую волну на национальном уровне смысла нет, поскольку это не отвечает государственным интересам. Есть неоднородная внутренняя аудитория, есть интересы внешней политики, есть сложнейший экономический кризис и все это надо учитывать.”
32 As per 365info.kz’s articles “Overview of the Kazakh press” (“Обзоры казахской прессы”) translating Kazakh press into Russian.
33 An explanation of the concept is given in Chapter 5.
34 “Создается впечатление, что наше правительство хочет создать «Мәңгілік ел» с историей после 1991 года.”
...Завтра Путин переиначит эти слова елбаса и выдаст что раз не было границ у Казахстана то и значит не будем признавать Северный и Восточный Казахстан под властью Астаны. И что тогда будет в ответ кукарекать елбас? Во истину, трудно стране у которой правитель безграмотный и самовлюбленный маразматик. (Mamashuly, 2014)

Some comments were made in his defence:

Назарбаев имел ввиду, что у нас не было государственности в современном понятие. и все вы это прекрасно понимаете. 550 лет - это великая дата и такой праздник даст возможность нынешней молодежи узнать нашу историю, ценить и понимать ее (ibid.)

And many comments were part of a heated debate over interpretations of history:

В современном понятие не было государственности ни у кого. Ни у одного народа. Зачем же говорить заведомую глупость? (ibid.)

Although it is hard to evaluate the truthfulness of online commentators, especially when they can comment anonymously, the number and scope of comments on Azattyk's article shows that there exists voices both critical and positive to Kazakhstani government policies, and that these voices engage in debate online.

7.2.3 In blogs

In the blogosphere, a similar situation can be described. The Anniversary spurred a lot of activity, for instance on some of the main blogging networks yvision.kz and gonzo.kz. After the announcement of the celebration, more than 100 blog entries were published on yvision.kz on the topic of the Kazakh Khanate, compared to only a few dozen on the topic before 2014. The readership of these blog posts reach from a few hundred views to several thousands. Most of these blog entries are either about events linked to the celebrations or bloggers recounting interpretations of the historical events, but some direct debate between bloggers on interpretation of the historical events also happened in addition to some bloggers writing more critical commentaries.

35 Quite interestingly it seems that mostly the critical voices (at least in the comment section of this article), have taken to use the name “Elbasy” for President Nazarbayev, perhaps as a means of ridicule. This name, which is Kazakh for “Leader of the Nation”, was given to Nazarbayev in 2010, but never really gained widespread use (Laruelle, 2015b, p. 14).
Some bloggers polemicized against each other over the historical foundations of the celebration, questioning amongst other details the dating of the event: “Nine dates when the Kazakh Khanate could have been formed”36 (Bibitalin, 2015b) and the interpretation of historical sources: “Fiction of the Kazakh Khanate. What are we actually celebrating?”37 (Shpak, 2015a) and “Shpak’s “fiction” or how not to write history”38 (Bibitalin, 2015a). These are just some examples of private individuals (possibly hobby historians) engaging in debate over the history of the Kazakh Khanate.

Several blogs can be read on a more political level, questioning the intention of the government in celebrating the Anniversary by pointing to the lack of quality or the integrity of government initiatives. In addition to the scandal about the logo of the anniversary mentioned above, other bloggers commented on the poor quality of the historical attractions connected to the Khanate. One blogger posted pictures of a museum devoted to the history of the khanate falling apart only months after being opened (Shpak, 2015b), and another complained about the lack of a longer term plan for development of the historical sites. The blogger argued that they have not been made accessible and interesting for Kazakhstanis who want to learn more about history (Lepsibaev, 2016). Of the more interesting political statements is a poem written by a blogger about the excessive use of money on the celebration, titled “No need for bread, only circus”39.

Говорят, что кризис в мире?
В экономике разлад?
Мы, казахи, смотрим шире –
Лишний повод для затрат!

Нам учёные сказали:
«Наши предки – молодцы!
Государство основали
Очень вовремя отцы».

Сомневался странный Путин,
Древность нашу не признал..
С прошлым мы своим не шутим
И устроим.. карнавал!

36 “Девять дат, когда могло образоваться Казахское ханство”
37 “Белые нитки Казахского ханства. Что мы празднуем на самом деле?”
38 “Белые нитки” по-шпаковски или как не нужно писать об истории”
39 “Не надо хлеба – только зрелищ”
На истории великой
Экономить – моветон!
Были мы не степью дикой,
Pуст запомнит крепко он.

Юбилей – очень редко,
Так что празднуем с душой.
Чтоб почтить заслуги предков
Скинемся мы всей страной.

Миллиарды, миллионы..
Пуст завидует весь мир!
Не хотите пантеоны?
Мы тогда закатим пир.

Правило у нас простое:
«В деле главное размах!» –
Как в любом казахском тое
Мы должны услышать: «Ах!!!»

Говорят нам критиканы:
«Можно праздник поскромней..»
Но обидятся султаны –
Жанибек наш и Керей!

Ханству сотни лет, ребята!
Пуст услышат москали!!!
Если бы не эта дата,
Мы другую бы нашли..

Был сатирик в древнем Риме,
«Хлеба, зрелищ» написал;
Современник на Ишиме40
Только «зрелищ» прочитал.. (Dzhamayev, 2015b)

7.2.4 In social media

Social media is a difficult subject for academic study, as there is an enormous amount of content online, and it is very difficult to search and navigate. The content available to you as a user is often controlled by algorithms, platforms such as Facebook and Twitter are not easy to search neither by content nor specific time frames, and profiles may be unavailable unless you

40 Ishim is the name of the river that runs through the capital of Kazakhstan, Astana. The presidential palace Akorda lies on the left bank of the river.
are “friends” or “followers” or part of groups. Because of this, I am confident that there is a lot more information out there that I could not access, but that was available for users who were “inside” the relevant forums at the time. One reason why I can state this is on the basis of comments I have seen in the blogging community in Kazakhstan that were commenting on the event in 2015, pointing to the fact that “social media is boiling over with discussion on this topic” (Dzhamaev, 2015a).

Despite these limitations, I have found enough examples to point to a tendency that social media, and especially memes, were used around the time of the 2015 celebrations as a means to criticize and delegitimize state policies and actors by making fun of them. Internet memes can be defined as “groups of items sharing common characteristics of content, form and/or stance, which were created, transformed, and circulated by many participants through digital participatory platforms” (Gal, Shifman, & Kampf, 2016, p. 1700). Ross and Rivers (2017, p. 1) describe internet memes as a “form of participatory culture that can offer certain demographics an opportunity for political expression, engagement and participation which otherwise might not have been accessible”. As Ross and Rivers show in their study of the 2016 Presidential Election in the US, memes in a political context are often used as delegitimization tools, by mocking, criticizing and negatively portraying the subject of the meme. Memes often have a simple form, building on common reference frames for the social networks they are communicated within, and often use humorous takes on serious subjects, thereby encouraging consumers to share them with friends and other community members. Furthermore, an important aspect of the spread of memes as political statements is the anonymity surrounding their creation and distribution. This might make them a more accessible way of expressing political opinions in closed and controlled media environments such as Kazakhstan, than social media platforms that require individual users to be named.

The following examples of memes referencing the celebrations in 2015 can be seen as examples of the use of humour and irony to comment on political events.

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41 “Соцсети бурлят в обсуждении темы”.

80
Figure 6 is an example of a widely used meme, adapted to comment on the 550th anniversary of the Kazakh Khanate. The original image is a screenshot from the film Iron Man, showing the character Tony Stark (played by Robert Downey Jr) at the height of his success. This seems to be a very popular meme in the Russian-speaking internet environment (Risovatch.ru), and has here been edited to include the head of a Kazakh khan. The meme as a result gives off the air of someone being very satisfied with themselves, perhaps with an ironic twist.

The meme in Figure 7 makes fun of the 550th anniversary celebration of the Khanate, with a joke about the dollar currency being linked to the number of years that is celebrated.

Figure 8 comments on the vast use of money on the celebration. The image is taken from a Lord of the Rings film where the character Aragorn goes to the underworld to summon the spirits of old kings. The text is Kazakh for “Where is the banquet?”, and I interpret this as...
suggesting that the celebration was so lavish to tempt even the old khans and batyrs to stand up from their graves to join in the festivities.

The fourth example, Figure 9, does not directly reference the 550th Anniversary celebrations, but it does use references to Kazakh history as a means to discredit the current leadership in the country. It compares president Nazarbayev (who has been given the title “Leader of the Nation”), to historical leaders of Kazakhs or Kazakhstan, ranging from old khans to the leaders of the independence movement Alash Orda, to Dinmukhamed Kunaev, the leader of the Communist Party of the Kazakh SSR from 1964-1986. These figures are surrounded by the slogan “Real leaders of the Nation”, indirectly saying that Nazarbayev does not deserve his title.
These are just a few examples of meme responses in social media to the 2015 celebrations. One limitation in analyzing memes as political commentary is that it is very difficult to measure the scope and reach of these memes. How many people have shared them, or stand behind their message? In the first three examples, I have found the images reshared in blog posts and therefore outside of their original shared environment, but the fourth meme I located in a nationalist oriented Facebook group called the “Kazakh Horde”. The group, though less active today, was very active in the years 2012-2016. At the time of writing, the group has just above 31 000 members, and the specific image that I refer to has 244 “likes” and 173 “shares”.

I cannot conclude anything about the extent to which these kinds of ridiculing memes are common or widespread in Kazakhstani internet community, but as we see from the examples, the phenomenon of political satire through modern communication means, such as memes, does exist in Kazakhstan, and was used in 2015 in response to the history politics of the Kazakhstani government.

7.2.5 What does this tell us?

The Anniversary generated engagement, both in conventional media, and in social media. While criticism of the government policies is very uncommon, many people engage in debates and discussions over historical topics, how to interpret the events and what the meaning of the events are. In this way, one can say that the history policies of the Kazakhstani government did generate a surge in interest for the history of Kazakhstan, and a sense of pride in the history of the country. The acts of public engagement I have looked at are dominated by people with Kazakh-sounding names, which might suggest that this event did speak more to the ethnic Kazakh part of the population.

Critical voices are few, but they do exist, both in conventional media and in social media. I have only looked at the open social media world, but the amount if information out there is so enormous and difficult to get an overview over, that what I have seen might only be a drop in the ocean. And there might also exist debates in forums I have not have had access to, either because of my lack of integration into the Kazakh media world, or because they might be closed forums.
It is noteworthy that not many commentators, be they academic experts or common individuals, seem to question the interpretation of the Khanate as a “state”. They might disagree with the form of the celebration or the interpretation of historical sources, but most agree that the statehood of modern Kazakhstan can be traced back to the Kazakh Khanate. This is also a view shared by many of the people I interviewed during my field work. The argument seems to be that it was not a state in “the modern sense”, but that it was consolidated enough territorially and politically to be called a state. Some would draw the lineages of statehood to entities even further back in history however. Therefore, one can say that the Kazakhstani government has been relatively successful in pushing the narrative of the Kazakh Khanate as the statehood origin of modern Kazakhstan.

On the other hand, criticism of the government policies point to the superficiality of the celebration, the lack of quality initiatives, the corruption of officials, and on a different level – the down-prioritization or avoidance of other important historical commemorations. As of my research, this kind of criticism is still quite limited, but if they reach a greater part of the population, they might undermine the trust in and the integrity of the government.

The limitation to studying media and social media engagement is that you only see the people that are engaged, and not the people that are not reached or moved by the subject. In addition, you have no way of knowing the opinions of those who are not even part of the social networks. According to my interviewees, the celebration of 2015 only reached a fraction of the population of Kazakhstan. We should therefore handle the findings of this chapter with care.
8 Conclusion

This thesis has been concerned with the use of history by elites who, by promoting certain historical narratives or legitimate policies with historical arguments, try to reach certain political goals. By looking at the history policy of the government of Kazakhstan on the history of Kazakhstani statehood, I have tried to shed light on the political priorities within their nation building project. The research questions guiding the analysis has been what factors motivates this historical policy, by what means it is carried out and whether it is effective. By looking at a case of historical politics in practice, the celebration of the 550th Anniversary of the establishment of the Kazakh Khanate, I have been able to trace both immediate and long term factors influencing history politics, and the way that the Kazakhstani state went about promoting a reinterpretation of history through a nationwide large scale celebration and other means.

The celebration of the 550th Anniversary of the Kazakh Khanate must be seen as a geopolitically motivated example of symbolic politics, where the aim was to reclaim the power of definition over the country’s history and assert that Kazakhstan has a statehood tradition stemming from long before the Soviet era. Seemingly offended by Russian President Putin’s remarks about Kazakhstan never having been an independent state before Nazarbayev’s time, the Kazakhstani regime set about to change this conception. As such, this example of history politics has implications for how we understand the process of building national identity. Few theories of national identity mention geopolitics as a contributing factor, and although they often emphasise categories of “us” and “them” in building identity, this is often understood in more abstract terms, and less as practical politics. The celebration of the Kazakh Khanate in Kazakhstan in 2015 was however, an example of geopolitical symbolic politics, thus suggesting that efforts that look like nation building may actually be geopolitically motivated political actions.

Nevertheless, it would be wrong to conclude that the anniversary was only a reply to Russian President Putin’s offhand remarks about Kazakhstan not having a history of statehood. The scale of the celebration and how it was incorporated into a wide array of society, academic institutions, museums, arts and popular culture, suggests that the promotion of the narrative of 550 years of state tradition in Kazakhstan was beneficial to the government in more ways than just as a tactical reply to the outside world. It also suited their nation building project, building
pride in the history of the Kazakhs and legitimacy for today’s regime, building upon a 550 year long history. This narrative however, appealed almost exclusively to ethnic Kazakhs, and may be seen in context with “kazakhifying” trends in Kazakhstani nation building, which builds upon the idea that Kazakhstan is the nation state for ethnic Kazakhs. This contrasts heavily with the “multinational” rhetoric that characterizes much of Kazakhstani official discourse.

The Kazakhstani government has for many years carried out parallel policies relating to ethnic and civic nationhood, performing a balancing act between the two as a means to preserve the stability between the ethnic groups of the country. This thesis suggests that within history policy the same balancing act has been carried out. The general principles guiding the principles for history policy seems to have been to emphasise only those historical narratives that can consolidate the population and not provoke tension or controversy towards groups within the country, or neighbouring countries, with Russia especially important in this regard. With the celebration of the 550th Anniversary of the Kazakh Khanate on the other hand, special attention was given to the Kazakh history of modern Kazakhstan, underlining the ethnic component as the foundation of the history of modern Kazakhstan. Nevertheless, the potential for more nationalist history policies exist, as the regime could have emphasised the rebellions toward the Russian empire, the independence movements around the time of the Russian revolution or portraying the famine of the 1930s as a “Kazakh Holodomor”. With the story of the establishment of the Kazakh Khanate, it can be argued that the government chose a safer historical narrative, that did not have the potential of provoking Russian reaction. As such, the trend of a careful and balanced history policy continues.

Another paradox apparent in the history politics of the Kazakh Khanate is the contrast between the ancient and modern conceptions of Kazakhstan as a state. The Anniversary of the establishment of the Kazakh Khanate not only celebrated the Khanate as the historical roots of modern Kazakhstan, but as the first state of the Kazakh people, with direct legacies to today’s Kazakhstan. This placement of the state formation of Kazakhstan in ancient times directly undermines the narrative whereby President Nazarbayev is seen as the creator and guarantor of the modern state of Kazakhstan. However, through the use of imagery and symbolism connected to the anniversary celebrations, Nazarbayev was actually framed within a historical continuity together with the old state builders. In this way, the celebration can be seen as a
way to build the legacy of Nazarbayev, and place him as a historical state builder on the same level as the khans of old.

This thesis has also sought to contribute to the theory within the field of history politics, by exploring what I have called the toolbox of history politics, especially within authoritarian regimes. History politics does not confine itself to educational policies, the building of monuments or commemoration of historical dates, but spans almost all fields where government and society meet. In an authoritarian regime such as Kazakhstan, where the government holds power and influence over so many parts of society, the playing field for history politics is broad. It may be especially difficult for academia, the free media and cultural institutions to challenge official policy, dependent upon government support as they are. As such, governments wanting to promote certain interpretations of history meet less criticism and open discussion than what would be the case within democratic regimes. In this thesis, I have looked at both the more traditional ways of carrying out history policy, but also the use of popular media, both in the promotion of certain stories through films and TV-series, but also in how the independent and social media world is controlled and the official views being left unchallenged. Nevertheless, I did find voices critical of the history policy carried out by the Kazakhstani government, but these were confined to alternative websites and social media.

I focused my thesis on one case of history politics, a mass celebration happening in Kazakhstan in 2015. Although there were reasons for choosing only one case, such as the space and time available in a master research project, this is of course a limitation for the ability to generalise from this case to a larger setting. As Kazakhstan is known to carry out parallel and sometimes contradictory nation building policies, this might also be the case within history policy. Different historical events might bring about different historical policy, and as such further research is needed to be able to conclude comprehensively about the general history policy of Kazakhstan. There are several interesting historical anniversaries that would lend themselves to this kind of research in the next years, as it is 100 years since the first years of the Soviet regime, a very turbulent period for Kazakhstan. It will be interesting to see how the Kazakhstani government choose to commemorate, or not to commemorate, the Alash Orda Autonomy, the establishment of the Kazakh ASSR, national-communism, the famine and Stalinist repressions. Further research should also include more comprehensive studies of the Kazakh language media world, and how the nation building
policies of the Kazakhstani government might be communicated differently to Russian- and Kazakh-speaking audiences.

In addition, my study also confines itself to the study of history politics in one country. In my opinion, history politics is only becoming more interesting and important with the rise of right wing populist movements across the world and with the popularity of “fake news” and “alternative facts”. As these trends challenge the conceptions of history as a science and open for more politicized use of history, the study of history politics should only become more relevant in the future. I hope my thesis can inspire more comparative studies of the use of history in the post-Soviet space, or across countries facing similar political challenges, understanding the methods used to promote reinterpretations, or outright falsifications of history, and why actors chose to do so.
## Appendices

### 9.1 List of interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title/Organisation</th>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alexander Morrison</td>
<td>Fellow and Tutor in History, New College, Oxford University</td>
<td>Astana</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Svetlana Kovalskaya</td>
<td>Professor, Department of History of Kazakhstan, Eurasian National University</td>
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<td>Zhaksylyk Sabitov</td>
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<td>Timur Shaimergenov</td>
<td>Nazarbayev Centre, Library of the First President of Kazakhstan</td>
<td>Astana</td>
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<td>Assistant Professor, Graduate School of Public Policy, Nazarbayev University</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Anonymized employee</em></td>
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<td>Gabriel McGuire</td>
<td>Assistant Professor, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Nazarbayev University</td>
<td>Astana</td>
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<td>Gulmira Sultangalieva</td>
<td>Professor, Department of History of Kazakhstan, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University</td>
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<td>Dina Sharipova</td>
<td>Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, KIMEP</td>
<td>Almaty</td>
<td>10.11.17</td>
</tr>
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</table>
### 9.2 Interview Guides

**Interview guide 1 (for historians and political scientists)**

**Intro**

I am a student at the University of Oslo and my research concerns the role of history in the formation of national identity in Kazakhstan. Thank you so much for your willingness to talk with me about the topic of my research.

Is it okay for you that I use a recorder?

Also, is it okay for you to be cited in my written work, or do you prefer to be anonymized?

Do you have any questions before we start the interview?

**About the interviewee**

What is your name, and your position at your place of work?

Tell me a little bit about yourself – some words about you work so far, what have been the main topics of your academic research?

How do you find working within your field in Kazakhstan?

**History writing in Kazakhstan**
In your view, what is the main aim of history writing in Kazakhstan today?

Are there productive debates on the interpretations of Kazakhstan history within academia?

Could you tell me a bit about these debates? What are the most heated debates at the moment and who engages in them?

How is the cooperation between the academic world and the government?

   In your experience, does the government and the academia have different aims when it comes to history writing in Kazakhstan today?

   Would you say there are certain topics or interpretations of topics within history research that are politically controversial?

**About the celebration of the 550-years of the creation of the first Kazakh khanate**

I am particularly interested in the celebrations that took place in 2015 to mark the 550-years anniversary of the creation of the Kazakh khanate 550 years ago.

Can you tell me your interpretation of this historical period of time?

Russian president Putin has commented that Kazakhstan does not have a state tradition. What is your comment to that?

The Kazakhstani government calls the creation of the first Kazakh khanate the birth of the Kazakh state. In your view, what is the link between present day Kazakhstan as a state and this historical happening?

Do you think the state’s interpretations of this event have changed over time?

Do you know what sources the state view of this historical event is built upon?

   Do you think there are other reasons than historical, that the government chose to celebrate these events in 2015?

   Did you experience any reactions in society to these events?

**History politics in Kazakhstan**

Seen as a whole, do you see any tendencies or trends in the development of the state’s view of history during the 26 years of independence in Kazakhstan?

In your opinion, what are the motivations behind the historical narratives of the Kazakh government today?

We’ve talked a bit about nation-wide celebrations. Can you tell me a little about what other methods the state uses to spread the official view of history in Kazakhstan? // Can you tell me a little about what other methods the state uses to spread knowledge about the history of Kazakhstan?
In your experience, how does the population of Kazakhstan relate to the current narratives of state history? The state has, for instance, supported the development of several historical documentaries and tv-series – what are your impressions of how they are received by the public?

Can you see any difference within the different ethnic groups of how they respond to the state’s projects on national history?

End

Do you have any further comments or questions?

Thank you so much for taking your time to talk with me!

Russian version:

Введение

Я студент Университета Осло и пишу магистерскую работу о роли истории в формировании идентичности в Казахстане. В связи с этим я хотела бы взять у Вас интервью. Спасибо Вам за то, что Вы согласились встретиться со мной.

Вы не против, что я воспользуюсь диктофоном?

Можно я буду использовать ваше имя и фамилию в работе магистра? Или Вы предпочитаете быть анонимным/-ой?

У Вас есть вопросы на данный момент, прежде, чем мы начали?

Начинаю с нескольких вопросов о вас:

Как вас зовут? Кем Вы работаете?

Расскажите, пожалуйста, немного о себе: несколько слов о Вашей академической работе до сих пор, и о темах Ваших исследований.

Как Вам работа в научном сообществе в Казахстане?

Историческая наука в Казахстане

Какова, с Вашей точки зрения, самая важная цель казахстанской исторической науки сегодня?

Существуют ли в Казахстане свободные и продуктивные дискуссии между учёными по вопросам трактовки исторических тем?

Расскажите мне, пожалуйста, немного об этих обсуждениях? Какие темы самые горячие? И кто участвует в этих дискуссиях?
Каково сотрудничество между академическим сообществом и государством?

По вашему опыту, у государства и у академического сообщества разные цели, связанные с толкованием истории Казахстана?

Существуют ли темы или толкования в историческом исследовании, которые кажутся спорными или противоречивыми на политическом уровне?

Празднование 550-летия Казахского ханства
Меня особенно интересует празднование 550-летия Казахского ханства в 2015 г.
Можете рассказать мне о Вашей интерпретации этих исторических событий?

Президент России Владимир Путин заявил, что «у казахов не было государственности» - что Вы думаете об этом?

Государство признаёт эту дату рождением казахстанской государственности. Какая, с вашей точки зрения, связь существует между нынешним Казахстанским государством и исторической государственностью?

Как Вы думаете, менялось ли в различные времена толкование государством этих исторических событий?

Знаете ли Вы, на основании каких источников государство строит свои толкования?

Думаете ли Вы, что есть другие причины, чем исторические, что государство праздновало эти события именно в 2015, и так масштабно?

Можете ли Вы рассказать о реакции общества на празднование?

Историческая политика в Казахстане
В общем, видите ли Вы определенные тенденции или развития во взгляде государства на историю в течение 26 лет независимости Казахстана?
С Вашей точки зрения, какова мотивация государства в его исторических повествованиях?

Мы немного говорили о национальных празднованиях. Н могли бы вы рассказать о том, как государство другими методами распределяет официальные взгляды на историю? // - знание об истории?

Как относится население Казахстана к повествованием государства об истории? Например, государство поддержало производство исторических документальных и развлекательных сериалов – как приняли их в обществе?
Существуют ли различия между этническими группами в том, как они реагируют на проекты государства о национальной истории?
Interview guide 2 (for government officials)

I am a research assistant for a project at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, and my research concerns the national history of Kazakhstan, and in particular the celebration of the 550-years anniversary of the establishment of the Kazakh Khanate that happened in 2015. Thank you so much for your willingness to talk with me about the topic of my research.

Is it okay for you that I use a recorder?

Also, is it okay for you to be cited in my written work, or do you prefer to be anonymized?

Do you have any questions before we start the interview?

About the interviewee

What is your name, and your position at your place of work?

Could you tell me about [insert institution], what work does it do, what are its aims?

The celebrations on 2015

How was your institution engaged in the celebrations in 2015 of the 550-years anniversary of the establishment of the Kazakh Khanate?

What events did your institution organise?

Can you tell me something about other events that took place around the country during the year?

What were the motivations behind the celebration?

How was the response from the participants at the events?

In your opinion, why is it important to celebrate historical events like this?

How would you describe the importance of the establishment of the Kazakh Khanate in the history of Kazakhstan?

Why, in your view, is history important for Kazakhstan today?

End
Do you have any further comments or questions?
Thank you so much for taking your time to talk with me!

Russian version:

Введение
Я научный ассистент в Норвежском Институте Международных Отношений и работаю над исследовательским проектом о роли истории в формирование казахстанской национальной идентичности. Меня особенно интересует национальная история Казахстана и празднование 550-летия Казахского ханства в 2015 г. В связи с этим я хотела бы взять у Вас интервью. Спасибо Вам за то, что Вы согласились встретиться со мной.

Вы не против, что я воспользуюсь диктофоном?
Можно я буду использовать ваше имя и фамилию в работе магистра? Или Вы предпочитаете быть анонимным/-ой?
У Вас есть вопросы прежде, чем мы начнём?

Начинаю с нескольких вопросов о вас:
Как вас зовут? Кем Вы работаете?
Расскажите, пожалуйста, немного о [институте/организации], чем он/она/оно занимается, какие цели у организации?

Празднование 550-летия Казахского ханства
Какой вклад привнесла Ваша организация в празднование 550-летия Казахского Ханства?
Какие мероприятия организовала Ваш организация?
Можете рассказать о других мероприятиях и торжественных церемониях в других местах в стране в течение праздничного года?
Какие мотивации были в основе праздника?
Как реагировали участники событий?
На Ваш взгляд, почему важно праздновать такие исторические события?
Насколько важно основание казахского ханства в истории Казахстана?
9.3 **Empirical material for the qualitative content analysis**

Presidential Speeches to the People of Kazakhstan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Language</th>
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<td>1997</td>
<td>Oct 10</td>
<td>Prosperity, Security and ever growing welfare of all the Kazakhstanis</td>
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<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Sept 30</td>
<td>On the Situation in the Country and major Directions of Domestic and Foreign Policy: Democratization, Economic and Political Reform for the New Century</td>
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<td>Akorda.kz</td>
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<td>1999</td>
<td>Sept 16</td>
<td>СТАБИЛЬНОСТЬ И БЕЗОПАСНОСТЬ СТРАНЫ В НОВОМ СТОЛЕТИИ</td>
<td>Russian</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Oct 24</td>
<td>Towards Free, Effective and Secure Society</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Akorda.kz</td>
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<td>2001</td>
<td>Sept 3</td>
<td>On the Situation in the Country and Main Directions of Domestic and Foreign Policy for 2002</td>
<td>English</td>
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<td>2002</td>
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<td>ОБ ОСНОВНЫХ НАПРАВЛЕНИЯХ ВНУТРЕННЕЙ И ВНЕШНЕЙ ПОЛИТИКИ НА 2003 ГОД</td>
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<td>2005</td>
<td>Feb 16</td>
<td>Kazakhstan on the Road to Accelerated Economic, Social and Political Modernization.”</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Akorda.kz</td>
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<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>March 1</td>
<td>Kazakhstan’s strategy of joining the world’s 50 most competitive countries. Kazakhstan is on the threshold of a major breakthrough in its development</td>
<td>English</td>
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<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Feb 28</td>
<td>Новый Казахстан в новом мире</td>
<td>Mainly Russian, parts in Kazakh</td>
<td>Akorda.kz</td>
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<td>2008</td>
<td>Feb 16</td>
<td>Growth of Welfare of Kazakhstan’s Citizens is the Primary Goal of State Policy</td>
<td>English</td>
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<td>2009</td>
<td>March 6</td>
<td>Через кризис к обновлению и развитию</td>
<td>Mainly Russian, parts in Kazakh</td>
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<td>2010</td>
<td>Jan 29</td>
<td>Новое десятилетие – Новый экономический подъем – Новые возможности Казахстана</td>
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<td>Socio-Economic Modernization as Main Vector of Development of Kazakhstan</td>
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<td>2014</td>
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<td>Kazakhstan’s way – 2050: common aim, common interests, common future</td>
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<td>Nyrly Zhol – The Path to the Future</td>
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<td>2017</td>
<td>Jan 31</td>
<td>Third Modernization of Kazakhstan: Global Competitiveness</td>
<td>English</td>
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<td>2018</td>
<td>Jan 10</td>
<td>New opportunities under the Fourth Industrial Revolution</td>
<td>English</td>
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**Speeches to the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan**

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<td>Национальное единство - наш стратегический выбор</td>
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<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>April 27</td>
<td>КАЗАХСТАНСКИЙ ПУТЬ: СТАБИЛЬНОСТЬ, ЕДИНСТВО, МОДЕРНИЗАЦИЯ</td>
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<td>Стратегия «Казахстан - 2050»: один народ – одна страна - одна судьба</td>
<td>Mainly Russian, parts in Kazakh</td>
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<td>April 18</td>
<td>Стратегия «Казахстан-2050»: культура мира, духовности и согласия</td>
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<td>April 23</td>
<td>Мәңгілік Ел: одна страна, одна судьба</td>
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<td>2016</td>
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<td>Патриотический Акт – Мәңгілік Ел⁴²</td>
<td>Russian</td>
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<td>April 26</td>
<td>Стабильность, единство, согласие – основа модернизации</td>
<td>Mainly Russian, parts in Kazakh</td>
<td>Assembly.kz</td>
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</table>

⁴² This is the document that was adopted at the session of the Assembly of the People that year. Unfortunately, I have not been able to locate the whole speech given by Nazarbayev at the session of the Assembly. On the Assembly’s website, the link to the speech only leads to this document, but media reports of the event lead to think that there was a longer speech connected to the adoption of the document.
Other speeches and texts

<table>
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<td>1999</td>
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<td>В ПОТОКЕ ИСТОРИИ (book)</td>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>e-history.kz</td>
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<td>2012</td>
<td>Dec 14</td>
<td>STRATEGY “Kazakhstan-2050” New political course of the established state</td>
<td>English</td>
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<td>ТЕРМИНОЛОГИЧЕСКИЙ СПРАВОЧНИК КАЗАКСТАН-2050 (book)</td>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>iph.kz</td>
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<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Sept 11</td>
<td>Выступление Президента Казахстана Н. Назарбаева на торжественном собрании, посвященном 550-летию Казахского ханства</td>
<td>Mainly Kazakh, parts in Russian</td>
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<td>2017</td>
<td>Sept 30</td>
<td>The Course towards Future: Modernization of Public Conscience</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>e-history.kz</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9.4 Close up of Fig. 3 “Trail of Kazakh Statehood”

Close up of Figure 3 from page 47.
References


Nazarbayev, N. (1997). *Историческая память, национальное согласие и демократические реформы - гражданский выбор народа Казахстана. Доклад на*


Wikipedia. Қазақ хандары. Retrieved from https://kk.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D2%9A%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B4%D0%B0%D1%80%D1%8B [Accessed 19.04.18]

