INTRODUCTION

"We stood shoulder to shoulder on that square back in the beginning of the new era, in the early 1990s. . . . So brave and so united, we thought we could die for the common cause. But what for? Now, after so many years I wonder," said Laima, my Latvian host whom I met in Riga in Kengaraks raion on a freezing evening in early February 2013.[1] In Riga they say one can tell how time changes by looking at the metamorphosis of one space, Kengaraks, a predominantly Russophone neighborhood outside Riga's city center over the period from the late 1980s to the present. "Here used to be the famous [Soviet] porcelain factory," says Laima, pointing at the rubble of an old factory on the other side of the bridge. She then returns to her memories of the Soviet Union and the 1990 barricades at the central square in Riga, in front of the Milda monument to the Latvian nation. Laima is a middle-aged ethnic Latvian who speaks to me in perfect Russian—"a remnant of the *Soviet time* in me," she laughs. The fact that we both speak Russian is perhaps the only thing that unites us at the point of our first encounter. Setting us apart are a generation gap, two different citizenships that require us to obtain visas to visit each other's countries, and two completely different experiences of navigating the post-Soviet world, or rather worlds.

On top of that, my only memories of the Soviet Union are ironic and subconscious—a box of Latvian sugar-coated cranberries (*kliukva v sakhare*) brought

from Moscow, a luxurious gift at a time of total deficit. A nice, very typical "Soviet" ribbon on top of the box echoes in my early childhood memory as something very alien and cruel at a time of the most heightened economic crisis in Kazakhstan. Laima's and my personal "Soviet" conceptualizations and memories clearly differ. Hers are of barricades, the Baltic Way human chain across Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, the communal feeling of coming together as a Latvian nation in 1990. Mine are of fading images of a strange balding elderly man with a beard, called Lenin, who is seen teaching kids how to be moral and not to lie and giving them presents in far-off Moscow. These are the things I have seen in the "Soviet" book that my older cousin threw away as an unnecessary and meaningless "remnant of the *Soviet time*" in 1995 post-Soviet Kazakhstan. Little did we know that Lenin would pop up again as an obsession of hipsters with the old time in the very late post-Soviet period.

Throughout my fieldwork in 2011 to 2019 I would see his portrait in a popular bar in Riga's downtown dance clubs; and then again at the largest Kyiv book bazaar, at Tashkent's flea market, on the streets of Baku's old town where Lenin's busts are sold at a higher price—as a "tourist attraction," says the local seller. I found Lenin again even in the public area around Astana's new bridge, where he reappeared on the old Soviet pins that are fashionable among the generation of teenagers who have a very distant idea of what "Soviet" means. As one of my respondents who was born in 2001 once said, "Soviet to me is represented through the most depressing apartment building blocks"; these are surprisingly similar everywhere, even in Kengaraks, which is so distant and yet so close to the apartment buildings in Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, or any of the post-Soviet urban spaces. Remnants of the Soviet time are present in the material structure of the old residential parts of the cities.

In that sense, Laima and I find a lot more in common because we can refer to some sort of "Soviet" abstract yet meaningful language beyond just Russian. She does not need to explain to me in 2013 what the rubbles of the "Soviet factory" are or why Kengaraks is a home to a predominantly non-Latvian Russophone population who migrated here in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s as a Soviet labor force. But she does narrate what is ahead of us—an old automobile center "where Soviet people came to 'buy' cars after waiting in line for that event for years," she says, and then she glances at me as if to check whether I understand what it meant to "buy a car" or "wait in line" to make a big purchase in Soviet Union. "Now everyone can buy whatever they want, whenever they want, as long as they have money for it," she concludes as the old Soviet automobile center now hosts

a major shopping mall for the old residents of the neighborhood. Ironically, the Soviet dream transfers into a capitalist one in the same exact space. Then what happens to the residents of Kengaraks? How did their lives change before and after Latvia became *post-Soviet* and independent?

My question brings Laima back to present reality. As her thoughts are no longer focused on the memories of the late 1980s Atmoda—the Latvian National Awakening wave and "singing revolution,"[2] she describes her sadness and despair about the "little changes" that independence brought. Her dissatisfaction is not new and is actually experienced by a lot of other people I interviewed across the post-Soviet space where "old elites" assumed power over their respective countries virtually overnight. Power struggles took place and continue to take place behind closed doors, and these processes are almost equally dominated by the power elites in democratic and nondemocratic post-Soviet societies. "I don't think my vote can change much," says Laima, as I question what brought us, two post-Soviets of very different worlds, into this very similar sociopolitical situation of our inability to change the regimes in our countries. As we walked and talked, big questions popped up in our conversation uniting what I research and what Laima lives through everyday: Where is the power? How is it exercised and who has control over it?

The answers to these questions are at the core of this book—political elites who operate on the level of nationalizing regimes, the ideational power field of meaning production, who control access to this field that in turn regulates other dimensions of power relations in the country. But why does nation-building become the most powerful space that guides political decision-making mechanisms post-1991 in such distinct places from Latvia to as far as Kazakhstan and beyond, to Russia itself? Why is further separation into distinct "nations" seen by political elites as the best legitimating principle for their political competition or for the exclusion of other parties from such competition on the basis of their centrist position, as it happens in Latvia? This question can lead to further examples of why certain regimes and politicians call for building real walls on their borders to stop what they view as "illegal immigration" or why certain political elites push for Brexit despite growing popular demand against it in the light of devastating political chaos in Britain on the never-coming eve of Brexit. Why do political elites push for constructed boundaries of difference, why do they make the exclusiveness of a certain ethnic or national group the cornerstone of their own legitimation, a source of their own power?

In this book I turn to power elites who have the most power in decision

making and in determining the limits and frameworks of national ideology or ideologies to explain why and how mechanisms of nationalizing processes guide political competition. The power elites are "composed of men [and women] whose positions enable them to transcend the ordinary environments of ordinary men and women; they are in positions to make decisions having major consequences."[3] But how do these elites exercise their power under different political circumstances and systems but with similar sociodemographic conditions at the inception of their independent state-building?

My journey to understanding the mechanisms of power and decision making started with the puzzle of regime change and difference in political contexts. I selected Latvia and Kazakhstan as the most differentiated comparative case studies,[4] which allowed me to question whether "democracy" differs from a nondemocratic system when it comes to the treatment of national minorities and creation of new fundamental national ideologies on which the whole structure of states and power relations is built. It also helped me to flesh out these mechanisms of power contestations, the rules of the game in elitist fields and how these are influenced by the formula for competitive elections in Latvia and "selections" of elites by the president himself in the super-presidential republic in Kazakhstan that had almost no free elections. But most important, the contrasting study of Latvia and Kazakhstan allowed me to distinguish differences in the experiences of political elites in building the states, reviving or constructing nations after 1991 in "democracies" and "nondemocracies." It also permitted me to see how communities on the ground responded to these processes in very different, post-Soviet spaces with their distinct systems, which I term here *nationalizing regimes*.

TOWARD NATIONALIZING REGIMES

Nationalism in the post-1991 realm is power in itself because it is the source of identification, meaning-making, and control of what type of identity is defined politically, when, and for whom. Within the power field, nation-building is an instrument to acquire more power for actors because elites try to convince others that they are the ones who possess the knowledge and capacity to bring the nation, society, and country to prosperity or to focus on any other commonly shared value because this is how they gain even more power to rule. Nation-building becomes the language for this meaning-making, which is at the same time the source of power within the politically defined power field

of a regime guided by control and an obsession with nationalism—the nationalizing regime.

Nationalizing regimes are formed of the most powerful elites who manage to control and impose the specific discursive and nation-building outcomes on the wider population, including ethnic minorities. The mechanism of a nationalizing regime is directly dependent on elites' consensus over the dominant discourse that usually defines the power field where elites struggle to enhance their power positions through arguing that they have more capacity to safeguard and enrich the most sacred discourse. Different nationalizing regimes pursue specific goals that are ruled by the interests of the dominant elites to stay in power and pursue their domination over the main nation-building discourse, thus circumventing political competition from other distinct discourses and potential counter-elites.

In other words, "nation" discourse dominates the competition for power in nationalizing regimes. Political elites compete to define and control this discourse that simultaneously constructs the power field and its rules of the game and closes its access to outsiders like Laima and me as well as many more people defined as society. Society is seen by these elites as "the web of interlocking fields" that nevertheless rarely forms the power field where "players try to impose the legitimacy of their particular species of capital in order to dominate the entire social order."[5]

I use the term "nationalizing" here in relation to the regime to demonstrate that in reality the dominant discourse for power struggles is defined by the search for some sort of lost national identity or nationalist distinction. The nationalizing sphere then becomes the most popular, dominant, and lucrative discourse for state builders and their competition in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet utopia, but where the framework of ideological structures and divisions on national levels remain. While the power elites try to position it as stable and deeply rooted in the history of one ethnic group that allows them to seek more domination because they represent this ethnic group, the nature of the nationalizing process is never fixed, but in constant flux due to the changing contexts within and outside the regime itself. As I will show throughout the pages of this book, in some scenarios elitist competition within the nationalizing regime itself is the main driving force of further nationalization. Power elites are simply afraid of competing discourses that drive the agenda away from the dominant national-ethnic discourse and could potentially shift the rules of the game and disempower them due to the shift in their own positions and the telos they support and safeguard. In other scenarios, the set of complex issues outside

the regime influences elites' indecisiveness in defining what they imagine as a *stable* or fundamental "national identity project." This forces the regime to come up with new slogans and even new state programs in searching for this national identity. These complex issues involve either the demands of ethnic minorities if these groups are defined as more than the "titular ethnicity" or other kinds of demands, when the electorate no longer votes on national preferences but demands the provision of economic and social programs instead.

All these issues and contexts influence the formation and implementation of mechanisms of nationalizing regimes because within the power field of each nationalizing regime most dominant political elites struggle for more power by controlling the production of meaning of this most popular discourse. So how can the study of elites help us to identify power struggles and further national-ization of the political field?

Elites are crucial to the understanding of power relations because they are "tiny but powerful minorities" that are "made up of autonomous social and political actors who are interested primarily in maintaining and enhancing their power, so that their power struggles are not reducible to classes or other collectivities."[6] Elites can be defined in various ways, for example, as political elites, cultural elites, regional elites, and finally, as power elites, a group that can comprise all three groups. In most contexts, political elites are the ones who gain more power positions within nationalizing regimes and take over cultural elites who are seen as "producers of the national discourses" but, in reality, are very weak when it comes to political competition.[7]

The term "nationalizing regimes" intentionally focuses on the nature of political ordering from the elitist perspective; it directs attention toward the dichotomy of rigid political categories of being democratic or nondemocratic in the post-Soviet state definitions and blurs them. It also links formal and infor-mal structures of power within a given state. Derived from comparative politics, which refers to regimes as "the formal and informal structure and nature of po-litical power in the country, including the method of determining office holders and the relations between the office holders and the society at large."[8] The con-cept of nationalizing regimes exposes and analyzes nation-building through the internal networks and interests of those who govern such policies—the elites in comparison to those who are ruled by them—the citizens and noncitizens (in the case of Latvia) or multiple linguistic and cultural minorities (in the case of Kazakhstan).

The "nationalizing" part of this definition also focuses on the fluidity and

constant repositioning of discourses as well as political elite competition to influence these discourses. This first half of the term, "nationalizing," is similar to Rogers Brubaker's idea of nationalizing states where the "nationalizing" connotation pointed to "the dynamic and processual implication of the term" suggesting "the unfinished and ongoing nature of nationalist projects."[9] The analysis in this book further enriches the term "nationalizing" by providing details about how the nationalizing regime actually works and by showing that though certain parts of the nationalizing discourse are in fact presented as finished and determined, others are intentionally kept unfinished and ambiguous to disempower minorities' leaders or other categorical groups and their agency. It is important to expand the existing framework of nation-building analysis and to address the agency and complexity of these processes through an empirical comparative study of very distinct cases. The focus reverts back to the question of "which nation" are elites talking about or trying to develop? The content of the concept of "nationalizing" in this book demonstrates the diversity of competing, coexisting, and parallel discourses of nations, to whom these nations belong, and who has the right and power to shape and control these discourses.

In the following chapters of this book I discuss the vibrant diversity of nationalizing that, although it is presented as singular—the one protecting the "core" ethnic group of Latvians or Kazakhs—in reality, it is dispersed, heterogeneous, and complex. As previous studies have demonstrated, the nationalizing process attempts to create homogeneity and it seeks its own power through controlling this homogeneity, but the nature of the process is such that by homogenizing only one core group, it inevitably creates divisions, inequalities, and differences and in the end becomes heterogeneous. Therefore, nationalizing cannot be total—it goes against complex social processes and people's own perceptions on the ground. Kazakhstan is never fully Kazakh and neither is Latvia completely Latvian or nationalized in the way its power elites imagine it. In fact, both host a number of different "nations" with their complex definitions, constructs, and identities. What the domination of the nationalizing regime as a power structure brings to the social dynamics is actually further dispersion of the meaning of "Kazakh" or "Qazaq" and division into urban and rural Kazakhs, *mankurts* and *mambets*, Russophones and Kazakh-speaking, and many other distinct identities and perceptions of what it means to be Kazakh.[10] And Latvia, too, has diverse understandings of Latvianized, Latviskii, Russkii, Russian-speaking, Russophone, ethnic Latvian, or European identities.

In this book I develop a critique of the ambiguity of contemporary post-Soviet

nation-building analyses and an in-depth consideration of its weakest links, namely, Brubaker's nationalizing states. Rogers Brubaker's idea of nationalizing states has been the most dominant framework for the study of post-Soviet nation-building since the collapse of the Soviet Union. It encompasses five characteristics and domains of such a state:

> (1) the idea that the state contains a "core nation" or nationality, understood in ethnocultural terms and distinguished from the citizenry or permanent resident population of the state as a whole; (2) a claim to ownership or primacy: the state is understood as the state of and for the core nation; (3) the claim that the core nation is in a weak or unhealthy condition; (4) the claim that state action is needed to strengthen the core nation, to promote its language, cultural flourishing, demographic robustness, economic welfare or political hegemony; and (5) the claim that such action is remedial or compensatory, needed to redress previous discrimination or oppression suffered by the core nation.[11]

The nationalizing states framework is useful for identifying and capturing the prime discourses and trends in post-Soviet nationalization ab nihilo if such a context exists. It captured the importance of the relevant Soviet legacy of ethnic codification and signaled the rise of the core nation defined in the constructed categories of ethnonational codification, but it also failed to theorize further on the temporal structure of this legacy and to answer the questions of who governs. The temporal link between Soviet and post-Soviet is something that the field is still addressing, and only a few works have succeeded in identifying this problem.[12] Local Kazakh and Latvian scholars accepted the temporal linearity of Soviet and post-Soviet as a sacred divide between the "past," which was supposed to be condemned, and the "post," which was supposed to dissolve by itself sometime soon. The persistence of this post-Soviet "transitionary" form of thinking only impedes the analysis of fluidity and hybridity of these post- and past experiences. Moreover, the nationalizing states framework hints at processes of post–Soviet-type postcoloniality in the claims for remedial actions (Brubaker's points [3], [4], and [5]), but does not resolve the ongoing tension of colonialism under the Soviets.[13] It also does not resolve decolonial attempts after the post-Soviet concept eventually passes, opening spaces for new temporal and perhaps spatial concepts.[14]

Although a broad and generally good starting point, the nationalizing states framework proposed to focus on grand narratives only, without further

specificity and more detailed and empirical comparisons. Most important, it is ambiguous in defining the actors who contain and reproduce the nation and national narratives in the successor states. As a result, it fails to capture the full contextual picture of nation-building processes and roles of nation-builders. Although Brubaker propagated a contingent and multifaceted approach to the study of the processes and events of nation-building, he too often implicitly assumed two- or three-way communication between the nationalizing state, its minorities, and possibly the kin state.[15]

The nationalizing regimes approach argues for a multifaceted and more nuanced perspective on these processes. Instead of being a limited two- or even three-way communication, nation-building is seen through this framework as a battlefield of ideas, interests, aspirations, discourses, and power struggles among the power elites in the country. Who influences nationalizing strategies development and who is in charge of controlling and challenging the dominant discourse? Brubaker's notion of nationalizing states acknowledged the importance of the elite agency, but similar to other nationalism studies, it simply took it for granted. Who is nationalizing? How and when does this happen? Why do nationalizations lead to different scenarios in different cases? No further explication or conceptual framework was offered for understanding mechanisms, agency, and processes of the nationalizing part, and as Brubaker himself stated, this was a limitation of the framework. Furthermore, this point of complex political developments in the world as a whole and not only in the post-Soviet space requires a critical reading of the rather ambiguously defined notion of the "state" in Brubaker's initial argument of nationalizing states.

I contend that the answer to the puzzle of elite-led projects of nation-building had to be found on the ground, within the sociopolitical systems of these states—it was tied to the regime, to the rules of the game in the power field. Throughout the book I demonstrate that in Kazakhstan the nationalizing agenda is clearly identified with the hybrid regime of one-man rule and President Nazarbayev's personalized regime. The concept of "regime" in the nationalizing regime framework was used in Kazakhstan's local discussions and political reports more often than "state" (*gosudarstvo*) or "government" (*pravitel'stvo*) to identify the ruling political and economic elites and the political discourses they were producing and guarding. In Latvia, the idea of the Latvianized regime was described more clearly by those who were outside of it—by the so-called Russian-speaking minority activists. The views of these outsiders, external to the ruling elite circle, helped me to identify some of the most important features

of the nationalizing regime as the one that separates people into "national" and "alien" bodies based on the historical-legal status of their citizenship. In this complex picture of legitimating the decision to cut through almost half of the population after independence by claiming that they were part of the legacy of the "occupation" and did not legally belong to the independent prewar Latvian nation, one had to dig deeper to separate a Baltic Russian from a Russia-proper Russian or Latvian.

Legal and discursive structures of defining and separating citizens and non-citizens through the means and mechanisms of a nationalizing regime often drew physical boundaries among lifelong friends, neighbors, and even families. Passports of different colors—red for Latvian citizens and blue for non-Latvian citizens—generated insecurities, fears, lack of self-confidence, and even hostility in Latvia. Throughout my ethnography I encountered these distinct boundaries, the outcomes of the nationalizing regime face-to-face often in Kengaraks but also in other parts of Riga and Daugavpils—the second largest city in Latvia and a hub for Latvian Russians. For those outside the dividing line of being Latvian, gaining a red passport not only meant securing their jobs as school teachers, museum guards, or engineers, it also meant confidence and a feeling of fitting in and not being looked down on, even within their own family, not being separated at the airport when four family passports are red and one is blue. For most of my interviewees within the elite circle, the nature of the Latvianized regime was not questionable and became a normalizing, commonsensical discourse about *how things ought to be.* But for Russian-speaking elites and nonelites alike it was evident that the regime pushed them out of the circle due to their Otherness from the dominant discourse that is politically and ethnically Latvian.

The features of nationalizing regimes include closed and restricted frameworks of involvement in decision making. The most important attribute was that it became both an empowering and ideologically constrained field for the ruling elites, which often excludes the intelligentsia and intellectuals.[16] Elites, not states, are the main actors in these processes of nationalization. For example, my findings demonstrate that in electoral democracies elites are elected but then reselected by the ruling political elites in the nationalizing regime through various formal and informal ideological coalitions. In less democratic (in terms of elections and political appointments) regimes as in Kazakhstan, elites are *selected* before the formal elections by the ruling political elites of the nationalizing regime and precisely by the president himself.

In the nationalizing regime the elites either have to conform with the

hegemonic perspectives and values dictated by the regime or engage in competition against it. As my findings regarding the Harmony and ZaRYA parties demonstrate this usually leads to the "artificial opposition" of such parties or their complete negation and disempowerment, even under democratic regimes (see chapter 3).

NATIONALIZING REGIMES AND MOST DIFFERENTIATED CASE STUDIES

The nationalizing regime is discussed here in the perspective of a power field, the space of interchangeable positions of actors involved in the process of competing for power but also as elites relating to nonelites in the state.[17] The postcommunist legacy of institutionalization, state control, and ideological training of the communist elites provided the space for diverse and hybrid political developments after independence. We can adopt a hypothesis that elite selection or election depends on democratization processes, and thus defines the openness or closedness of the nationalizing regimes and their policies. This process in turn influences the democratization of each state. Let us consider this in a theoretical perspective.

It is widely believed that a democratic regime requires open and competitive elections for "open contestation over the right to win control of the government, and this in turn requires free competitive elections, the results of which determine who governs."[18] It is also believed that authoritarian regimes function under the logic of nonrepresentative elections. In other words, elites are selected and co-opted by the court of power elites rather than by the mechanisms of open elections. And although elections are also held in nondemocratic contexts, these are often not open to wider contestation and are not free. Lisa Wedeen argued that elections in nondemocratic states served as performative politics: they "signaled that 'support' for the president, by those who admire, fear, and loathe him, could be tied to public performances of democratic openness *and* to the sense of lost opportunities such public performances made apparent."[19] Other scholars also argued that staged elections in nondemocratic postcommunist states are used for the domestic and foreign audiences and stakeholders.[20] However, democratic regimes by all means require "competitive" elections in which each citizen can technically participate; this leaves Latvia with a quarter of its population noncitizens in a rather nondemocratic context. How can one test the nature of that democracy? Charles Tilly, for example, writers that "a regime is democratic to the degree that political relations between the state and its citizens feature

broad, equal, protected and mutually binding consultation. Democracy means net movement toward broader, more equal, more protected, and more binding consultation. De-democratization, obviously, then means net movement toward narrower, more unequal, less protected, less binding consultation."[21] We have already established that state- and nation-building in this context of post-Soviet politics is defined by the elites' struggle and their power in different state institutions including the government, parliament, and others. If democratization is then defined and evaluated by an "equal" and "broad" relation between the state and its citizens, then both Kazakhstan and Latvia would be considered nondemocratic for the reason that equal and broad political participation of nonelites in political development is limited in both states.

In principle, although nominally a democratic state and a member of the European Union, Latvia remains a closed ideological regime that controls the sacredness of the "immortal" Latvian nation. This means that any other political party or group that decides to challenge this dominant discourse or deviate from it to support the rights of the vast Russian-speaking minorities, will fail in the political competition. For example, the centrist party Harmony (Sarkanas) won the popular vote in the parliamentary elections in 2014 and 2011, but never managed to get even one minister in the cabinet, which is now almost by default composed of the ruling Latvianized right-leaning coalition. One of my respondents described the situation as an "artificial opposition" of the Harmony party. The party only managed to win for the charismatic Russian-speaking mayor of Riga, Nils Ušakovs, three terms in the citywide elections ruled by the popular vote of Riga's diverse bilingual residents (including ethnic Russians and ethnic Latvians) where the Russian-speaking population constitutes almost half of the residents.

Kazakhstan, the second largest post-Soviet state after Russia, is considered nondemocratic and is often described as an authoritarian state.[22] In Kazakhstan the regime is solid in composition, representing the loyal bond of pro-Nazarbayev power elites. It is distinguished in the literature as authoritarian rule that is characterized by the regime's continuous manipulation of "formal political institutions" and by the "increasingly repressive" sole leadership of "societal institutions" by a very powerful political group of elites.[23] The growing financial crisis and devaluation of the local currency (tenge), rumors about the Land Reform, and the lending of Kazakh land to the "Chinese" spurred the most recent (April–May 2016) social protests across the country. This was followed by more recent waves of mothers' protests (in winter 2019) and protests for open and fair elections (April–July 2019).

The mothers' protests were sparked by a tragedy in February 2019 in Astana when five girls in one family died in a fire while their parents were working at night to provide for the family. This event demonstrated societal unrest regarding inequality, economic and social insecurity, and overall instability. Movements such as Oyan Qazaqstan openly call for a parliamentary republic, open elections, and the right to conduct public rallies. This political-social movement calls for political freedoms as well as the economic-political changes necessary to help classes at risk and mothers. In his numerous speeches President Nazarbayev defines more challenges to Kazakhstan's "stability." These include internal Islamic terrorism threats coming from the supporters of radical Islamic movements. Growing intra-elite competition since Nazarbayev's resignation also threatened the regime's overall stability—Nazarbayev was and remains the connecting link between numerous political interest groups. Nazarbayev regime stability rests on the regime's control of regional and central elites and on control over the dominant discourse propagated by the regime to the wider population.[24] When Nursultan A. Nazarbayev, the country's first and only president, in power since 1989 and reelected numerous times for almost thirty years of Kazakhstan's independence from the Soviet Union, voluntarily resigned in March 2019, it first shocked various groups of population including those who expressed the view that they "never knew a different president."

For a short while lasting no more than twenty-four hours after Nazarbayev's voluntary resignation in a televised presidential address, there was hope for Kazakhstan's democratization. Some Western commentators even considered the start of a new era in Kazakhstan. Yet the symbolic resignation of Nazarbayev and the symbolic following of the constitutional mechanism calling for the interim president position to be held by the speaker of the Senate, who happened to be one of the most loyal elite members of Nazarbayev's regime, shattered these hopes in seconds. One of the first decisions of the interim president, and now elected second president, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, was to rename Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan to Nur-Sultan, to reflect the historical role of Nursultan A. Nazarbayev, the *Elbasy*, translated as the Father of the Nation. The move spurred local protests.

These major changes in Kazakhstan's domestic policy only revealed the obvious—the dominant discourse in Kazakhstan is centered around the legitimacy of Nazarbayev as the sole guarantor of the miracles of development that had been accomplished and of interethnic stability in the country,[25] even after his official resignation. Any alternative discourses deviating from this presidential

discourse are doomed to be marginalized and defeated, for example, the stagnant agenda of the Kazakh national-patriots, who are nevertheless taking over the agenda at the moment, or the defeated opposition.[26] The interim president, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev became the de jure second president of the country and announced elections that were already being contested by growing dissent among young urbanized groups of artistic and civil society activists demanding open and fair elections. On June 9, 2019, Kazakhstan held the first presidential elections in which Nazarbayev's name was not on the ballot for the first time, and for the first time including an oppositional candidate, Amirzhan Kosanov, who was nevertheless discredited after the elections as the pro-regime candidate. The June 2019 presidential elections also signaled the growing involvement of young activists who formed the Oyan, Qazaqstan (Wake Up, Kazakhstan) movement and volunteered as independent electoral observers at the polls, when Tokayev was elected as the second president of the country. Yet President Tokayev continues to work in the shadow of the Father of the Nation, *Elbasy.*

Even after the official departure of President Nazarbayev, the regime continues to live in the conditions of his personalized rule. Nazarbayev's positions as the lifelong chair of the Security Council and as a recently named Honorary Senator allow him to remain in power and offer his guidance to the new president, parliament, or any other political institution in the country. Time will show how long it takes for Nazarbayev's influence to continue in person, but it is clear from the outset that his resignation brought only visual changes and that the regime remained intact: the first presidential elections without Nazarbayev did not promise or deliver real political or elite changes in Kazakhstan.

The discourses that Nazarbayev was able to develop throughout decades of his personalized rule will continue to influence the nationalizing regime and its tactics in diminishing discursive and political competition in years to come. This will allow study of the development of a personalized nationalizing regime in more detail and with more nuance than just studying a cult of personality. The difference between a cult and a personalized nationalizing regime is that cults of personality are diminished or even condemned after a leader's death. But the institutionalization of the Father or the Leader of the Nation discourse into every concept of what the nation meant in the first decades of independence has a lasting effect on further nation-building processes, even after the departure or death of the leader. This happens because the remaining political elites use institutionalized discourses of the personalized rule of the Father of the Nation to build their legitimacy until they come up with new discourses and new

institutionalized systems of state programs on national identities. Alternatively, personalized regimes may not survive competition from rival groups that do not support the ideas of the personalized nationalizing regimes. Thus, they either attack the Father of the Nation, defy every project he implemented, or criticize the whole system. The situation in Kazakhstan after Nazarbayev's departure is still unclear but there are signs that a young artistic community of urban activists across Kazakhstan has chosen to protest against the system with their slogans "For Fair and Free Elections," "I have a Choice," "I woke up," and "You cannot run away from Truth." And it continues to the present with a war of positions and ubiquitous new slogans and posters citing the Constitution in Roman Zakharov's artistic activism.

The hegemony of specific dominant discourses challenges pluralism in political development and political participation beyond the ethnic field in Latvia and beyond the authoritarian leadership in Kazakhstan. Throughout this book I will demonstrate that despite Nazarbayev's resignation and even after his physical death one day, he remains and will remain one of the most powerful discourses on which political elites and nationalizing regimes can build their legitimacy and political messages. This happens because the elitist discourse of the nationalizing regime was constructed so that the figure of the first president would be dominant in every positive development in the country and he would be placed at the discursive core of every ideological program or paradigm.[27]

This is what defines the personalized nationalizing regime where the dominant discourse is based not only on the notion of the sacred nation but also on the sacred Nation-Builder who creates and sustains this nation in contemporary time himself. The question for a different book would be to study how long the personalized discourse of Nazarbayev would sustain itself after almost three decades of consistent injection of his words, his historical role, and his vision into nation-building fabric that is almost comparable to the Soviet obsession with Lenin and his "physical" appearance in the daily lives of every Soviet citizen. Nursultan Nazarbayev's busts are not yet ever-present in public spaces as Lenin's busts were, but his portraits surely occupy too much space across Kazakhstan, even after his official resignation. This phenomenon problematizes the development of democratized political and public spheres.

Latvia's ideational nationalizing regime is not better than a personalized one because it also continuously cuts off pluralistic views in debates about what the nation is and how it should develop. Moreover, an ideational nationalizing regime that is stuck on defining and safeguarding a very narrow perspective of

the nation, for example, a very distinct ethnic connotation of what it means to be Latvian, impedes the development of the country as a whole. The obsession with controlling what the nation is also creates difficult precedents that leave large parts of the population outside the nation, but within the state where the nation is constructed. And although non-Latvian elites have long spoken about the creation of parallel communities in that homogeneous view of the Latvian nationalizing regime, what is happening at the moment is that Latvia is a country of migrants creating their own diasporic communities away from the state of their citizenship and away from the territory of the sacred Latvian nation.

How do we make sense of these complex discourses, practices, institutionalizations, and power relations in understanding how a nationalizing regime works? In the following section I discuss the main methodological tools used in this study, including elite interviews, content and discourse analysis, and archival study.

FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY USED IN STUDYING NATIONALIZING REGIMES

In the study of power and nationalizing regimes I was driven by the "performative" approach, in which my main questions including in interviews with elites were guided by the unraveling of how processes of state- and nation-building were done. The performative nature of "How is the state being done?" as well as "In what ways does the performance of politics reproduce, enable, challenge, or naturalize ideologies about the state?"[28] done through control of the national imagination about the boundaries and limits of the specific nation within the realm of the nationalizing regime required a set of different methods ranging from elite interviews and political ethnography to content and archival analysis and the study of legislation, state programs, and speeches. It was important to identify these processes and performances in historical texts, elite interviews, newspaper content analyses, and even the memoirs of politicians. The overall fieldwork for this study spanned various states beyond just Latvia and Kazakhstan and over the period from 2011 to 2019. In this process of validating the main findings when the principal decision makers were "asked to reflect upon past events" and in order for them not to "strategically misremember or revise their accounts, and likely in a way that is favorable to them,"[29] it was important to collect a larger sample of interviews and to contrast and compare the accounts of different political elites. To validate the information further I also had to

evaluate the context in which each interview was conducted and collect factual and contextual data from other resources, such as the most widely read public newspapers as well as official newspapers. Part of this multifaceted research also included the study of secondary polling data, for example, from the Baltic and Eurasian Integration Barometers. Let me briefly discuss the main methodological tools used in studying nationalizing regimes.

Elite Interviews and Political Ethnography

In the study of nation-building and its ideological construction, most of the information concerning the actual construction of meanings and symbols is not part of the public discourse. To assemble particular information about actors and producers of such meanings and the ways in which they were produced, the study of nationalizing regimes relies on interviews with relevant elites.

Elite interviews are a very successful tool for contextualizing the processes of nation-building because they allow reflection on contexts, time, and decision making. Preparation for the interviews includes research on the elite field, historical comparison of the two cases, and the methodology for elite interviews in studying nationalism. Consequently, I had two or three questions that started with the introduction of my project and led to the discussion of the concept of nation and nationalism with my interviewees. Following this, I asked the interviewees to remember how post-Soviet nation-building evolved in their respective countries and explain their role in these processes at the point when they started their political careers. This varied from more senior elites such as former speakers of the first parliaments or founding fathers of specific parties (especially the National Alliance in Latvia or the post-Soviet Communist Party in Kazakhstan) to younger elites who had joined the political arena only two or three years ago. I had two of these interesting interviews—one with the Unity representative in Latvia and one with Zhanbolat Mamay, a member of the new national-patriot movement in Kazakhstan in 2013. Generational gaps of the first wave of independence politicians compared to the newcomers of the late 2000s era allowed changes to be distinguished within the elitist field and discourses that were navigated by different parties and actors. Significant historical events and periodization constructed by each of my respondents helped with mapping the initial historical development of nation-building, which I then compared suing legal documents, historiography, and archival documents. It was important for me to capture the elitist imagination of the past and its gradual development

into the present to grasp elite visions of time and to balance elites' own involvement in these processes. I wanted to narrate decision making and power mechanization based on firsthand experiences.

My interview pool was selected based on their active role in envisioning and discussing national discourses in their respective countries. After the introductory questions I elaborated on the development of national projects, giving the respondent the power to prioritize his or her views on specific discourses and policies. In this way I could compare and contrast the interviews to determine what was seen as the most important set of projects and discourses among the different elites. Differences were drawn mostly between the nationalists (Kazakh and Latvian) who prioritized language, traditions, and the importance of specific historical discourses and more nonnationalist elites who focused on multifaceted approaches to nation-building, for example, politicians who also focused on economic development beyond ethnic problems. The rest of the interview focused on the processes of such decision making, for example, the selection of discourses and projects in nation-building, and the role of different power elites or other members of the regime who had more power in decision making.

The sample was balanced across the cases. In Latvia I tried to interview a sample from each political party that was present in the Saeima (Latvian Parliament) throughout its modern history from the early 1990s to the 2010s. In addition, I interviewed independent experts, opinion leaders, and intellectuals. I also focused on members of the party who had worked on specific nation-building projects. For example, I interviewed the 2013 speaker of the Latvian Parliament and prominent member of the National Alliance, Inara Murniece. She was also one of the leading authors of the post-2012 referendum Program on the Integration of Non-Latvian Minorities, an important strategic document reflecting the ruling coalition's approach to Russian-speakers in Latvia. This interview proved to be very fruitful as Murniece was very open and went into a detailed explanation of what the project of building the Latvian nation meant to her, her colleagues, and Latvian politicians in general. She also talked about the changes made to the law on referendums provide stricter conditions for organizing new referendums after the 2012 referendum on the status of Russian as the second official language in Latvia, which was nevertheless unsuccessful. She further explained in detail different categories of belonging and identification (variations of nation, people, citizens, and so on) in the integration program she had worked on. These types of interviews when collected in a large sample and in greater detail allow us compare and contrast narratives across different players,

while also shedding more light on decision making at the critical moments of Latvian parliamentary crises.

These interviews with political elites are very useful because they "give access to information about respondents' experiences and motivations that may not be available in the public or documentary record; they allow us to understand opinions and thought processes with a granularity that surveys rarely achieve; and they can add micro-foundations to events or patterns observed at the macro level."[30]

The sample in Latvia included advocates of different views regarding how the nation should develop further—by becoming a political nation, ethnodemocracy, or some alternative. This selection ranged across different parties, and even the Unity party had advocates for more open and inclusive versions of nation-building. In my sample there was a large selection of pro-Russian activists from Riga and Daugavpils, from the former PCTVL and ZaRYA and other local Russian movements. The setting of the interviews varied a lot but was embedded in the urban structure—near or inside the buildings of political institutions, in special parks such as the World War II memorial site in Daugavpils or the Monument of Independence in Riga. This provided an interesting setting that further contextualized my respondents' historical, cultural, and social references. They offered brief explanations on a specific building, especially for example, when we passed the Saiema, near the monument to the heroes of the 1990s barricades located near the parliament, or the contested monument to World War II Soviet liberators that pro-Latvian elites proposed to demolish almost every year closer to the Victory Day celebration. I collected around two hundred interviews with political elites, cultural elites involved in political processes and regime programs, oppositional leaders, and opinion leaders of the new youth movements.

Nonrandom sampling was chosen as a technique to identify respondents based on their position and power. I prioritized four–five specific groups of elites. The sample is divided into four different layers. The first layer was aimed at the ruling elite members and the "ideological gatekeepers": political and nonpolitical members who had direct access to the "political" formation of national symbols, identification, and culture. These interviews provided firsthand experience and knowledge of the field. The people interviewed here had been involved in symbolic formation at the first stage of national constructions in the late 1980s and early 1990s. I used snowball sampling to find most of my respondents.

The second layer represented major political forces—members of political parties and movements both progovernmental (more visible in Kazakhstan's

case) and oppositional. Here I was interested to see the evolution of the national symbolic narrative over the change of the regime and political party in power, which may change the symbolic content of the national ideology.

The third layer of respondents was represented by the so-called cultural elite—public intellectuals, writers, artists who either work for the ruling elite in the construction of state ideology,[31] work for the opposition, or form a neutral, third side of observant and "objective opinion." This set of respondents consists of opinion leaders for different social groups (intelligentsia, ethnic minorities, indigenous nationalists, etc.) who either have power or strive for it. Although they are not key figures in the decision-making process over nation-building, they are strong players in the field of content provision for such projects. So it was important to determine their vision of national development and further ethnicization, especially among indigenous intellectuals who usually become guardians of purity of the "national" culture in Soviet vocabulary.

The fourth layer consisted of ordinary citizens, most of whom represented so-called ethnic minorities, Russian–speakers, and non-Latvians or non-Kazakhs. A large part of the fourth layer included numerous interviews and ethnographic data among the minority groups in large cities of Kazakhstan and Latvia.

Political Ethnography

My use and understanding of political ethnography spanned far beyond the initial boundaries of the first days of fieldwork in snowy Riga in March 2012 on the famous Lomonosova Street when the door opened to a slightly different understanding of post-Soviet *time* through discussions with local residents and local institutionalized knowledge.

This method allowed me to become immersed in political discussions in the ministerial offices and endless corridors of power in Astana, Almaty, Daugavpils, and Riga, but also helped me contextualize power from below—from the perspectives of the everyday lives of ordinary people, citizens of each respective state and nationalizing regime. The pages of this book often introduce readers to these narratives of nation-builders and ordinary people—through the ways many of my interviews divided these two groups, through the eyes of Laima and her circle of family and friends further divided into citizens and noncitizens, often not just based on legal or ethnic lines but on social statuses and their own identifications.

These identifications also included categories of time—Soviet and post-Soviet, the urban and rural divisions I have already mentioned, including

mambets, *kolkhozniks*, and urban dwellers, *korennoi zhitel' goroda*, a native resident of the city. While my political ethnography continues in the realm of empowerment from below—from grassroots art-activist movements across Central Asia or national-cultural revivals that grant certain social actors unexpected empowerment in conditions of further state ordering[32]—the nationalizing regime framework benefits from these ethnographic findings and contextualization from within the field, through the active process of becoming local but also foreign at the same time.

Content Analysis and Archival Research

The study of major newspapers during the more than twenty-year-time span from the late 1989s to the 2010s was designed to help identify the main ideological narratives used by political elites over the course of change through elections. The study of newspapers enabledme to identify the main discourses and public debates prevailing at specific times.

In Kazakhstan I conducted a bilingual search focusing on the official newspaper, *Kazakhstanskaia Pravda* (in Russian), the more nationalist *Ana Tili* (in Kazakh) and *Qazaq Adebieti* (in Kazakh). I also analyzed the publications (2012–2014) of the *Central Asia Monitor*, a newspaper that targeted the urban middle class and intellectuals. This newspaper initiated a heated central discussion about the absence of a stable national ideology and the necessity of creating more feasible identification markers, defined by respondents as a *concrete ideological framework*. Each issue in this series of discussions, published over about two years, featured a major opinion leader, politician, or political analyst and indepth analysis of the situation. The selection of these interviews and discussions serves as a backdrop for detailed content analysis focusing on the discussions around nation and nation-building in Kazakhstan. In Latvia I focused on the Latvian *Diena* and the Russian-language newspapers *Telegraf* and *Chas*, the most influential and popular newspapers in both communities since independence.

The choice of such media sources is explained by the fact that newspapers, especially government–sponsored papers such as *Kazahstankaia Pravda*, were among the main ideological and informational outlets created by the Soviets to transmit information and meaning to the respective populations in these republics. Immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union, most of the newly independent republics were unable to construct informational systems anew, so the remaining Soviet-type outlets were transformed into informational channels

for new regimes and elites. In some countries, the Soviet legacy in the informational and ideological fields still prevails.[33]

I focused on the following categories for the selection of articles: (1) the discourse of independence; (2) the discourse of the "Other," for example, the Russian minority or Russia both in positive and negative connotations as the symbol of Soviet "Occupation" in Latvia; and (3) the discourse of the political elites in power, for example, the role and figure of the president or prime minister. These three categories were chosen to test and explain the nature of the "independence" symbol that is important in these nations.

The discourse of the "Other" or othering was the simplest technique for identity construction and self-imagination. Finally, the latter category helped identify some of the main actors behind these policies and the public's reaction to them. Content analysis aims to identify the main symbolic fields in which national symbols and ideas formed throughout the twenty years of independence. Some examples of keyword searches in newspapers are: Latvian/Kazakh/Kazakhstani "nation," "occupation"–"colonialism," "nationalists," "national memory," "Russians," "ethnic minority," and "national identity"; additional searches included dates of celebrations of state official and unofficial commemorations, for example, the controversial March 16 and May 9 in Latvia—days of remembrance of Latvian legionnaires and Russian-Soviet soldiers who fought during World War II; and the image of third parties—"Russia," "European Union," "Customs Union," "Estonia," "Belarus," and others.

I also focused on particular opinions and debates in the public space about initial national projects on national symbols, laws (on language and citizenship), addresses of the dominant ruling elite, and opinions of the opposition. The analysis of newspaper content thus provided a very fruitful background for my discussion of national discourse in both countries (further discussed in chapter 2).

Finally, in late 2013 I was able to conduct archival research in the office of the Organization for Security and Co-operation (OSCE) in Europe in Prague where I collected data on the OSCE Mission to Latvia and reports of the High Commissioner on National Minorities. This important mission monitored minority rights and interrelations with the Latvian majority during the turbulent periods of the main policy decisions on citizenship and language laws. These data provided a significant background for the analysis of external influence and Europeanization in Latvia.

As part of the research I also analyzed data across the cases and focused on the more limited involvement of the OSCE in Kazakhstan and finally,

Kazakhstan's chairmanship of the OSCE in 2010 and the importance of the de-mocratization agenda and pressures on Kazakhstan. Most of these findings are covered in chapter 4 where I discuss the creation of national minorities in both nationalizing regimes.

PLAN OF THE BOOK

This book is built on historical, contextual, and empirical accounts of the post-Soviet world and its nationalizing regimes as a whole. It also addresses the Latvian and Kazakh cases in more detail to conceptualize the mechanisms of those who rule meaning-making and how they do it. Chapter 1 provides more detail on why these two divergent case studies help shed more light on the mechanization of nationalizing regimes. The aim is not only to study the nature of post-Soviet nation-building but also to flesh out the power struggles within the nationalizing regime. For this reason, it requires the comparison of a nominally and structurally democratic regime and a nondemocratic one. The chapter includes methodological and theoretical discussions of nationalizing regimes and how to study them. I first address the main concepts used in this study—nationalizing regimes, elites, states, and nations. Then I discuss differ-ent types of elite structures and differences that can be formed in nationalizing regimes. In this chapter I also address the most recent developments of President Nazarbayev's resignation and analyze how changes from outside and within the regime affect its nature.

The chapters 2–5 focus on the mechanization of nationalizing regimes through understanding how they construct and dominate discourses over the time of independence (chapter 2), how elites contest power within nationalizing regimes and why and how democratic and nondemocratic contexts shape this competition (chapter 3). Then I discuss (chapter 4) how groups outside nation-alizing regimes—those constructed as national minorities—respond to these power discourses and power contestations. In chapter 4 I also discuss further the most recent developments of protest movements in Kazakhstan.

In chapter 5, I demonstrate how political electoral participation declined equally in Latvia and Kazakhstan throughout the end of the 1990s and mid-2000s because both electorates felt unable to change the established structure of their regimes. These regimes must be understood as formal and informal structures guiding and forming governments and political institutions based on the interests of the ruling elites at the time; the chapter clearly deconstructs the

effects of these interests and actions. Chapter 5 sheds light on societal feedback through elections and popular responses to nationalizing regimes. Finally, in the Conclusion I draw on the major aspects of nationalizing regimes and their different types, discuss the development of post-Soviet nation-building, and discuss further avenues of research in this field.