



Nationalism and Identity Construction in Central Asia. Dimensions, Dynamics, and Directions

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the regions treated here. Even when dealing with mainstream issues, such as frozen conflicts or border disputes, this volume endeavours to analyse them from a particular outlook, focusing more on their empirical consequences on institutions and societies, rather than retracing causes or suggesting rough solutions. Finally, the cleverness of the book pushes forward for new and groundbreaking comparative research on related fields, including social policies, politico-economic transition and religion.

This volume includes 17 chapters organised in five parts. The first one concerns elections, revolutions and policies. Here three authors deal with three different issues, yet all of them rely on the concept of hybridity, as all of the systems analysed here feature a mix of democracy and autocracy in their transitional path. The volume's second part addresses the role of external actors in the democratisation effort, focusing on US democracy-assistance programmes and NGOs in the eastern partnership. In the two chapters that analyse this topic, Georgia is taken as the case study; the choice is well thought out, as this country represents the most successful regional example of democratic development. The third part deals with identities and how it is possible to (re)construct them in a changing world. Chapters included in this part deal with interactions of insecurity with national identities in the three South Caucasian states, and also observe how Georgian migration to Turkey has established a circulatory territory as a particular migratory system.

The volume's fourth part assesses the impacts of protracted conflicts on people, economy and institutions in the South Caucasus and Black Sea regions. Here, four chapters deal with immigration and displacement, war economies and the foreign policies of the *de facto* states. The final part concerns a hot topic for the region: energy and its implication in politics and the economy. This part is divided into five chapters, which address specific issues, including Azerbaijan's role or possible venues for cooperation among countries in these troubling regions.

It is noteworthy to mention also the introductory and conclusive chapters written by Ghia Nodia and Christoph H. Stefes, which complement and mastermind the state of the art of the literature and the future challenges for researchers in these regions. The two authors underline how the Southern Caucasus has developed as a region in its own right since the early 1990s and that nowadays could be considered as part of the larger Black Sea region. Moreover, the two authors properly underline how many issues in the regions are interconnected and could be properly understood only through a comprehensive approach to the issues.

The volume has the merit of gathering different topics in one book, yet sometimes there is the impression that there is a lack of consistency among the chapters. Nevertheless, it remains a book very well worth reading for its variety and innovative outlook toward these regions.

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Mariya Y. Omelicheva (ed.), *Nationalism and Identity Construction in Central Asia. Dimensions, Dynamics, and Directions*. London & Lanham, MD, 2015, xxiv + 173pp., £49.95/\$80.00 h/b.

WHAT TYPES OF NATIONALISM UNFOLD IN CENTRAL ASIA AND WHAT determines the nature and dynamics of national identity construction? The present volume, which brings together scholars based in Australia, Kazakhstan and the United States, seeks to shed light on the dimensions, dynamics and directions that nationalisms and identities take in five states that became independent in 1991. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan as on the map today, are all products of Soviet ethnic engineering, which renders national identity a particularly special political and social issue.

The book contains eight analytical chapters plus an introduction and conclusion. The volume begins with a useful outline of theoretical debates on nationalism and identity formation, focused on Central Asia, and at the same time provides insights into relevant legacies and current challenges. It is followed by six case studies exploring different aspects of nationalism and identity building. Marlene Laruelle's contribution on Kazakhstan analyses three coexisting discursive paradigms—Kazakhness, Kazakhstanness, and transnationalism—which the author identifies as key to what she calls Kazakhstan's 'hybrid state identity' (p. 1). The tensions that emerge in the interaction of the three paradigms are rooted in their different levels of inclusiveness. The first is targeting ethnic Kazakhs, the second is focused on minorities living in the country, while the third deals with all other nations that could possibly accompany Kazakhstan on its development path (p. 16). Aziz Burkhanov and Dina Sharipova's chapter explores the development of Kazakhstan's dynamic state identity between the model of a civic nation and an ethnic nation (p. 21), looking at language and culture policies, beginning with the Soviet legacies of *korenizatsia* and russification (p. 22). The authors' conclusion is that Kazakhstan's state identity project remains ambiguous, due to incongruence between policies and their implementation (for example promotion of the Kazakh language and budget cuts for Kazakh language education). The authors also find evidence for primordialist approaches dominating the elite discourse, including the concept of *Mangilik El* (p. 33), which they identify as Soviet legacies.

Aminat Chokobaeva explores changing paths of memory discourses in her contribution on the impact of the 1916 Great Revolt in Kyrgyzstan on Kyrgyz national identity, an occurrence that saw the killing of thousands of Kyrgyz by Tsarist authorities (so-called *Urkun*, p. 38). From the 1920s to the 1950s, the official perception of the event shifted from one of a 'progressive national liberation movement' (p. 40) to one 'usurped by feudal-clerical elements' (p. 42). Today's discourse drifts between the poles of genocide on Kyrgyz committed by Russians, and friendship between Russians and Kyrgyz (p. 46). In any respect, the author concludes, public commemoration remains ambiguous and has become a political instrument serving a broader ideological agenda (victimisation versus brotherhood) (p. 49). The chapter by David Radford explores the emergence of ethno-religious identities in Kyrgyzstan, focusing on the renewal of Islamic and other religious awarenesses, and their intertwining with ethnic identities as a cure for a diagnosed post-Soviet ethnic identity crisis. Structured as a *tour d'horizon* rather than a theoretically informed study, the author's fieldwork suggests that religion is perceived as a personal matter of choice, while the construction of ethnicity is birth-related (p. 66). Kyrgyzzness, in this sense, does not have a clearly defined religious component.

Kirill Nourzhanov's chapter analyses the role of political Islam in Tajikistan's nation-building process, looking at both dominant national narratives and counter-narratives, focusing on three phases of secularist state-led discourse, challenged by the Islamist Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT). The author concludes that the outcome has been an ongoing discourse rather than an identity formula, promoting dynamic elements of political, national and Islamic values (p. 87). Mariya Omelicheva explores Turkmenistan's recent nation branding for an external audience, focusing on political neutrality, market attractiveness, tourist destination and the image of a modern and democratic state. She concludes that, due to authoritarian and isolationist practices, the aforementioned image that the state wishes to portray remains elusive (p. 108). Reuel Hanks studies the rival use of ethno-symbolism in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan as a cultural resource in the formation of (distinct) identities. As for Tajikistan, symbols of Aryanism and the Samanid era construct imagined links to Europe and support claims for an early presence in the region. This narrative both challenged and inspired the Uzbek discourse, leading to the adaptation of Aryan origins in Uzbekistan's national mythology and the creation of an imagined golden age—or, as the author concludes, to identity theft (p. 123). Galym Zhussipbek analyses the impact of primordialist national identities on regional conflict in Central Asia. The author implicitly acknowledges the contemporary identities promoted by political elites as colonial legacies and finds conflict solutions in pre-Soviet identities of the 'Central Asian civilisation' that derive from families and regions, and are by its multi-ethnic approach more inclusive (p. 142).

Overall, the volume provides interesting (and also innovative) insights into identity formation in the Central Asian countries. What could have strengthened the book would be the inclusion of more comparative studies within the region, as case contextualisation supports a better understanding of identity-building processes. Most of the studies employ process tracing, investigating a number of Soviet legacies, in order to make sense of the construction of identities today. This leads to both redundancy and generalisation. Soviet legacies on the macro-level apply to all cases under investigation, and identity building seems to be more complex than just responding to the past. Comparison of contemporary identity projects within the region would highlight the unique and diverse aspects of identity-building processes in different Central Asian countries, some of which seem to reflect contemporary rival projects in the political and social spheres rather than responses to the Soviet past. One perspective generally missing is bottom-up research and micro-focus on identity formation. All contributions explore the field top-down from a macro- or meso-level analysis.

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Mariya Y. Omelicheva, *Democracy in Central Asia. Competing Perspectives and Alternative Strategies*. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2015, 220pp., \$60.00 h/b.

DESPITE HUGE DEMOCRACY PROMOTION EFFORTS UNDERTAKEN BY Western governments in Central Asia, their results, largely, have been disappointing. Mariya Y. Omelicheva sets out to explain this puzzling difference between aims and outcomes by focusing on the content of democracy promotion policies themselves, particularly on how discourses of democracy and democratisation are defined and conceived by the Central Asian states and societies of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, as well as the main external actors which aim to influence them.

To this end, the book begins by considering the state of democracy in these countries before moving to the main theoretical and methodological aspects in Chapter Two. One main focus of this book is the contested nature of democracy for Central Asian governments and societies, as illustrated by the use of democracy promotion frames. As a 'specific presentation, packaging, and positioning of issues related to democracy and democratization' (pp. 24–25), a frame gives prominence to the communicative power of ideas and their resonance with Central Asian governments and societies. Omelicheva importantly notes that rather than as top-down instruments, the discursive frames employed are neither entirely determining nor irrelevant in how they are perceived. The extent to which these frames are perceived as being culturally compatible, consistent and credible by the governments and societies under consideration is an important underlying factor in whether or not they are even able to resonate at a given time or under certain circumstances (p. 30).

Chapters Three to Six focus on the discourse of 'representatives of the US, EU, Russian, Chinese and Central Asian governments' in order to define their democracy (or autocracy) promotion frames and their development (p. 30). Both EU and US perspectives on regional engagement tend to focus on democracy and human rights, though there are some key differences. The huge growth of democracy assistance initiatives under the Bush administration coincided with the increasing importance placed on counterterrorism by Washington. This uneasy juxtaposition has largely continued under the Obama administration, albeit with discourse shifting from democratisation to Central Asian states' 'stability, prosperity, and security' (p. 48). The EU has focused on good governance and 'effective policy making, public accountability, and transparency' (p. 52), though it too has softened its rhetoric on human rights and democracy recently, in part due to its energy interests in the