Identity and Politics in Central Asia and the Caucasus

Edited by
Mohammed Ayoob and
Murad Ismayilov

Routledge

Identity and Politics in Central Asia and the Caucasus

The multicultural region of Central Eurasia is living through its early post-independence years and as such serves as an ideal case to study and analyse theories of identity and foreign policy in a non-European context. Looking to re-introduce identity as a multidimensional factor informing state behaviour, this book analyses the experiences of the different Central Eurasian states in their post-independence pursuits.

The book is structured into two broadly defined sections, with the first half examining the different ways in which the combination of domestic, regional, international and trans-national forces worked to advance one national identity over the others in the states that comprise the region of post-Soviet Central Eurasia. In the second half, chapters analyse the many ways in which identity, once shaped, affected the foreign policy behaviours of the regional states, as well as the overall security dynamics in the region. The book also looks at the ways in which identity, by so doing, enjoys an intricate, mutually constitutive relationship with the strategic context in which it bears its effects on the state and the region. Finally, given the special role Russia has historically played in defining the evolutionary trajectory of the regional states, the book discusses the ways in which Russia itself and its post-cold war policies towards its former colonies have been conditioned by factors associated with Russia's evolving post-Soviet identity.

Placing the region firmly within the context of existing theories of identity and state practices, the book will be of interest to students and scholars of Central Asian Politics, Security Studies, Foreign Policy and International Relations.

Mohammed Ayoob is University Distinguished Professor of International Relations at Michigan State University, USA.

Murad Ismayilov is Doctoral Researcher in Development Studies at the University of Cambridge, UK and Research Fellow at ADA University (previously Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy), Azerbaijan.

Routledge Advances in Central Asian Studies

Identity and Politics in Central Asia and the Caucasus

**Edited by
Mohammed Ayoob and
Murad Ismayilov**

Contents

Illustrations

Figures

Tables

Contributors

Fuad Aliyev is Adjunct Faculty, Societies and Religion in Caucasus and Central Asia, at ADA University, Baku, Azerbaijan. He has also been certified as an anti-money laundering specialist by ACAMS since 2013. He holds a PhD in Economics from Azerbaijan State Economic University (2011) and an MA in Political Science from the Central European University, Hungary. He was Hubert Humphrey Fellow in Public Policy in 2005–2006 at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill as well as Fulbright Scholar at Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies in 2011–2012. His research interests include political economy, Islamic finance, Islamic activism in Eurasia, and Eurasian studies.

Mohammed Ayoob is University Distinguished Professor of International Relations at Michigan State University. He holds a joint appointment in James Madison College and the Department of Political Science. He is also the Coordinator of the Muslim Studies Program housed in International Studies and Programs. A specialist on conflict and security in the Third World, his publications on the subject have included conceptual essays as well as case studies dealing with South Asia, the Middle East, the Persian Gulf, and Southeast Asia. He has also researched, taught, and published on the intersection of religion and politics in the Muslim world. He has been awarded fellowships and research grants from the Ford, Rockefeller, MacArthur, and MSU Foundations; the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore; and the East-West Center, Honolulu, Hawaii. He has acted as a consultant to the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, the High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change appointed by the UN Secretary General, and the Ford Foundation. He has held faculty appointments at the Australian National University and Jawaharlal Nehru University in India, and visiting appointments at Columbia, Sydney, Princeton, Oxford, and Brown universities and at Bilkent University in Ankara, Turkey. He has authored, co-authored, or edited 13 books and published over 90 research papers and scholarly articles in leading journals such as *World Politics*, *International Studies Quarterly*, *International Studies Review*, *Foreign Policy*, *International Affairs*, *International Journal*, *Survival*, *Orbis*, *Asian Survey*,

World Policy Journal, *Global Governance*, *Alternatives*, *Third World Quarterly*, *Washington Quarterly*, *Middle East Policy*, *International Journal of Human Rights*, *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, and as chapters in edited volumes. His books include *The Third World Security Predicament: State Making, Regional Conflict, and the International System* (Lynne Rienner, 1995), *India and Southeast Asia: Indian Perceptions and Policies* (Routledge, 1990), and *The Politics of Islamic Reassertion* (St Martins, 1981). His latest books are titled *The Many Faces of Political Islam* (University of Michigan Press, 2008), *Religion and Politics in Saudi Arabia* (Lynne Rienner, 2009), and *Will the Middle East Implode* (Polity, 2014). His commentaries on world affairs have been published in *The Guardian*, Project Syndicate, and on the websites of *Foreign Policy*, CNN, and the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding. His latest scholarly articles include "Beyond the Democratic Wave: A Turko-Persian Future?" (*Middle East Policy*, Summer 2011), "Making Sense of Global Tensions: Dominant and Subaltern Conceptions of Order and Justice in the International System" (*International Studies* (New Delhi), special issue 2012), and "Expanding Civil War: After Syria, Iraq?" (*YaleGlobal Online*, May 2013).

Rick Fawn is Professor of International Relations and Director of the Institute for Middle East, Caucasus and Central Asian Studies at the University of St Andrews. Among his recent book publications are *International Organizations and Internal Conditionality: Making Norms Matter* (2013), *Georgia: War and Revolution* (as editor, 2013), *Historical Dictionary of the Czech State* (as co-author, 2010), and *Globalising the Regional, Regionalising the Global* (as editor, 2009).

Paul Goble is a professor at the Institute of World Politics in Washington, DC, who blogs at Windowoneurasia2.blogspot.com. Earlier, he served in a variety of positions at the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy, Audentes University, and the EuroCollege of the University of Tartu, following a career in the US government.

Norman A. Graham is Professor of International Relations at Michigan State University's James Madison College of Public and International Affairs and Director of the University's Center for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies. His published research includes eight books and numerous articles. His current research interests include industrial and technology development in the European Union; the future of European and Eurasian security; British, French, German, and Russian foreign policy; economic and political change in eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia; and environmental policy and policy making in Eurasia.

Murad Ismayilov is a doctoral student in Development Studies at the University of Cambridge, UK and Research Fellow at ADA University (previously Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy), Azerbaijan. His research interests include social theory (with a focus on critical approaches); sociology and political

economy of culture; postcolonial theory; sociology and political economy of post-Soviet transformation (with a thematic focus on social stratification and class; nationalism; identity; and state–society relations); social movements; sociology and political economy of power; sociology of class; sociology of intellectuals; sociology and security of the Middle East; sociology and political economy of religion; and Islamic political thought. He has authored a number of academic articles and book chapters, including "State, Identity, and the Politics of Music: Eurovision and Nation-Building in Azerbaijan" (*Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 40, Issue 6, 2012); "The Impact of Energy Resources on Nation- and State-Building: The Contrasting Cases of Azerbaijan and Georgia" (*Beyond the Resource Curse*, ed. By Brenda Shaffer and Taleh Ziyadov, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012); and "Nation-building and State-building in Azerbaijan: The Challenges of Education Abroad" (with Prof. Michael Tkacik, *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Winter 2009/2010).

Natalie Koch is an assistant professor in the Department of Geography at Syracuse University's Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs in New York State. She specialises in political, social, and urban geography, with a focus on state-making, nationalism, and geopolitics in post-Soviet Central Asia and the Gulf Arab states. Since completing her PhD at the University of Colorado in 2012, she has authored numerous articles in journals such as *Political Geography*, *Urban Geography*, *Geoforum*, *Area*, and *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*.

S. Neil MacFarlane is the Lester B. Professor of International Relations at the University of Oxford. He works on the international dynamics of the former Soviet region, with particular reference to the Caucasus and Central Asia.

Kyle L. Marquardt is a PhD candidate in the Department of Political Science at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. His research interests include identity politics, survey research, and separatism; he has conducted field research in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Russia (specifically the Volga region), and Turkmenistan. He has published articles in journals such as *Nationalities Papers* and *Central Asian Survey*; his work has been supported by a National Science Foundation Doctoral Dissertation Research Improvement Award and a Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad fellowship, among other sources.

Acknowledgements

Abbreviations

BTC	Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan (pipeline)
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CoE	Council of Europe
CSCE	Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
ESC	Eurovision Song Contest
EU	European Union
GTEP	Georgia Train and Equip Program (US)
GU(U)AM	Georgia/Ukraine/(Uzbekistan)/Azerbaijan/Moldova
ICG	International Crisis Group
IDB	Islamic Development Bank
IEOM	International Election Observer Mission
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IRI	International Republican Institute
ISAF	International Security and Assistance Force
LTO	Long-Term Observer
MFA	Georgian Foreign Ministry
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NRC	NATO–Russia Council
NU	Nazarbayev University
ODIHR	OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PACE	Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
PfP	Partnership for Peace (NATO)
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
STO	Short-Term Observer
US	United States
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

Introduction

Identity as a source and an output of foreign policy and regional security in post-Soviet Central Eurasia – towards integrating nationalism scholarship into IR constructivism

Murad Ismayilov

This collection of case studies – and the research agenda it is set to frame – rests on the notion that state identities evolve and state behaviour develops through two major channels of socialisation (or cultural selection, to use Alexander Wendt's terminology):[1] internal and external. For the purposes of this study, internal channels of socialisation are defined as modalities that derive from, and rest upon, determinative/constitutive sources of behaviour *exogenous* to states' social interaction with each other and other members of the world society (non-state actors), that is, indigenous/intra-state cultural elements, narratives, and understandings. Conversely, external channels of socialisation are defined as modalities that derive from, and rest upon, determinative/constitutive sources of behaviour *endogenous* to states' interaction with each other and with other members of the world society (non-state actors), that is, transnational social preferences, norms, and understandings.

Conventional theorists of International Relations (neo-realists and neo-liberals alike) as well as comparative political scientists, most foreign policy analysts, and "nationalism scholars", however divergent their approaches, have all traditionally located the sources of state behaviour and/or identity formation – to the extent they problematised identity at all (the scale of possibilities ranging from the delegitimation of identity in neo-realist discourses to its full embrace in nationalist studies) – inside the state. Their analyses have centred on the workings of internal channels of state socialisation and have neglected the influences that states' interaction with each other and/or other inter- and transnational actors brings to bear on state polities and their evolution in time (cf. Mylonas 2013). With the important exception of nationalist scholars, many – if not all – have also had a tendency to reduce the range of domestic sources underlying states' preference formation to their material conditions and functional needs (rather than social realities of any kind) and/or have treated those sources in a rationalist fashion as affecting state behaviour only (rather than as working in parallel to also constitute state identity).[2]

The last two decades have witnessed the rise in IR constructivist scholarship (e.g. Adler and Barnett 1998; Bartelson 1995; Doty 1996; Finnemore 1996; Katzenstein 1996; Klotz 1995; Price 1997, 2008; Reus-Smit 1997; Wendt 1987, 1992, 1999, 2003).[3] Tracing their intellectual roots – some more explicitly than others – to 'critical' sociological theory, including as embodied in Anthony Giddens's (1984) theory of structuration and Pierre Bourdieu's (1977, 1992) sociology of practice, IR constructivists have sought to emphasise the role identity and culture play in shaping and conditioning state practices (and state interests attached to them) on the one hand and the mutually implicated nature of engagement between agents and structures on the other. While numerous empirical studies have resulted from this endeavour, few focus on Central Eurasia.[4] Much of the IR scholarship that has engaged the region, in turn, has done so within the limits of the realist paradigm and, as such, singled out materially constituted power politics as the key variable underlying evolving security dynamics in post-Soviet Central Eurasia. Many within this group have worked within the 'geopolitics paradigm' and, as such, have focused on the energy dimension of the region's interaction with the international system, viewing – and analysing – this part of the world through the prism, and in the context, of what has been dubbed as 'the second great game': an exogenously unfolding contest between and among great powers for the control over energy resources in the South Caucasus (namely, Azerbaijan) and Central Asia (namely, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan), as well as – given the landlocked nature of the states in the region – over transportation routes for those riches (e.g. Kleveman 2004; Menon 2003; Karagiannis 2002; LeVine 2007; Cheterian 1997; Ahrari 1996, Ch. 3; Cohen 1996). Tending to locate the agency behind the evolving dynamics of the many intra- and inter-state developments across the post-Soviet space with the multitude of energy-thirsty external actors, this literature remained blinded to the many factors, including inward- and outward-oriented causal motives, lying within the realm of state polity and potentially apt to account for the unfolding dynamics therein (cf. Gvalia *et al.* 2013; also cf. Freire 2013).

With such material power-based analysis of the region largely blinded to the many ways in which cultural and social factors worked to condition state behaviour in post-Soviet Central Eurasia, IR constructivism – its focus on identity and culture as constitutive variables notwithstanding—has not been effectively employed in efforts to advance understanding of the complex mechanisms by which intra-state elements, on the one hand, and transnational and international modalities, on the other, worked *together* to shape and condition state behaviour in the region during its post-Soviet transition. Given the holistic view they hold of the way the international system relates to its units (states), mainstream IR constructivists have in large measure focused on the workings by which the international society directly affects state identity formation and/or state behaviour while remaining largely oblivious to internal mechanisms of state socialisation and/or the complex interplay between the former and the latter in the process of state identity/behaviour formation (e.g. Finnemore 1996). While the notion of interplay between the domestic and the international has

been growing more popular in IR constructivist scholarship in recent years[5] (particularly, if not exclusively, in IR scholarship on European identity),[6] this approach has not, as yet, been reflected in studies on post-Soviet Central Eurasia (cf. Blum 2007; Ismayilov 2012; also Abdelal 2005; Hopf 1999).

Wendt's conceptualisation of the state and the multifaceted structure of state identity could serve as an illustrative example of the promise IR constructivist theorising holds for the analysis of the unfolding processes in post-Soviet Central Eurasia, on the one hand, and some of the fallacies attending it, on the other. Accepting the ontological primacy of both agents and structures in producing social outcomes, Wendt – in his widely acclaimed *Social Theory of International Politics* (1999) – conceptualises the state as a corporate agent (indeed, "a person") constituted by and through forces residing in structures of two distinct kinds: external (or social) and internal (or organisational) (Wendt 1999, 71; 1987, 343; also see Wight 2006, 96, 181); the former involving, according to Wendt, a micro-level structure of interaction and a macro-level structure of anarchy. That being so and while Wendt, to use Wight's (2006, 96) expression, does highlight – in an outline of his theory of international politics – "theoretical space … in which the internal (domestic) relations that constitute the state can be theorized", he works to develop a detailed theory of external constitution while leaving the issue of the internal constitution of the state (the state viewed as pre-social and immutable agent) largely untackled. As part of the former, Wendt (1999, 318–336) emphasises at least two mechanisms of cultural selection: imitation and social learning.[7] While Wendt (1999, Ch. 5) does develop a theory of the internal constitution of the state as corporate agent elsewhere, his failure to analyse the workings of the two channels through which states are constituted in tandem – and, consequently, his positioning of the domestic and foreign policy realms of state behaviour as inherently autonomous from and immune to each other – blinds his theory to the complex interplay and mutually implicated relationship that exists between internal and external channels through which states get socialised into the subjects that they are and through which state behaviour gets conditioned.[8]

Wendt's homogenous vision of the state and the constitutive society obscures the complex divisions within the state and leaves no room for individual agency. As such, it renders internal channels through which the state is socialised largely irrelevant for understanding the workings of international politics in general and foreign and domestic practices of individual states in particular. Furthermore, even in his conceptualisation of the mechanisms through which external constitution occurs, Wendt – while acknowledgeing the importance of imitation as a mechanism of cultural selection in general and one through which former Soviet states, as well as many in the developing world, re-entered the international system in particular (Wendt 1999, 341) – brackets this mechanism with his further discussion of structural change and the evolution of collective identities and instead focuses on – and prioritises – the mechanism of social learning.

Wendt's analysis, as it stands – and the IR constructivist agenda it frames – is ill-suited for explaining and understanding the post-colonial evolution of political

identities and the unfolding dynamics of domestic and foreign policy practices of states in the post-Soviet setting of Central Eurasia in at least three ways.

First, the inherent weakness of post-colonial states in Central Eurasia – as is the case with all post-colonial polities – effectively worked to translate their quest to pursue their post-Soviet national agendas into the struggle for what Wendt terms "thick" recognition.[9] One of the principal mechanisms through which a state's struggle for thick recognition is most likely to proceed – particularly in a post-colonial setting – is one by which a state "tries to conform as closely as ever possible to the rules [and norms] which govern life" in the temporal and social context into which it has emerged (Ringmar 2002, 122), a process Wendt terms "imitation", but – as noted above – fails to engage with in any meaningful way. Furthermore, Wendt fails to establish any workable connection between imitation as a mechanism of socialisation and collective identity formation, on the one hand, and the struggle for recognition as the main driving force behind imitation, on the other. The two, however – if treated as an integrated conceptual whole – are well suited to explain the evolution of security dynamics and post-colonial identities in post-Soviet Central Eurasia. Indeed, the analysis of the workings of the struggle for recognition–imitation nexus, and their effects on regional units and their interaction (both with each other and the outside world) does much to shed light on the evolution of nation- and state-building processes that the region's young post-colonial polities have gone through over the brief period of their independent existence. As is the case with basically all post-colonial polities, the struggle for recognition, and the imitation through which that struggle was effected, set in motion an evolutionary mechanism through which the 'international' has borne its effects on the evolving identities and behaviour of post-Soviet states.[10]

Second, Wendt's prioritisation of external channels of socialisation in his analysis of the workings of the international system and the evolution of state identities – a move partly attributable to his assumption of a pre-social ready-made state, one with a pre-existing political culture and political identity that 'the international' comes to engage with and influence in many interesting ways – leaves his theory blinded to the more complex ways in which the national identities and polities of the newly independent post-colonial states in Central Eurasia (as well as elsewhere for that matter) evolved, states, as Roger Brubaker (1996, 43) aptly notes, whose very "sociological 'stateness' [is yet] to be established" and "even the fact of their durable statehood [is] not yet settled", a state of order (or indeed disorder) making them in a sense 'states-in-the-making' and a condition which effectively boosted the role internal channels of socialisation had to play in defining the evolutionary pathways post-colonial states and their societies in the region have come to follow.

And third, Wendt's failure to account for an intricate linkage between the two levels of state socialisation and the two channels informing the process of nation- and state-formation and, as an extension, domestic and foreign policy-making blinds his analysis to the role indigenous cultural notions and understandings, as well as historical forces and their interplay with international cultural forces,

have to play in state behaviour. These omissions are to be especially lamented in the case of post-Soviet Central Eurasia, for the region's post-independence evolution suggests a particularly strong case for the combined role that intra-state and transnational notions and understandings play in defining the domestic and foreign policy practices of states. If nothing else, the role of identity, culture, and religion in shaping states' domestic and international behaviour as well as in conditioning the overall regional dynamics is especially strong in post-colonial states, which are still in the process of state- and nation-building and hence characterised by weakness of their young post-colonial polities; a reality that brings to salience the role supra-national as well as sub-national/clan/group identities come to play in defining state and elite legitimacy, for it increases the extent to which the state elite come to use the identity language in attempts to achieve political mobilisation (cf. Shaffer 2006).[11]

That being so, nationalism scholars working on post-Soviet Central Eurasia in turn concerned themselves primarily – and nearly exclusively – with intra-regional ethnic conflicts and/or the preceding or subsequent nationalism that attended them (Hale 2008; Kaufman 1996, 1998, 2001; King 2001; Snyder 1993), focusing predominantly on the primordial or constructed nature of ethnic hatreds and/or pre-existent structural embeddedness of any sort as a chief driving force behind the processes of intra-state dynamics, on the one hand, and/or inevitably linking the extent of post-colonial nationalism that unfolded to the prevalence of ethnic conflicts that preceded – or indeed paralleled – it, on the other; as such, they blinded themselves to the many ways in which state practices associated with nationalism and nation-building in the region, apart from being often traceable to preceding conflicts of ethnic construction, have been contingent products of the evolving dynamics of the state's multiple engagements across, and embeddedness within, the international domain (cf. Ismayilov 2012).

In light of the above, bringing, on the one hand, the 'conventional' focus on internal (domestic) influences back in – particularly as displayed in constructivist nationalism scholarship (e.g. Anderson 1991; Brubaker 1996; Hobsbawm 1990; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983) – and having the latter integrated with the IR constructivist emphasis on external forces, on the other, would re-introduce identity as a multidimensional factor informing state behaviour, either directly (through internal channels of socialisation) or indirectly (by mediating the influences the international works to bear upon state polity through external channels of cultural selection). This collection seeks to do just that by offering and developing – through the case studies it features – a single platform upon which internal and external channels of state socialisation in post-Soviet Central Eurasia are explored and examined in sync. More specifically, this collection examines the role that continuous tensions in the interplay between the modalities of internal and external socialisation played in the evolution of the post-colonial identities of states in post-Soviet Central Eurasia and the ways in which they worked to condition ultimate state practices (domestic and international). As such, the study is meant to pioneer research into domestic and international behavioural patterns of post-Soviet states in Central Eurasia, wherein 'the

domestic' and 'the international' are theorised as part of a single whole (cf. Abdelal 2005; Mylonas 2013) and in which the evolving dynamics of the domestic and foreign practices of regional states as well as the evolution of their political identities are contextualised in the post-colonial setting into which the 'new' states were born and within which they evolved.

In doing so, the case studies that the volume features draw – some more explicitly than others – on the existing theories of state and identity, including social constructivism, while also offering insights as to the ways in which the conceptual and operational toolkit those theories embody could be refined and expanded in view of the experiences to which the states in Central Eurasia have been exposed as they began and have followed through with the multitude of their post-independence pursuits. Indeed, by bringing identity back to the agenda in the study of regional security dynamics in post-Soviet Central Eurasia, the collection is meant to place the region firmly within the realm of existing theories of identity and state practices. Multicultural as it is and living through its early post-independence years, Central Eurasia serves as an ideal test case to study and analyse the workings of theories of identity and foreign policy in a non-European context. Finally, the findings the collection has to offer are also likely to bring to light some of the fallacies attending IR mainstream thinking about what is known as the level-of-analysis problem in IR, with a tentative suggestion being that what has been largely treated – following primarily Singer (1961) and Waltz (1965) – as a set of discretely evolving domains (that is, 'levels of analysis'), which could, and should, easily be separated, are rather intricately linked and interlinked with each other, with the relationship they stand to enjoy with one another being mutually constitutive – one level informing and simultaneously being informed by others in many interesting ways – and the borderline between and among them being anything but fixed. Indeed, at a time when *transnational* forces, such as Islam and the many of its practical expressions, for example – ones that are not to be easily located within either of the 'levels of analysis' of which we know – serve as "the media by which external conditions and factors are translated into a policy decision" (Singer 1961, 87) via both internal channels of socialisation endogenous to the structure of state–society relations and external modalities of cultural selection exogenous, but inherently linked, thereto, a requirement of strict adherence to allegedly discrete levels of analysis may not be useful and is rather likely to cause the production of a distorted depiction of reality.

Organisational structure

The collection is structured into two broadly defined sections, its first half examining the many different ways in which the combination of domestic, regional, international, and trans-national forces worked to advance one national identity over the others in the states that comprise the region of post-Soviet Central Eurasia. All four studies in this section attempt to unravel the dynamics attending post-Soviet nation-building in Central Eurasia as a combined function of

structural forces and individual agency, both internal and external to the state polity in question.

More particularly, Fuad Aliyev – focusing on Islam – locates the process of domestic identity construction in the region within the intra-state and regional strategic context in which the states are embedded to demonstrate how the variation in the extent to which the states have been ready to embrace Islam as part of their unfolding collective identity in general and its material institutional instantiations (e.g. Islamic finance) in particular has been a function of the dynamic interplay between the objective challenges of state-building a state needed to address, on the one hand, and the regional strategic setting in which it was bound to do so, on the other. While the states in the post-Soviet Muslim-majority Central Eurasia – each having defined its statehood in secular terms – have all been affected by what the paper terms 'Islamophobia', the level of threat perception of Islam in each individual republic and, consequently, the extent to which this interfered with resulting state practices have been contingent on the degree of external challenges associated with political Islam that the states perceived as facing from within their regional strategic context, on the one hand, and the degree to which these challenges have been perceived to overwhelm the intra-state strategic benefits any particular policy associated with Islam could offer, on the other. As the analysis the paper offers evinces, while threat perception of Islam for both Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan has been informed by their choice of secular statehood and their Soviet-era understandings of what secularity means, and while both have been set to benefit in practical terms from introducing Islamic finance, the two states have evolved to differ in their attitudes towards different possible forms of engagement related to Islam, including Islamic finance – Kazakhstan having introduced it and Azerbaijan having so far refrained from doing so – the variation deriving from the difference in the strategic setting in which the two states find themselves. As the analysis the paper presents makes clear, unlike Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan – given its geographic proximity to and historical/cultural affinity with Iran and given, consequently, the latter's frequent attempts to use Islam as a tool by which to interfere with and undermine Azerbaijani statehood – displayed more caution towards Islam in general and its practical instantiations in particular. The result is likely to be, at least in the short run and if only by virtue of unintended effects of strategic pragmatism of sorts, a national identity more inclusive of Islamic notions and understandings for Kazakhstan and one more immune to explicitly defined Islamic values for Azerbaijan.

Kyle Marquardt locates the process of language and broader identity construction in post-Soviet Central Asia and the Caucasus within the intra-state historical and cultural context, on the one hand, and international and regional structures of power, on the other, to outline the ways in which the domestic and international factors merge and intersect to shape a contextual framework within which individual agency towards identity construction could be exercised. More particularly, he draws on a comparative analysis of language policy in post-1991 Tatarstan and Kazakhstan to examine how the extent of language shift in post-Soviet Central

Asia and the Caucasus away from Russian towards the 'titular' language of the respective polity has been a function of both internal realities (evolving dynamics of ethnic demographics at the time and in the course of independence) and external conditions (the extent of the sovereignty the respective polity enjoyed from the international community, on the one hand, and its former metropolitan power, on the other). Further research in this direction might also look into and analyse how the rising prominence of English as a language of global communication and discourse interferes with the dynamics between the titular language and Russian, on the one hand, and the impact the resulting status a respective titular language evolves to enjoy vis-à-vis Russian stands to bear on the respective state's relations with Russia, on the other.

Paul Goble focuses on Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Kazakhstan and conceptualises the process of post-Soviet nation-building there as a function of the individual agency of the state elite, the latter in turn located within the evolving structures of intra-state and international power relations, memory, and the sway of history. History, and hence memory, is further contextualised – temporally and spatially – to demonstrate how the complex interplay of Soviet, pre-Soviet, and immediate pre- and post-independence historical experiences (within the domestic and international realms alike) through which the three states lived worked to interfere with the elite's reasoning and, consequently, conditioned the different ways in which the states' post-Soviet identities evolved at different stages of post-colonial formation. More specifically, the paper examines the dynamics of post-Soviet nation-building – and the individual agency of the state elite driving the process – in Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Kazakhstan as a fluid set of practices embedded within, and hence contingent upon, the lasting – structural – effects of the Soviet 'nationality' policy towards the Soviet republics at the time, on the one hand, and the continuous effects of the evolving domestic (e.g. rapid economic transformation, demographic shifts, the extent of domestic stability/security) and foreign policy developments (e.g. involvement in regional and/or world wars, quest for integration with the international community, focus on particular directions of bilateral and multilateral foreign policy), on the other, to show how the behavioural outcome – and the emerging state identity – have been a complex and fluid function of the intersecting combination of all. Finally, the paper complexifies the notion of power to distinguish between domestic and international power structures, in which the elite and the nations they were meant to guide found themselves embedded. Both evolving and fluid as they are, domestic and international structures of power relations worked to interfere – each in its own way – with the individual and collective agency of the national elite (and the society at large) and, consequently, shaped the dynamics of identity formation in the three states in many different ways.

Picking up from Paul Goble, Natalie Koch focuses exclusively on Kazakhstan and uses a proxy of the country's education policy to elegantly illustrate how Kazakh national identity construction has been a continuously instantiated, if often unintended, function of the elite's tactical pursuit of, and the intra-elite ad hoc competition for, wealth and status rather than a strategic effort to that effect

on the part of a 'coherent state'; how, that is, the evolving content of the Kazakh nationalist project has in many ways been derivative of individual 'egos and desires' across the Kazakh political and administrative landscape and how the elite's use of a nationalist language to justify their personal agendas in pursuit of wealth and status worked to shape a 'myth of coherence' and consequently implicate the population at large (the objects of the nationalist discourse) in enacting – and naturalising – the nationalist discourse in which various educational projects are clumsily wrapped. The chapter also shows the regime-centric nature of the Kazakh nationalist project and the ways in which it has been meant to reflect and continuously worked to shape (indeed, and again, 'naturalise') the hierarchical (subject–object) structure of state–society relations underlying the Kazakh political and social landscape and as such has been unfolding as a continuously instantiated product of the elite's quest for power vis-à-vis the Kazakh society.

The collection's second section examines the many ways in which identity, once shaped, affects the foreign policy behaviours of the regional states, as well as the overall security dynamics in the region. It also looks into the ways in which identity, by doing so, enjoys an intricate, mutually constitutive relationship with the strategic context in which it affects the state and the region. Finally, given the special role Russia has historically played in defining the evolutionary trajectory of the regional states – political and ideational alike – this section also looks into the ways in which Russia itself and its post-cold war policies towards its former colonies have been conditioned by factors associated with Russia's evolving post-Soviet identity.

Focusing on Russia as a post-imperial power in pursuit of its interests and in search for identity, Norm Graham locates the evolution of Russia's post-cold war foreign policy posture towards post-Soviet Central Eurasia within the wider context of the evolving dynamics of Russia's relations with the West and with the world more broadly, these in turn conceptualised as a fluid function of Russia's post-Soviet quest for identity and its search for a new role to play in the post-cold war international setting. The author meticulously surveys post-cold war developments in the region and the world and Russia's tumultuous vacillation between obstruction and engagement in its efforts to define its attitude towards and reaction to the unfolding events to conceptualise Russia's ultimate choice – in the majority of cases – of engagement and its rejection of obstruction as a viable element of foreign policy as a function of its post-imperial quest for 'normalcy' (for a post-imperial 'normal' power status, that is) within the realm of 'civilised' Western nation-states.

With a focus on the unfolding dynamics of political identities in the region, on the one hand, and on evolving patterns of interaction between the post-Soviet states and intra-regional and international institutions, on the other, Rick Fawn analyses the post-Soviet states' choice of "political values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law" – one exemplified by those states' post-independence accession into the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and/or Council of Europe (CoE) – as a fluid function of the combined workings

of internal and international dynamics. The post-Soviet identities that the regional polities embody – and the compound nature of their evolving existence– emerge and are conceptualised as expressed by these states' acceptance, by virtue of the Western institutional membership for which they opted, of the political values the respective Western organisations embody, on the one hand, and their parallel resistance to those values by virtue of prompting and promoting new institutionalisation processes in the region (cf. Ismayilov 2012), on the other. Furthermore, and in congruence with the extent of resistance to Western values the regional states evolved to display, the cognitive structures of domestic polities in post-Soviet Central Eurasia, as the paper also evidences, are tightly intertwined with cognitive structures that come to underlie the intra-regional groupings these states choose to promote, the cognitive foundation on which intra-state socialisation evolves to rest extrapolated to underpin, and consequently to be reinforced by, the modalities of regional socialisation.

Focusing on alliance politics in post-Soviet Central Eurasia and placing the latter in a wider Eurasian and global geopolitical context, Neil MacFarlane examines the ways in which the dynamics of identity politics and the structural parameters of threat perception that the dynamics worked to generate conditioned the alliance choices in the region, on the one hand, and the role other determinants – ones involving the distribution of power and consequent security dilemmas, regime type, and economic gain – played in this respect, on the other, particularly in light of the extent to which the latter worked to interfere with, and were themselves influenced by, the effects of the former in moulding distinctive patterns of alliance behaviour in the post-Soviet region. In many ways echoing the chapter on Islamic finance in his conclusions, the author argues that, while a direct association between identity and alliance behaviour is unlikely in general (cf. Barnett 1996) and has been uncommon in the region in question in particular, security challenges – real or perceived – that identity-based linkages worked to engender served to condition the particular ways in which the states in the region conceived of their national interests and, consequently, underlay the logic by which regional alliance choices have been made. Finally, resonating with the chapter on Georgia, the author also demonstrates the ways in which identity has often been instrumentalised in the regional states' pursuit of domestic or foreign policy agendas and how this effort, in turn, worked to reinforce – and indeed de-rationalise – initially rational and strategically employed identity choices.

Finally, Murad Ismayilov focuses specifically on Azerbaijan and the so far short history of its involvement with the Eurovision Song Contest (ESC) to show how the Baku government tapped the domestic cultural capital it has got in accrued possession to acquire social capital abroad and how the dynamics that underlay this effort set in motion multiple channels by which the country's cultural capital itself – and hence the indigenous pool of cultural sources on which its national identity feeds – became subject to modification and change, not least because the influence it was meant to command with a Western middle class audience only proved achievable through the prior self-destruction of the ethnic