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978-0-521-59968-9 - Nation-building in the Post-Soviet Borderlands: The Politics of National Identities

Graham Smith, Vivien Law, Andrew Wilson, Annette Bohr and Edward Allworth  
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## **Nation-building in the Post-Soviet Borderlands** *The Politics of National Identities*

This book examines how national and ethnic identities are being reformed in the post-Soviet borderland states. The first chapter provides a conceptual and theoretical context for examining national identities, drawing in particular upon post-colonial theory. The rest of the book is divided into three parts. In part I, the authors examine how national histories of the borderland states are being rewritten, especially in relation to new nationalising historiographies centring around myths of origin, homeland and descent. Part II explores the ethnopolitics of group boundary construction and the manner in which such a politics has led to nationalising policies of both exclusion and inclusion. Part III examines the relationship between nation-building and language, especially with regard to how competing conceptions of national identity have informed the thinking of both political decision-takers and nationalising intellectuals, and the consequences for ethnic minorities. Such perspectives on nation-building are illustrated with regard to substantive studies drawn from the Baltic states, Ukraine and Belarus, Transcaucasia and Central Asia.

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## Preface

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Following the break-up of the Soviet Union, one of the most urgent questions to emerge from the critical confusion was how the newly emerging polities would set about creating convincing identities for themselves and their citizens. It was perhaps a foregone conclusion that Russia would inherit the lion's share of the symbols and the history of the USSR and the tsarist empire; on the other hand, it was unclear what resources nation-builders in the fourteen borderland states would have to draw upon. What new tensions would arise out of the choice of symbols and myths, and which old ones would be exacerbated, or alternatively suppressed? Which of the heady mix of religion, language, ethnicity and homeland would come to the fore in any given region? The elusive, ever-shifting nature of the answers to these questions, the separate elements rearranging themselves kaleidoscopically in the very moment when a coherent pattern seemed to be emerging, has become dismayingly plain in the years since 1991. And yet the more complex the picture, the greater the urgency of the task of understanding it.

It is clearly impossible for any one individual to be conversant not only with the languages, histories and diverse political and social cultures of the fourteen new or restored borderland states, but also with the disparate academic disciplines required to arrive at a balanced picture of the changes now underway. Hence, when in 1993 the then newly appointed Master of Sidney Sussex College, Professor Gabriel Horn, persuaded the Fellows of the College of the desirability of capitalising upon the multi-disciplinary nature of a Cambridge college by initiating an interdisciplinary research project within the walls of Sidney Sussex, the post-Soviet states in transition, and more especially the restructuring of national identities within those states, were an obvious choice of subject. The founding members of the team – Graham Smith, a geographer with expertise in Russia and the Baltic states, and Vivien Law, a historian of linguistics with an interest in Georgian language myths – were joined by two College-funded Research Fellows, Andrew Wilson, a political scientist working mainly on Ukraine, and Annette Bohr, whose expertise lies in

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the political and social affairs of Central Asia, Uzbekistan in particular; and by a Visiting Fellow on sabbatical leave from Columbia University, Edward Allworth. We owe a very considerable debt to Dr Viktor Shnirelman, who spent a term with the Project as a visiting Fellow funded by the British Council. In addition to sharing his anthropological expertise with us during that time, and presenting a paper in our seminar series, he graciously agreed to contribute a chapter to this volume. We are most grateful to him for this, and hereby express our unreserved thanks.

Our research has been considerably furthered not only by the resources generously put at our disposal by the College, but also by the magnanimous support of the Leverhulme Trust and the confidence of its director, Professor Barry Supple. Thanks to Leverhulme funding we have been able to undertake field research in Estonia and Latvia, Ukraine and Belarus, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakstan, and Georgia. We are grateful to the Leverhulme Trust too for funding our invaluable Research Associate, Helen Morris, without whom the preparation of this book would have been far more laborious. Ian Agnew, of the Department of Geography, Cambridge, provided vital assistance in drawing the maps and figures for this volume.

In addition, Graham Smith would like to thank the Britia Mortensen Fund and the Scandinavian Studies Fund, Cambridge University, for their financial support. Vivien Law would like to thank first of all the very numerous Georgians who have given unreservedly of their time and effort to assist with the collection of materials for chapter 8. For reasons explained in note 7 to that chapter, it seems imprudent to thank them publicly by name. Others who have contributed include Patrick Hillery, Stephen McKenna, Patrick Sériot, Elizabeth Fuller, Vera Rich and members of the Post-Soviet States in Transition project. Andrew Wilson would like to thank Jim Dingley, Heorhii Kas'ianov, Oleksii Haran, and David Saunders for valuable advice. Annette Bohr gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the Nuffield Foundation in carrying out the field research and survey work for chapter 9. She also wishes to thank Vsevolod Rahr for his invaluable assistance in processing survey data. Viktor Shnirelman would like to thank the Central European University in Prague, where he was a Research Fellow in 1994–5, and the organisers of the 1995 symposium on 'Ideology, Warfare and Indoctrinality' held in Ringberg Castle, Germany, for their support.

We would also like to thank Michael Holdsworth of Cambridge University Press for his enthusiasm for this project and the three anonymous referees for their useful and encouraging comments.

As is inevitable with a multiauthored volume such as this, although each of the four Cambridge-based authors read and contributed to the



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final form of all chapters, individual members of the team took responsibility for particular chapters. The division of labour was as follows:

- Chapters 1 and 5: Graham Smith
- Chapters 2 and 6: Andrew Wilson
- Chapter 3: Viktor Shnirelman
- Chapter 4: Edward Allworth
- Chapters 7 and 9: Annette Bohr
- Chapter 8: Vivien Law

Where a standard English form of proper names or place names already exists, we have retained that spelling; in other cases, and in all transliterations of book and article titles, we have used the Library of Congress system for eastern Slavic Languages and Edward Allworth's system, slightly modified, for Turkic languages as set out in his *Nationalities of the Soviet East: Publications and Writing Systems* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1971). For Georgian, the system chosen is the one which most closely corresponds to that being used for Russian.

Graham Smith  
Vivien Law  
Andrew Wilson  
Annette Bohr

Sidney Sussex College  
Cambridge  
July 1997

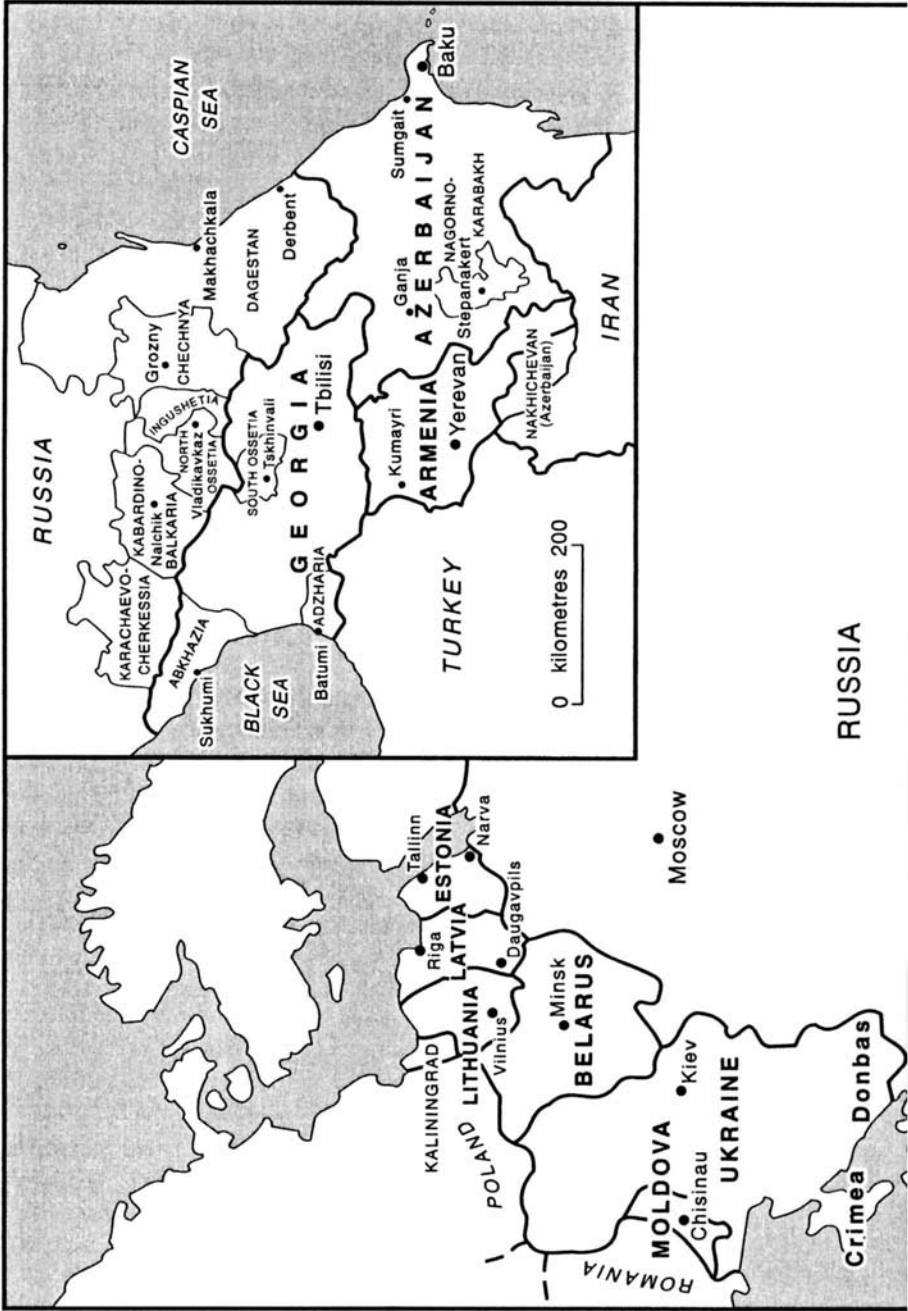
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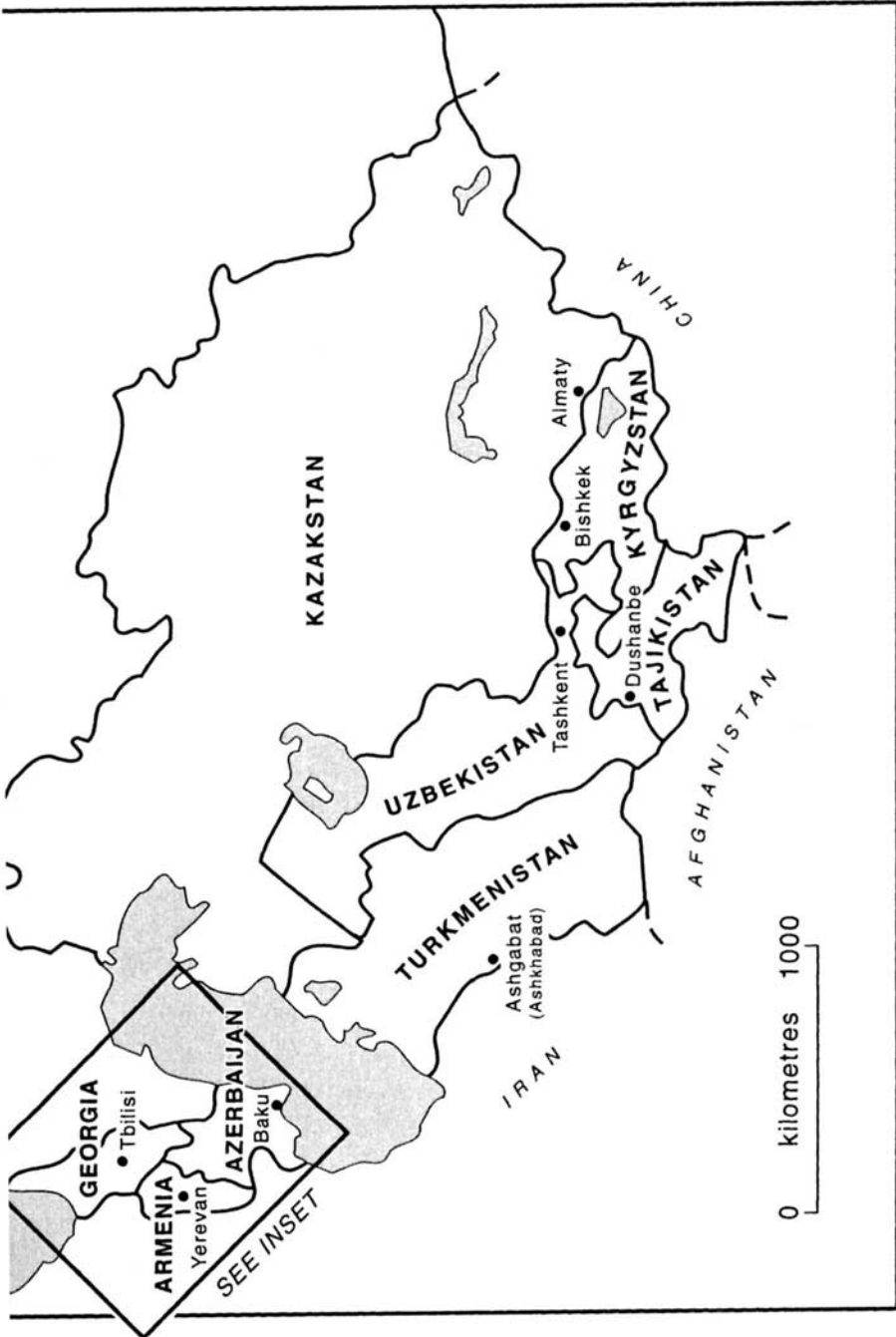


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