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978-0-521-87619-3 - National Identity and Globalization: Youth, State, and Society
in Post-Soviet Eurasia

Douglas W. Blum

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National Identity and Globalization

Is globalization in danger of diluting national identities and “transnationalizing” cultures? How can societies attempt to manage globalization and become developed while maintaining a viable national identity? In a study of three globalizing states and cities in post-Soviet Eurasia – Russia (Astrakhan), Kazakhstan (Almaty), and Azerbaijan (Baku) – Douglas W. Blum provides an empirical examination of national identity formation, exploring how cultures, particularly youth cultures, have been affected by global forces. Blum argues that social discourse regarding youth cultural trends – coupled with official and non-official approaches to youth policy – complement patterns of state–society relations and modes of response to globalization. His findings show that the nations studied have embraced certain aspects of modernity and liberalism, while rejecting others, but have also reasserted the place of national traditions.

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Acknowledgments

I arrived at the topic of this book simply by following my curiosity about an intriguing question: how would cultural globalization affect the states of the former USSR, and how would they seek to respond? I had been puzzling over the dynamics of identity formation for some time, and trying – like so many scholars of my generation – to fully comprehend the dizzying changes that had transpired since the fall of the USSR. This topic was useful to me personally, then, inasmuch as it afforded me a way of thinking through the complexities of globalization and post-Soviet nation building more broadly. But far more importantly, I think in retrospect, I was drawn to it simply out of a sense of intellectual fascination, regardless of its theoretical significance or ultimate publishability. After years of struggling to get tenure while working in the evenings as a marketing consultant, what an enormous pleasure it was to simply let my thoughts run! If the result is sometimes undisciplined (both literally and figuratively), I hope the reader will indulge my whims and excesses. I only wish everyone could enjoy their work as much as I have during this project.

I spent a total of almost six years completing the book, and accumulated numerous debts in the process. First and most obviously, I could not have conducted the research presented here without the very generous support of IREX and Providence College. I deeply appreciate it.

Second, I owe tremendous debts to my colleagues. I have been extraordinarily lucky to be able to draw on the collective wisdom of my wonderful fellow members of PONARS (Program for New Approaches to Russian Security), who gamely withstood repeated drafts of my work and provided countless suggestions. In particular, for their helpful comments and reactions to one or more drafts, I wish to thank Jeff Checkel, Matt Evangelista, Henry Hale, Steve Hanson, Ted Hopf, and Jim Richter. And I also want to thank Celeste Wallander, who, after a presentation of my early research, pointed out in her customarily incisive and to-the-point manner: “It’s about state–society relations.” This was in fact the crucial insight, which had somehow managed to elude me until that moment, and which framed my entire approach from then on. Along the way a

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number of other people also tried to sharpen my focus, clarify some of my misunderstandings, and steer me in more fruitful directions – hopefully with at least some success. I am very grateful to David Abramson, Laura Adams, Patti Goff, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, Ron Suny, and Nina Tannenwald. Special mention must be given to Rod Hall, who not only offered many superb suggestions but also, without a trace of condescension, first broke the truth to me: “You, my boy, are a sociologist, not a political scientist.” I have drawn strength and a measure of consolation from his remarks ever since.

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