The reinvigoration of nationalism studies over the last three decades has, to a large degree, resulted from observations of how post-communist ethnopoli
tics has unfolded in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe: as regimes collapsed, ethnicity came to the forefront as one of the most important fac-
tors in politics. One group of observers presented these conflicts as driven by ethnic identities: group membership predetermined both mind-sets and actions. Nationalism and ethnic conflict were perceived as more or less automatic
cally following from such identities. Other observers emphasised how collec-
tive allegiances were constructed and actively used by state leaders, ethnic entreprenuers and rank-and-file members of the groups, pursuing collective or personal goals. Identities could be mobilised for collective action and the politicisation of ethnicity was, to a large extent, interest-driven. This book discusses the relative merits of these two perspectives through one theoretical introduction and eight case studies of Russian and post-Soviet nationalisms and ethnic politics. Expressing these views as a short formula, I claim that collective identities can be and are being used as mobilisational resources to pursue both group and personal interest. Such identities, however, cannot be conjured out of thin air, but must be based on the cultural reservoirs and his
torical memories of groups.

My book does not purport to contribute to the understanding of the ‘essence’ of nationalism as such; instead, it takes as a starting point the fact that nationalism is a pervasive feature of politics in the modern world. Various kinds
of actors employ nationalist rhetoric and stratagems to further their political agendas and achieve particular goals. A good place to study these processes is the former Soviet Union. As the unitary state collapsed and political authority withered away, ethnic identities, which had already been institutionalised under the communist regime, were used as a mobilisational resource.

The book aims at providing a deeper understanding of contemporary Russian and post-Soviet nationalisms both at the popular level and as a state strategy. It uses different theories for each chapter, since the chapters have different foci. It also aspires to contribute to nationalism theory on a general level by drawing on insights from the various chapters. Each chapter goes deep into the subject matter under scrutiny, while together they give a wide and comprehensive picture of the dynamics of nationalism in Russia since perestroika. I focus on the role of nationalist ideology: ethnic boundary making, the function and usages of symbols, ethnic competition for material goods, in particular jobs, and coalition building in ethnic mobilisation.


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