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PREFACE

Writing a preface is often difficult, especially if one also happens to be a contributor to the book in question. In such a case, one must face a difficult dilemma: to briefly-yet-comprehensively highlight the topic to which the book is devoted, all while purposefully *not* touching upon the very same issues that are to be addressed in greater detail elsewhere in the book. We shall now endeavor to introduce and offer this book to the public by using broad brushstrokes and drawing the reader’s attention to larger themes and questions at hand.

Finding a more fashionable (yet debatable) topic at present than that of identity and the modern individual’s cognition of his or her place in the world would be difficult. Society’s ever-complicated and ever-changing structure determines, to a large extent, the nature of the identity-related problems with which the individual is continuously faced. The high pace of social, political, and technological changes within modern societies both point out and give substance to crises of identity. At the same time, identity is a convenient instrument for representatives of influential social and political groups looking to engage in social engineering. Over time it has become evident that ethnic identity is a particular object of interest for politicians, who often make use of ethno-cultural values in their respective ideological doctrines to attract broad social backing and influence.

The end of the 20th century marked the collapse of the communist system, the breakdown of complex multiethnic state formations, and the growth of the “ethnic factor” in social-political life throughout the societies of the world. Each of these complex processes, which have touched the lives of many thousands of people, gained momentum in the shadow of globalization and have been accompanied by cultural crises. Under these condi-

tions, ethnicity has become one of the most important symbols of identity. Other bases of identity, such as language and certain elements of cultural traditions, have gradually begun to erode in some contexts. This erosion has led to greater emphasis on ethnicity and ethnically-tinged interpretations of history. It is no accident that members of the ruling elite in post-Soviet space have taken to construing the historic and modern identities of the nations they represent in ethnic terms.

Questions concerning identity often draw the attention from scholars from many different disciplines. These complex questions can only be answered through the interaction and cooperation of various branches of scientific inquiry, including, anthropology, sociology, and psychology, among other branches. This collection of articles is one such attempt—that is, it is an attempt to bring together scholars from different disciplines, all concerned with some aspect or aspects of identity-related phenomena. Each of the authors featured within this text examines ethnic identity from a different angle, just as the authors also represent different scientific disciplines.

This book features the work of scholars from various countries in an examination of the factors involved in processes of identity construction, change, and negotiation in the face of processes like migration and globalization. Particular attention is paid to issues involving the interaction of local, regional, and global identities within the South Caucasus and issues regarding Azerbaijani ethno-cultural identity in particular.

Despite the centrality of the concept of identity to this book, the specific issues and contexts addressed by each author are rather diverse. The method of analysis chosen by each author is, for one reason or another, central to his or her own research interests and involves specific sets of questions. The choice of research questions and methods of analysis are not chosen at random; rather, the peculiarity of the issues and contexts invol-

ved help determine the questions and methods best-suited to each researcher and the goals of his or her project.

Various chapters of the book attempt to address the relationship between processes of globalization and loss of cultural identity or how globalization might impact one’s propensity to self-identify in cultural terms. Questions like “Who am I?” and “Who are we?” are ever-present in today’s increasingly interconnected world, and the answers to these questions are demanded just as frequently from average individuals as from representatives of particular groups, cultures, or societies. The authors of this book offer for the reader’s consideration a collection of what are hoped to be insightful and thought-provoking articles that should be of particular interest and value to area specialists and others interested in identity-related issues in general or with regard to the South Caucasus and Azerbaijan in particular.

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