National Purpose in the World Economy: Post-Soviet States in Comparative Perspective. By Rawi Abdelal. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001. *xi*, 221 pp. Index. $39.95, hard bound.

This is an ambitious book that plunges intrepidly into the clash of "isms" in international relations, arguing that realism and liberalism fail to explain the variation in post-Soviet international economic strategies. Instead, Rawi Abdelal advances a "nationalist" paradigm: "What post-Soviet societies wanted depended on who they thought they were" (5). He presents nationalism as a constructivist paradigm. In contrast to statist, materialist realism, Abdelal argues that a nationalist perspective on international politics regards national identities as constructed and contested, and as varying in their content. For example, Russian identity can be constructed in terms of a mythic union of Slavic peoples, or in terms of a Western, European orientation. The outcome of this struggle, which has been going on in Russian intellectual and political life for hundreds of years, has obvious implications for foreign economic policy.

Abdelal argues convincingly that economic nationalism matters in the former Soviet Union. Ukraine, Belarus and Lithuania have very different conceptions of national identity, and he argues that these conceptions have played an important role in motivating their foreign economic strategies. These case studies are very nicely done; I plan to use chapters three through six in an undergraduate course. My only regret about these chapters is that Abdelal does not identify his interview subjects, so it is impossible for the reader to evaluate that material. He then broadens his discussion to include brief discussions of instances of post-colonial politics in the successor states of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the 1920s, Indonesia in the 1950s, and Francophone West Africa in the 1960s. He builds a convincing case that national identity in new states is consistently defined in terms of the dilemma of how to interact with a former colonial power, so the struggle of how to define the nation defines foreign economic policy.

The troubling question is what exactly we are to make of this argument. As description, it succeeds very well. However, what can we say generically about the causes and consequences of national identity? Abdelal opens the book by trying to explain why some parts of the former Soviet Union have pursued reintegration with Russia, others have rejected Russia and pursued integration with the European Union, and still others have followed an intermediate course. In the end, however, he has simply pushed the question back to a prior stage of analysis: why did the countries that emerged from the Soviet collapse choose a pro-Russian, pro-Western, or ambivalent national identity?

The constructivist critique that Abdelal mounts of materialist paradigms would have more force if he could argue that it was the substance of nationalist ideas that explained variation in international economic orientations. However, he argues that there was no important variation in the substance of nationalism across his cases. "Although the dominant *nationalisms* (specific proposals for the content of national identity) that emerged in these three states were similar, their *national identities* (the collective meanings ascribed to nations by societies) turned out to be quite different." (13). He means that the substance of nationalist ideas was the same, but the reception that the ideas found in society varied. National identity, as Abdelal uses the term, is a political

outcome. This renders the argument circular. Economic nationalism arises when economic nationalists come to power, and results in nationalist economic policies.

This would not be problematic if the theory provided some resources for predicting the outcome of struggles over national identity; however, it does not, and probably cannot. Thus, Abdelal points to historical particularities such as the heritage of Lithuanian independence between the world wars and the divisions in Ukrainian society between the Russian-speaking East and the recently acquired West. In his case studies, he seems at times to treat these historical antecedents as strongly determining outcomes, in a way that is reminiscent of Robert Putnam's Making Democracy Work (1992). For example, he endorses the view that the difference between Ukraine and Belarus is largely attributable to the fact that Galicia (West Ukraine) had been a province of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (133).

Yet, as Abdelal also insists, the outcomes of these struggles were always contingent, and could easily have developed differently. One wonders, for example, how the sociology of national identity might be told differently had Mikhail Gorbachev appointed a hardliner like Latvia's Boris Pugo instead of Algirdas Brazauskas as first secretary of Lithuania, and Viktor Yushchenko instead of Leonid Kravchuk as first secretary of Ukraine. Had Ukraine marched to the West while Lithuania remained mired in the East, might we now be told that Lithuania had a weak tradition of national identity because it was a multi-national state, its capital was historically notable as a center of Polish culture, and its elites had collaborated during World War II? Might we find that Ukraine had a strong tradition of national identity rooted in independent Cossack traditions and reflected in bitter partisan resistance to Nazi and Soviet power? The problem is that Abdelal's nationalist perspective does not give us any basis for choosing which historical particularities to highlight as causal variables to explain identity, so any explanation based upon them ends up sounding ad hoc.

Nevertheless, this is a challenging and informative book. It makes a strong case for paying attention to national identity when we try to explain the foreign economic policies of new nation states. If it does not contribute much to the positivist project of building and testing theories, it does focus attention on a substantive blind spot of contemporary paradigms. After all, who else would have noticed a "striking resemblance" (197) between Austria in the 1920s, Senegal and Ivory Coast in the 1960s, and Belarus in the 1990s? (Each sought to perpetuate patterns of exchange inherited from a previous imperial order.) The criticisms I raise will not seem particularly troubling to most constructivists, who are more interested in raising questions and identifying patterns than in testing hypotheses.

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