

Kathleen Collins, *Clan Politics and Regime Transition in Central Asia*, Cambridge 2006 (Cambridge University Press), 376 S.

In recent years, two schools of thought have shaped scholarly debate concerning the political development of Central Asia. The first, characterised by a new institutionalist perspective, is that regional identities (*oblast* and *raion*) shaped by formal Soviet institutional legacies are a primary factor driving the state building process in Central Asia.¹ The second, emphasising a more traditionalist outlook, argues that informal pre-soviet identities are shaping political outcomes.² Kathleen Collins book builds and expands on the latter arguing that rather than formal Soviet legacies shaping the developmental trajectories of post-Soviet transition in Central Asia, it is rather the hegemony of ‘clan politics’, an extensive network of kin and fictive kinship relations, that is the dominant social and political force.

In this volume Collins explores the influence of clan politics on regime transition in Central Asia. Clan politics is viewed as ‘profoundly impacting both the nature and direction of regime transition and the potential for regime viability during and after the transition’ (p. 21). Her argument is supported by a weighty assortment of sources including elite interviews, primary data (newspapers and reports) and secondary sources. Using comparative historical political analysis, Collins explains that the divergent trends of Kyrgyzstan (democracy), Tajikistan (regime collapse) and Uzbekistan’s (autocracy) early transition, as well as their later convergence, is highly contingent upon the influence of kinship clan dynamics.

Collins book asks two questions: why and how do clans exist? And how do they impact on regime transition and durability? In her view, clans persist under three conditions: late state formation (due to a colonial hegemonic influence), late formation of national identities and an economy of shortage. In explaining how clan politics has impacted on the nature and durability of regime transition and long-term political trajectories Collins puts forward a theoretical framework that is underpinned by the logic that kinship (or fictive kinship) bonds produce social norms that reinforce clan identity networks at the mass and elite level. From this emerge patronage networks where resources are distributed along clan divisions. Elite behaviour is constrained by this clan rational and therefore limits the ability of regime consolidation. Clan networks impact firstly on the process of ‘pacting’ and clan balancing during the transition period. Pacts put clans informally behind the levers of power in circumvention of formal institu-

- 1 Pauline Jones Luong, *Institutional Change and Political Continuity in Post-Soviet Central Asia*, Cambridge 2002.
- 2 Edward Schatz, *Modern Clan Politics and Beyond: The Power of “Blood” in Kazakhstan*, Washington D.C. 2005.

tions. Consequently, clan pacts (or absence of them) explain the durability or non-durability of the regime during transition. In the long term, however, Collins argues that clans can have a negative impact on political trajectory and regime consolidation due, in the first instance, to clans using the state as a source of patronage and resources. This leads to 'asset stripping' and the 'crowding out' of non-clan forms of association (political parties, unions or class organisations). Thus formal state institutions are weak while presidents are forced to balance the competing interests of different clan groups placing their legitimacy on an almost constant precarious footing.

Initially, Collins explains how clans persisted during the Tsarist and Soviet periods of Central Asian history. Attempts by the Soviet regime to enforce socialism and eradicate clan influence failed. The Soviet *Kolkhoz* system was co-opted by local clan networks which retained exclusive control, while the policy of *Korenizatsiia* (native cadre development) allowed native clan networks to remain in powerful positions and maintain responsibility for the allocation of resources. During the Brezhnev era the power of clan networks intensified as Moscow allowed a form of indirect rule which allowed for a longevity and hegemony of clan access to power and resources – particularly in the case of the Khodjenti clan in Tajikistan. Accordingly, even though Soviet policies interacted with and shaped clan identities and informal networks, they were also responsible for reinforcing them.

The core of the book empirically demonstrates how the persistence of clan networks impacted on the regime transitions, durability and long-term trajectories of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Collins highlights the significance of the informal clan pacts which brought Akaev and Karimov to power in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan as an explanation for regime stability during the transition, while the absence of any form of clan pact in Tajikistan is proposed as the reason for regime collapse. The stability of pacts are based on three conditions: equal balance of power among clans, presence of a legitimate leader who can broker the pact and stability of military and security forces while a sufficient degree on economic resources to divide among the groups was also important. Moving on, Collins analyses how 'clan-based societies severely constrict the influence of elite ideologies and elites' choices' (p. 208) and therefore, impacts on regime stability. This is evidenced in the case of Kyrgyzstan by the decline in economic resources as the state was stripped of its assets and increasingly placed in the hands of Akaev's family and clan. Consequently, this placed the stability of the early transitional pact at risk and, according to Collins, was responsible for the forcing out of Akaev as president in 2005 due to the preference he was giving to his own clan as opposed to those from the southern regions. Proving regime fragility due to the unstable nature of clan politics in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan is more difficult, however, Collins puts forward a convincing case that both regimes are not only converging towards a form of autocracy but also demonstrate a situation where presidents Karimov and Rakhmonov are slowly

consolidating power and resources within their own families and clans – thus placing the informal clan pacts on a perilous footing. The final chapter attempts to provide a wider comparative analysis of clan politics linking it to historical and contemporary developments in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan as well as parts of Africa and the Middle East and Italy.

While overall Collins puts forward a clear, concise and well grounded case for a ‘clan’ perspective on Central Asian political development, there are four central problems with the approach. First, Collins suggests her approach is not inherently orientalist, as she argues that clan influence can disappear and be removed. However, her argument implies an overall emphasis on the linkage between autocracy and clans as well as the conflict potential of clan politics. She insists clans can only be broken down by the institutionalisation of a Western style market economy. This implies a pre-determinant understanding of Central Asian development that views clans as a form of social organisation which is regressive and non-responsive to democratisation and that their continued influence leads only to autocracy unless, however, they are reconciled with Western methods of economic and social organisation. Second, despite providing definitional clarity at the beginning of the book as the text develops a sense of definitional confusion emerges. In particular the comparative section, aligns a culturally laced understanding of clan with more economic specific concepts such as, clientelism, corruption and patron-client relations. There seems to be little distinction between these terms when Collins is trying to fit the model to other cases. Third, it is possible to observe a certain over-stating of the power of kinship based clan identities. Recent scholarship suggests that identities can be based on wider social networks as opposed to narrow clan kinship identities as the events of 2002 in Ashgabat, Kyrgyzstan indicate.³ Or as in the case of Kazakhstan, the emergence of inter elite cleavages are founded not on kin-based networks but socio-economic cleavages.⁴ Finally, recent events in both Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan point to the restricted explanatory nature of a kinship based clan perspective. The removal of members of Nazarbayev’s family from political office and business interests, such as Rakhmat Aliyev, Dariga Nazarbayeva and Timur Kulibayev suggest that kinship ties are not as important as the clan perspective purports. Also, the smooth transition of power, following the death of Turkmen president Saparmurat Niyazov, which placed Berdimukhamyedov in the presidency was counter to claims the death of Niyazov would send Turkmenistan spiralling into chaos and conflict between competing clans.

Nevertheless, Collins excellent book points to the importance and unreserved attention that needs to be given to the influence of ‘informal politics’ in post-Soviet Central Asia. Individually, both the ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ approaches to

3 Radnitz Scott, Networks, Localism and mobilisation in Ashgabat, Kyrgyzstan. In: *Central Asian Survey*, 24 (2005) 4, pp. 405–424.

4 Barbara Junisbai/Azamat Junisbai, The Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan: A Case Study in Economic Liberalization, Intraelite Cleavage, and Political Opposition. In: *Demokratizatsiya*, 13 (2005) 3, pp. 373–392.

Central Asian politics present a rather exclusionary framework – maybe future studies could consider a midway approach that explores the interaction between the influence of informal politics and practices and the elite level actors and emerging formal institutions. This would allow for a more open approach to the diverse factors and agents impacting post-Soviet political development in Central Asia.

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Zurab Karumidze/James V. Wertsch (eds.), “Enough!” The Rose Revolution in the Republic of Georgia 2003, New York 2005 (Nova Science Publishers), 143 S.

Numerous analyses have been written about the so-called ‘coloured revolutions,’ unearthing the causes that led to the downfall of the (semi-) authoritarian regimes in Serbia (2000), Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004), and Kyrgyzstan (2005). In general, this literature can be divided into two approaches. On one hand, the bottom-up approach identifies the opposition and its ability to mobilize the masses as the primary force that drove the Milosevic, Shevardnadze, Kuchma/Yanukovich, and Akaev regimes from power.¹ Within this approach, we can further differentiate between those authors who emphasize the role of Western governments and international organizations in strengthening the opposition and other authors who downplay the impact of foreign support, emphasizing the home-grown strength of opposition movements.² On the other hand, the state-centrist approach attributes the collapse of the incumbents to their inability to control the state apparatus’ coercive forces.³

Enough! does not side with either approach. Its editors, Zurab Karumidze and James V. Wertsch, eschew larger theoretical questions. Instead, the editors provide us with a rich empirical account of the 2003 events in Georgia, starting

- 1 For example, Eric McGlinchey, Central Asian Protest Movements: Social Forces or State Resources? In: Amanda Wooden/Christoph H. Stefes (eds.) Politics of Transition in Central Asia and the Caucasus, New York/Oxford 2008 (forthcoming); Michael McFaul, Transitions from Postcommunism. In: Journal of Democracy, 16 (2005)3, pp. 5-19.
- 2 While Lincoln Mitchell emphasizes the crucial role of Western organizations and governments, Michael McFaul treats foreign support as less important. McFaul, Transitions from Postcommunism; Lincoln Mitchell, Explaining Georgia’s Rose Revolution. In: Current History, (October 2004), pp. 342-348.
- 3 For instance, Lucan Way, State Power and Autocratic Stability: Armenia and Georgia Compared. In: Wooden/ Stefes (eds.) Politics of Transition (forthcoming).

with a comprehensive chronicle of the Rose Revolution, followed by interviews with some of the key domestic and foreign players (e.g. Presidents Mikhail Saakashvili and Eduard Shevardnadze, US Ambassador Richard Miles, and NGO activist David Zurabishvili), and concluding with five analytical articles by Georgian analysts and a summary article by James Wertsch. The insights that this case study provides are impressive and allow us to reassess the validity of the above mentioned theoretical approaches.

Karumidze and Wertsch provide ample empirical support for the state-centrist approach. Throughout the events, the police and internal military forces remained neutral, hesitating to break up the massive demonstrations of tens of thousands of Georgians who protested against the vote-rigging during the parliamentary elections. As they had not received salaries for months, their loyalty to the government was half hearted.⁴ However, their resolve was also not tested, as President Shevardnadze never gave orders to disperse the demonstrators.⁵ *Enough!* also chronicles how divisions within Shevardnadze's cabinet left the president without a good sense of what happened on the ground, which prevented him from developing adequate responses to the protests. In the end, as most observers and opposition leaders argue, Shevardnadze's downfall could have been avoided, had the president ordered a recount of the ballots or a new election.⁶

Enough! also provides empirical support for the bottom-up approach. As Wertsch in his concluding article argues, "a vibrant civil society, especially in the form of NGOs [and] a free press" were crucial in bringing about the Rose Revolution.⁷ NGOs and especially one independent TV-station (Rustavi-2) had been instrumental in informing the public about the many wrongdoings of the Shevardnadze government long before 2003. During the 2003 elections, they detected and made public numerous incidences of electoral fraud. Finally, Rustavi-2's live coverage of the events, as well as the rallying efforts of the NGOs and the opposition parties, brought up to 200,000 people to the street – a mass critical enough, according to Mikhail Saakashvili, to force the resignation of Shevardnadze.⁸ As Political analyst Ghia Nodia summarizes: "a political opposi-

4 Interviews with opposition leader Zurab Zhvania and then National Security Advisor Tedo Japaridze (Karumidze and Wertsch, p. 39 and 54).

5 Interview with Eduard Shevardnadze (Karumidze and Wertsch, p. 30). In this interview, Shevardnadze admitted that the police and military forces were divided, which discouraged him to order their deployment, to avoid bloodshed. Shevardnadze's hesitancy and the division of the coercive apparatus stands in stark contrast to recent events, during which Shevardnadze's successor, President Saakashvili, ordered a loyal coercive apparatus to dispel anti-government protests with massive use of force.

6 Interviews with opposition leader Nino Burjanadze, civil society activist David Zurabishvili, and Tedo Japaridze in Karumidze and Wertsch.

7 In Karumidze and Wertsch, p. 133.

8 Interview with Mikhail Saakashvili in Karumidze and Wertsch. It should be noted that, unlike most other observers and opposition leaders (e.g. David Zurbabishvili and George Nizharadze), Saakashvili downplays the role of the NGOs with whom the new president had an uneasy relationship before and after the Rose Revolution.

tion provided leadership, the media were crucial for delegitimizing the regime and mobilizing public protests, and civil society organizations laid the groundwork with their civic education efforts and contributed to better organizations of public protests.”⁹

The importance of western influence in strengthening opposition parties, independent media, and NGOs is contested throughout the book. While Shevardnadze identifies the US embassy, the National Democratic Institute, and the Soros Foundation as critical supporters and instigators of the revolution, the majority of the contributors to *Enough!* argue that foreign support was not crucial for the success of the opposition movement. While US insistence on fair elections and non-violence might have given further legitimacy to the opposition’s demands and discouraged Shevardnadze from using force, “long festering social problems and difficulties [...] culminated in the action which we saw after the most massive fraud imaginable in the elections.”¹⁰ In the end, Aleksei Malashenko is probably correct when he argues that Shevardnadze’s fall might have been less the consequence of what Western governments did but more of what they did not do – namely, continuing to support a regime that had entirely lost its early enthusiasm for democratic and economic reforms.¹¹

After reading *Enough!*, it is obvious that neither of the two theoretical approaches can provide us with a complete explanation of what happened in Georgia. In fact, a comprehensive explanation needs to take into account that Georgia’s state and society had constituted one another in ways that eventually caused the collapse of the Shevardnadze regime. As Wertsch rightly states, the weakness of the coercive apparatus was “only the tip of the iceberg. The bigger story is how a weak state in effect allowed NGOs and the opposition media to emerge and fill a vacuum. This, in turn, allowed the NGOs and media to challenge and ultimately erode state authority in increasingly assertive ways” (p. 137).

What remains missing from this book is an account of the reasons that motivated hundreds of thousands of Georgians to take to the streets of Tbilisi. Falsified elections, corruption, and perhaps the spread of democratic values are mentioned in passing. Economic decline and social disruptions are also brought up, but immediately discarded, as “Similar grievances can be found in many other countries, but no revolutions have broken out.”¹² However, Georgia has had more than its fair share of economic and social hardships. No other post-Soviet country has experienced a sharper economic decline and a slower economic recovery. By 2006, the estimated level of real GDP was still well below the 1989 level, while most other former Soviet republics already exceeded pre-inde-

9 Karumidze and Wertsch, p. 102.

10 Interview with US Ambassador Richard Miles (Karumidze and Wertsch, p. 78); see also interviews with Zurab Zhvania (p. 36) and David Zurabishvili (p. 64).

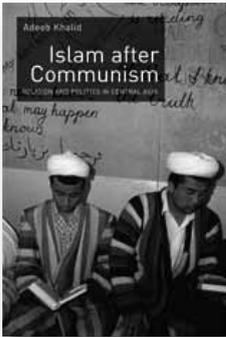
11 Interview with Aleksei Malashenko, representative of the Moscow Office of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (Karumidze and Wertsch, p. 88).

12 Wertsch, p. 132.

pendence levels by the late 1990s. Moreover, due to growing income inequality, most Georgians have not benefited from recent economic gains, condemning more than half of the population to live below the national poverty line.¹³ It is therefore unlikely that social and economic hardships played only a secondary role during the Rose Revolution, as suggested in this volume. Interviews with ordinary citizens who participated in the demonstrations might have highlighted deeply felt socio-economic concerns, which are still widespread in post-2003 Georgia, severely eroding the popularity of President Saakashvili.

Nevertheless, *Enough!* is an empirically rich case study. Every scholar who intends to say something meaningful about the Rose Revolution will have to read this book. In fact, equally well-crafted studies of the revolutions in Serbia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan are needed to enrich our theoretical discussions about the causes and dynamics of the coloured revolutions. Unfortunately, our theoretical conclusions are rarely based on sound empirical foundations. Karumidze and Wertsch not only avoid this fallacy, but help in building these foundations.

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Adeb Khalid, Islam after Communism, Religion and Politics in Central Asia, Berkeley 2007 (University of California Press), 253 S.

In the introduction to this book, Adeb Khalid sets his stall in sharp opposition to accounts that focus on primordialist civilizational discourses and the inevitability of conflict on civilizational grounds. He takes particular aim at the by now (in)famous work of Samuel Huntington and his 'Clash of Civilizations' argument.¹ In framing this study of Islam in Central Asia, Khalid takes issue with such essentialist accounts of Islam and/or those that frame religious belief into mutually exclusive categories of moderate and extreme. For Khalid such accounts 'efface history' (p. 7), ignoring the social and religious diversity of Islamic belief and practice, and the disparate and complicated nature of interactions between Muslims and their neighbors.

Having framed his work in these terms, Khalid goes on to provide the reader with an accessible introduction to Islam in Central Asia in the late 19th and 20th

13 United Nations Human Development Programme, Human Development Report 2006. Accessible at: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2006/>; retrieved on 23 November 2007.

1 See, for example, Samuel Huntington, The Clash of Civilizations? In: Foreign Affairs, 72 (1993) 3, pp. 22-49.

century, beginning with the impact of modernizations such as the Jadiids and their disputes with more traditional religious leaders in the pre-tsarist and Tsarist period, going on to trace the continuities and discontinuities of the Soviet period, where the modernizing tendencies of the Jadiids were initially harnessed towards Soviet ends before being repressed in the Stalinist purges of the 1930s. The fourth chapter, on Islam as National Heritage, details the manner in which religious belief in Central Asia became divorced from the political and to a large extent public sphere, but where Islamic practices became firmly embedded within Soviet discourses (and indeed cultural and social enactments) of 'national' tradition.

His fifth and sixth chapters deal with more contemporary issues, reflecting the title of the book. In chapter five, entitled "The Revival of Islam", Khalid highlights the manner in which Islam has been reintroduced into the public sphere – with the focus largely on the a relatively muted reintroduction of Islam into the public discourse in the post-Soviet period, together with some (largely) symbolic attempts by Central Asian leaders to harness Islam towards their political ends. In a region where the threat of Islamic extremism frequently dominates written accounts Khalid's focus in this chapter is unusual in discussing two Islamic social movements that are usually ignored – the development and expansion of Turkish Gülen schools and the introduction of Tablighi Jama'at, a Muslim 'self-help' organization with roots in India (pp. 123–124). His sixth and seventh chapters, entitled 'Islam in Opposition' and 'the Politics of Antiterrorism' tackle the bogeyman of Islamic extremism. These chapters focus on the impact of the Tajik civil war on the policies of Uzbekistan in dealing with organized opposition, including opposition mobilized through social networks in part based on common Islamic beliefs. In these chapters he successfully highlights the potential for radicalization that repressive government policies hold – and indeed that were realized to a large extent in the 1990s in the form of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), and offers a sober assessment of the extent of the actual (as opposed to imagined) threat that such movements actually present to states in the region. The book concludes with an assessment of the events in Andijan and the future potential trajectory of Islam in Central Asia.

In a world where Islam in all too often branded as a reactionary belief system that fosters violence and terror, Khalid's book offers a timely assessment of Islam in Central Asia in both historical and contemporary contexts. While largely an introductory account for readers new to the region and its history, he offers some interesting nuggets for the more informed readers – two in particular struck this reader – his note on page 212 (note 11) on the Latinization of Central Asia languages in the 1920s and a second note on page 213 (note 19) correcting standard accounts of the delineation of Central Asian states as part of Soviet nationalities policy. Khalid's range and depth of scholarship is impressive – drawing from English, French, Russian, Uzbek and Arabic language sources, while the text is peppered with interesting personal anecdotes that offer the

reader further useful insights. If I have to find fault with this fine book, it would be that it focuses heavily on Uzbekistan to the relative marginalization of other Central Asian states – Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan in particular, are hardly covered, with the text on Turkmenistan somewhat dated by the death in late 2006 of President Niyazov. However this is a minor quibble – given the length and target audience of the book choices had to be made and the heavy focus on Uzbekistan is appropriate given the importance of the state and events there to the region. I would recommend the book to anyone interested in understanding the role that Islam plays in contemporary Central Asia and the reasons why its role is so different from other regions of the world with Muslim majorities. It offers a timely response to essentialist accounts of civilizational clash and/or geopolitical analyses based on crude zero sum calculations that ignore the distinctiveness of the Central Asian experience.

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Askold Krusheknycky, An Orange Revolution. A Personal Journey through Ukrainian History, London 2006 (Harvill Secker), 360 S.

Revolutions always present opportunities for retrospection, analyses, predictions, and speculations. Their attraction for social scientists and politicians increases when the revolutions are contemporary events as is the case with the colored revolutions. The recent avalanche of attempts to effect regime change in a few post-Soviet states was triggered by electoral fraud by which those in government tried to stay in power. Due to the large number of people involved, the scale of developments and the dramatic outcome,

the Ukrainian revolution represents a case study worthy of detailed analysis. This is the goal of Askold Krusheknycky's journalistic book written in the aftermath of the 2004 events and based on solid documentation and subjective perceptions, due in large part to his Ukrainian origins.

The author's connections with Ukraine and his position as a journalist with well-known newspapers has allowed him to reconstruct in a few hundred pages the recent history of the former USSR's second largest country. In a manner close to historical institutionalism, Krusheknycky describes the territorial development of the state, the political leadership and transition period up to the Orange revolution. Special emphasis is placed upon the relationship between Ukraine and Russia and the obedience to the latter of Kravchuk and Kuchma, the two men who served as Ukrainian President from 1992 until 2004. Histori-

cal decisions, institutional reforms, assassination attempts (both successful and unsuccessful) and political games in independent Ukraine are given special attention in chapters with colorful titles: “The Longest Fight”, “Rotten Guys” or “Beheaded”. By juxtaposing facts and hypotheses, the author challenges testimonies often taken for granted such as Melnychenko’s recordings of Kuchma’s orders to kill Gongadze. Detailed descriptions of campaign activities and dirty tricks before and during the October-November elections as well as a comprehensive presentation from a personal perspective of the *Maidan* events complete a well-written book. When scrutinizing the Orange revolution, the author addresses its causes, developments (speeches, actions, negotiations, and behavioral patterns) and short term effects (the opposition’s electoral victory, the failure of the Yuschenko-Tymoshenko partnership in governing together, and the political compromise with Yanukovych).

Despite its pronounced descriptive style and lack of academic elements, this book displays a variety of merits, providing bases for further research. First of all, it is a good and elaborate historical study. With a declared goal of providing an exhaustive picture of what Ukraine was like before the Orange revolution, Krusheknycky sets out facts chronologically, oftentimes combining general aspects, familiar to most of readers with particular biographies and unique statistics. Unfortunately, the lack of sources does not facilitate verifying the accuracy of information. Moreover, the lack of deductive or inductive arguments weakens the message leaving too much room for interpretation.

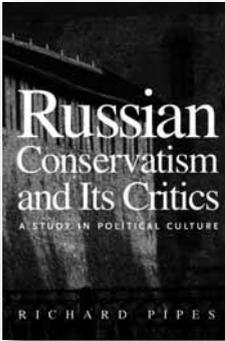
The book provides valuable information to conduct multiple researches by using Ukraine as a single case study. The detailed description of historical upheavals, the confident and comprehensive review of political actors’ biographies combined with a good knowledge of the main constituencies loyal to the candidates in the 2004 elections provide the basis for a study that can illuminate electoral behavior depending on context and launch hypotheses regarding Ukraine’s evolutionary democratization as a result of domestic and international pressure. Furthermore, the Orange revolution can represent a valuable example of how theories of revolution apply to the Ukrainian case. Thus, it can reflect differences between the nature of the 1989 revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe and the Orange manifestation in 2004.

Staying in the field of regime change and institutional reform, the book facilitates further research in the realm of comparative studies. Based on the “most similar” system, a comparison between the colored revolutions is feasible in order to identify trends; the main condition is having comparable data relevant to those states involved in the color revolution phenomena.

From a social science perspective, the book lacks conceptualization, a theoretical framework, hypotheses and references. Moreover, the chosen events, interviews and tangible results are not necessarily representative. The book displays the relevance of a single color revolution in the broader context of revolutionary movements in post-Soviet states, followed by a rather weak and descrip-

tive historical method. However, the book is valuable due to the wealth of raw information, vivid description and the potential it offers for further research. Its biggest merit, summing up, is that it raises questions and opens the floor for further enquiries and answers. This personal stance on recent Ukrainian history helps the reader to understand the forces and mechanisms that drove a successful revolution in the post-Communist world.

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Richard Pipes, Russian Conservatism and Its Critics. A Study in Political Culture, New Haven, Conn. 2006 (Yale University Press), 240 S.

In 1991 when the Soviet Union disintegrated, expectations were high in the West that Russia would take a solid pro-Western path democratizing its political system and giving its people their civil and political rights. Since then it has become clear that such expectations were rather naïve and that neither Russian people nor the current leadership are interested in democratic governance or civil rights. Why do Russians not share democratic and liberal values? Is it solely a legacy of Soviet political culture and upbringing or are there deeper cultural and intellectual reasons for it? For Richard Pipes, professor of Russian history at Harvard, the latter is the case.

In his concise and timely volume “Russian Conservatism and Its Critics: A Study in Political Culture” Pipes masterly traces Russian conservative political thought from the rise of medieval Muscovy in the fifteenth century to the First World War. In the Western context being conservative usually implies favoring less government but Pipes calls conservative those Russian thinkers and statesman that justified and supported an autocratic form of government. Their critics are liberal intellectuals in opposition to the status quo. As the author notes in the introduction, the study of Russian political thought traditionally concentrates on the radicals Bakunin, Belinsky, Chernyshevsky, Herzen, Lenin, Trotsky, and Plekhanov, but overlooks conservatives and liberals. It is the discourse of often overlooked conservatives, liberals and Slavophiles, in and out of government, that Richard Pipes thoroughly examines.

Unlike Western Europe Russia inherited Byzantine, East Roman rather than Roman culture which meant that it did not benefit from Roman law and Catholic theology. Roman law as inherited by the West had emphasized the importance of private property. The sanctity of private property became a maxim of European political thought with even Jean Bodin, the theorist of royal absolutism, denying

kings the right to infringe upon it. The existence of private property was an effective barrier against royal absolutism as it obligated kings to turn to their subjects for financial support and consequently to concede to them a share of political power. In Russia, explains Richard Pipes, the concept of private property did not develop in the medieval period and the crown was able to claim title to all Russia's soil, which meant that the country lacked an independent nobility and middle class.

Another institution that could have played a role in limiting the authority of the Russian czars was the Orthodox Church. In the West, the Catholic Church insisted that the kings must rule justly and in accordance with the precepts of the Holy Scriptures. In Russia, however, a dispute in the early sixteenth century over church lands, between so-called 'possessors', and 'non-possessors' had strengthened an autocratic tendency as it led the Church to give its full support to the crown in return for a right to retain its land holdings. In 1503, the leading 'possessor', Joseph of Volokolamsk, wrote that to obey the sovereign was equivalent to obeying God.

The net effect of these conditions was that the early development of the Russian state led to the emergence of an especially strong form of autocracy. Over the next centuries autocracy was justified on various grounds. From about the era of Peter the Great onwards, a conviction emerged that if autocracy is not the best form of government in general, it is the most appropriate for Russia. Some of the thinkers that helped legitimize autocratic government and whose ideas Pipes examines include V. N. Tatishchev (1686–1750), Nikolai Novikov (1744–1818), Nikolai Karamzin (1766–1826), Iury Krizhanich (1618–1683), Alexander Pushkin (1799–1837), Konstantin Kavelin (1818–1885), Iury Samarin (1819–1876), Konstantin Leontiev (1831–1891), Dmitry Shipov (1851–1920) and Peter Struve (1870–1944). Pipes also examines a liberal criticism of autocracy: Dmitry Golitsyn's attempt to introduce a constitutionalism in 1730, Count Nikita Panin (1718–1783), an aristocrat who sought influence for the nobility, and Mikhail Speransky (1772–1839), a minister seeking to create a government that was accountable to law. Russia's two pre-revolutionary statesmen, Witte and Stolypin as well as Fyodor Dostoevsky are also thoroughly discussed.

Overall, Richard Pipes combines materialistic and ideological factors to explain Russia's autocratic and patrimonial tradition. The author, however, defends the autonomy of ideas pointing out that ideas themselves can become autonomous social forces. As he puts it "socialism ... did not grow out of socio-economic conditions of the age of high capitalism, but emerged as an idea in the heads of a few individuals ..." Conservative political ideas too, although a product of their social, political, and historical conditions, took on a life of their own. These ideas did not help to cultivate conception of society as an entity separate from the state and, as Pipes emphasizes, Russia failed to develop a tradition of partnership between the state and society. Russia's rulers, in the czarist tradition, continue to view the state as their property.

This volume is not merely an exercise in intellectual history of forgotten Russian political thinkers but as Pipes notes an “intellectual history relevant to reality”. It provides a revealing outline of Russian conservative thought with political ideas integrated with historical events. The principle of autocracy remains a very influential idea in Russian political history. *Russian Conservatism and its Critics* is not only a significant contribution to our understanding of Russia’s past but also the ideas that are shaping Russian political culture today and offers plenty of food for thought on contemporary events.

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