Charles King: ***Extreme Politics: Nationalism, Violence and the End of Eastern Europe***
Oxford 2010: Oxford University Press, 256 pp.

The long decade from the collapse of communism to the beginning of the war on terrorism does not yet have a name. It has been interpreted, by those living through it, as an 'end of history' (Francis Fukuyama) foreshadowing liberal democracy throughout the world. Alternatively, it has been interpreted as an 'extinction of Leninism' (Ken Jowitt) opening up the possibility of a new species of illiberal horrors. For those now living in the Baltics, the former vision has merit; for those in the Transcaucasus, it is the latter that captures the ugly reality of post-communist life. Indeed, the Soviet collapse ramified in so many directions that the core communist area today can only be characterised by its past (the 'former Soviet Union') with no moniker to encompass this once unified region, with its own coterie of academic specialists. Charles King, with broad regional expertise and a keen eye for those details that exist mostly beneath the surface, in his essays written throughout that world historic decade (and now compiled in the book under review), captures both its drama and its diversity.

The *pièce de résistance* is his 'Benefits of Ethnic War'. Students of ethnic war typically begin their treatises (usually without evidence) that ethnic war is not only destructive of life (for which the evidence is clear), but also destructive for economic growth and public order. Here King examines Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and Transnistria in the wake of their wars against Azerbaijan, Georgia and Moldova. It turns out that without international recognition (with no claim on IMF or World Bank missions; no seat in the UN; and no embassies propping up the capital city's economy save for the delegations representing the unrecognised sisters) these quasi-states are performing quite well economically and are providing their residents greater security than they would have gotten under protection of the states from which their seceded. Their ability to trade in goods (with the complicity of neighbours and the states from which they broke away, both of whom profit from it) free from typical government restrictions makes them liberal trading states that World Bank missionaries could only dream about for countries to which they are assigned. In laying out the logic of survival in these unrecognised states, and how they prosper in a rather harsh international environment, Charles King reminds us that even at the level of the state, order does not require law.

A second major contribution is his essay on 'Loser Nationalisms'. Ever since Ernest Gellner's agenda-setting works, students of nationalism were lectured on the fact that the denominator of potential nationalisms is gigantic, and however large the nominator of successes, the probability of a successful national awakening is paltry. Yet, most of the work on nationalism is written by the winners, those who dance on top of the winner/potential ratio. King takes up Gellner's implicit challenge and offers a theory of the losers, with historical vignettes on Scotland (whose national aspirations, subsequent to King's writings, may be falling out of desuetude), the American South, and Circassia. His explanation for losers is that their 'antiquarians, émigrés and exiles', who provide the key narrative justifying the rights to statehood, told incoherent stories, with their movements subsequently breaking down in narrative contradictions. While appealing, this theory would be more convincing had King chosen a matched set of successes and examined their ideologies for internal coherence. I'd be surprised if the Israelis, the Croatians, or the Indonesians had tales any less convoluted than the three cases under review. As an alternative thesis,

I once proposed that the key to success was an alliance of those antiquarians, émigrés and exiles with a rising bourgeoisie that wanted export protection but needed their own state to assure it, and who found an alliance with the proto-nationalists I called the 'half-forgotten poets and lonely philologists' to be the key to a successful national separation.[1] Even if empirical scrutiny would undermine King's conjecture, in this essay he usefully opens up the field for the study of the typical loser nationalisms whose histories got forgotten due to the selection bias favouring winners in the field of nationalism.

Beyond revealing the drama and diversity of the long *fin de siècle* decade, King has another goal in these essays, and that is to compare British and American approaches to nationalism and area studies. Alas, these methodological and disciplinary discussions disappoint, as his sociology of science does not approach his anthropology of post-Soviet power. In his overview of Soviet studies, the reader is provided with only a casual sketch of the scholarly landmarks. He writes that the classic Sovietologists saw 'brute force' as the key factor In sustaining communism, with no mention of ideological indoctrination (and the work of Adam Ulam) or centre-local bargaining (in the unsurpassed volume on Smolensk by Merle Fainsod and the equally revealing study on the Soviet prefects by Jerry Hough). He writes useful summaries of recently published treatises on nationalism in the former Soviet world – by Mark Beissinger, by Valerie Bunce, and by Daniel Treisman—and in other regions—by Ashutosh Varshney on India and Stathis Kalyvas on Greece. These summaries make terrific crib sheets for doctoral students preparing for comprehensive exams; but for those who want to understand the data that drove their conclusions, the books will pay off more handsomely than King's reviews of them.

The casual rendering of scholarly literatures undermines his account of why in the UK academies there developed a field called 'nationalism', while in the US the study of nationalism existed only within the disciplines. In his grand comparison of British and American schools of nationalism, Hans Kohn and Karl Deutsch get shipped back and forth willy-nilly across the Atlantic. Worse, the common roots in Vienna and Prague of scholars on both sides of the ocean are bizarrely underplayed. He ignores the Committee on New Nations inaugurated at the University of Chicago that united anthropologists (Clifford Geertz and Lloyd Fallers), sociologists (Donald Levine and Edward Shils), and political scientists (Aristide Zolberg and Myron Weiner), a collaboration that if identified would quickly have undermined King's thesis that the study of nationalism on the west bank of the Atlantic lacked interdisciplinarity. King even ignores the contributions of Robert Armstrong, situated in the American Midwest, an expert on Ukraine, who was a fundamental contributor to the study of nationalism.

More generally, King seeks in this volume to reconcile the historically based area studies approach to the region as practiced in the UK with that of the more disciplinary and analytic approach as practiced in the US. Alas, this goal also remains unfulfilled. When trying to capture the essence of the American quest for explanation, King seems not to know the difference between observations, variables, and values. He seems not to grasp the logic of comparison, and what constitutes inferential leverage in the setting up of a comparative study. His causal conjectures typically have more variables than observations. States for King too often have motives, as if they were people. He challenges conventional theories with a telling exception rather than a statistical correlation. His typical conclusion in exposing the limits of social scientific approaches is that the world is far more complex than American generalisers

had believed. It takes no great insight, however, to proclaim that the world is more complex than previously believed. His goal to find a 'genuine' explanation of nationalism is elusive, even if combining history and political science in the most efficient manner, as all theories are invariably tentative. He writes as if the goal of all students of the former Soviet world is to integrate concepts from conventional political science into the study of Eastern Europe. I hope this is misplaced, and that most of them were interested primarily in understanding the sources of democratic emergence, economic stagnation, state weakness, and violence.

To be sure, reconciling area knowledge with general theory is no trivial task. But appealing for mutual respect for each other's contributions while standing like a boxing referee in the middle, as King seeks to do, is no solution. After all, experimentalists and theorists in physics do not make progress by making nice to one another. They make progress by challenging each other, forcing theorists to take into account anomalies previously unforeseen and forcing experimentalists to design tests of theories ever more complex. In social science, this entails, *inter alia*, learning what the state building literature would have predicted for Armenia, for Georgia, and for Moldova in the wake of imperial collapse; and if the expectations were wrong, proposing alterations in the theory that would account for these cases as well as those previously explained. As an exemplary illustration of how historical cases can feed into political science theory, I recommend the essay by John Ferejohn on elections in early modern England.[2]

But even without sophisticated methodological instincts, King has an uncommonly perceptive eye for exceptions that often suggest new rules. Throughout the essays, the reader knows that he was there, observing the state well beneath the surface of national data archives. He does this with wit, clear prose, equanimity, yet without the bitter and biting irony of Georgi Derluguian.[3] And it is those essays that merit attention and critical review, as his truths are in quotidian details. We learn in these essays that Romanian thugs relied on an eyeglass test to determine who was an intellectual and was therefore implicated in the previous dictatorship. We see Belarus with its fitful gyrations from authoritarianism to populism as the more typical post-Soviet outcome than is Poland. We see from the perspective of a rural family in Moldova, or Azerbaijan, or Georgia, that there is no perceptible difference between living in a 'real country or an imaginary one'. We learn that the highway spanning the Lachin corridor dividing Nagorno-Karabakh from Armenia is one of the best in the region, serving the goal of maintaining a stable equilibrium of an unrecognised state. And we learn that there is at least one state official who explains variation in the high numbers of exported sex workers in his state by the beauty of his country's young women. From these luscious stories, the reader can be assured that in the tumultuous post-communist decade, Charles King circulated through Eurasia and kept his eyes open and ears to the ground, much to the benefit of his readers.

There is a bigger substantive theme that pervades the essays. King is confident that ethnic hatred and loyalty are not spontaneously generated, and when you look closely at the mechanisms of violence, of diasporic identities, and of irredentist movements, you will see the remnants of state institutions, even if those very institutions are feeble, redirecting interests in oftentimes ugly ways. Somehow the once Soviet state is really there even after it has collapsed. For those areas of the former Soviet Union that engross King, that state is nearly invisible when viewed from Mt. Olympus, but what remains are a set of networks and citizen expectations about power that make the state awesome in every-

day life. King doesn't want his readers to forget that beyond poverty, institutional weakness, and ethnic heterogeneity, there are state-like institutions that are responsible for some of the more depressing aspects of political life that persist in the now defunct Soviet world.

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[1] Laitin, David D. 1988. 'Language Games.' *Comparative Politics* 20 (3): 293.

[2] Ferejohn, John. 1991. 'Rationality and Interpretation: Parliamentary Elections in Early Stuart England.' Pp. 279–305 in *The Economic Approach to Politics*, edited by Kristen Monroe. New York: Harper Collins.

[3] Derluguian, Georgi. 2005. *Bourdieu's Secret Admirer in the Caucasus.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Jacob S. Hacker and Paul Pierson:
Winner-Take-All Politics: How Washington Made the Rich Richer and Turned Its Back on the Middle Class
New York 2010: Simon & Schuster, 357 pp.

The United States is today one of the most unequal countries in the world in the distribution of income and wealth, and by far the most unequal among the advanced capitalist democracies. The richest 1% of the population take home about 24% of all income, up from about 9% in 1976. By 2001, the CEOs of the largest American companies earned 530 times as much as the average worker, up from 42 times as much in 1980. From 1980 to 2005, more than four-fifths of the total increase in American incomes went to the richest 1%. In fact, the main beneficiaries of the pro-rich redistribution have been not even the top 1% but the top 0.1% of the population, mainly top executives and managers in the financial services. Its share of total income grew to 12.3%, up from 2.7% in 1974. The highest earners in this tiny group typically take home annual earnings of 50 million USD or more. Hence, America is not only an extremely unequal society, it has become much more unequal during the last three decades or so. Those have been years of massive economic growth, but the produce of that growth has been so distributed that most of it has been absorbed by the super-rich, while no other groups, including the broad middle class, have seen any improvement in their standard of living as a result of better real pay or only as a result of more work, both through longer hours and more two-earner families.

In *Winner-Take-All Politics*, Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson seek to explain this explosion in top-earner income in America. A first possible explanation lies in market effects resulting from globalisation, so that top earners in individual countries, such as America, now earn not only what their national markets pay for their expertise but what it is worth in global markets. This explanation is dismissed. There has been nothing inevitable in the massive shift of income to the top. It is a movement that has been both politically induced and politically allowed, mainly by deregulation, especially of the financial services industry. A second possible explanation, when we move from markets to politics, is in a shift of legislative power from the centre-left to the centre-right on the party political spectrum, in America from the Democrats to the Republicans. This is also dismissed. The shift in the distribution has been long and steady and has occurred under Democratic as well as Republican presidents and Congress majorities.

The authors then look beyond and behind the legislative arena to the underlying political organisation, and it is here that they start to find their own explanation. They first observe a weakening of the position of organised labour. Unionisation has fallen from a level of about 35% of the