

resources to preserve Abkhaz political control, as well as in the struggle for power among themselves. Throughout the period, however, Abkhaz political actors sought to preserve Abkhazia's de facto independence and ensure that ethnic Abkhaz monopolize power at the expense of others, notably Armenians, Russians, and especially Georgians. As she explains: "(T)he power game was constrained by one red line: protecting the titular's monopoly of the field of power, which the dominating Abkhaz basically equated with maintaining the entity's sovereignty" (134–35).

The politics described by Smolnik in post-Soviet Nagorno-Karabakh are in many respects similar. The key difference is that political control by Armenians is not at issue because the conflict led to the exodus of Azerbaijanis and Kurds from territory controlled by the secessionists, turning what had been a multinational region into a mono-ethnic one. As a result, Armenian political actors feel less threatened domestically, which in turn means they have even less incentive to seek accommodation with the metropolitan state than they would otherwise. Again, the author narrates the story of secessionist rule around three key episodes: a conflict between the president and the defense minister in the late 1990s; the election season of 2004–05; and the presidential elections of 2007. As in Abkhazia, albeit in subtly different ways, military backgrounds, active war participation, coercive capabilities, and the possibility of renewed warfare with the metropolitan state (Azerbaijan) are important resources in Nagorno-Karabakh's evolving field of power.

On balance, the theoretical and empirical arguments in *Secessionist Rule* are convincing. The book would have benefited, however, from more comparative control—that is, from greater attention to other cases directed at demonstrating that secessionist rule is different from non-secessionist rule. After all, informal politics and practices, use of traditional networks and administrative resources, personality-driven parties, weak legislatures, a formally strong executive, and appeals to external actors are hardly unique to secessionist rule, particularly in post-Soviet space. Nor are political strategies and tactics that draw on foundational struggles for legitimation purposes, violent or otherwise, unusual. In short, the reader is left wondering whether politics and state-building efforts in Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh are importantly different, for example, from those in the "metropolitan" states, Georgia and Armenia, or for that matter from those in other postcolonial/post-imperial cases involving liberation struggles.

Finally, the book's central arguments would have been strengthened had the author made a convincing case for why she chose Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh as case studies. Are they somehow more revealing about the dynamics of politics in de facto states, or are they otherwise more consequential than, say, in Transnistria or South Ossetia—or indeed than in Northern Cyprus or Somaliland?

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Twenty-Five Sides of a Post-communist Mafia State. Ed. Bálint Magyar and Júlia Vásárhelyi. Trans. Bálint Bethlenfalvy, Steven Nelson, Kata Paulin, Ágnes Simon, Anna Szemere, Robert Young, and Frank T. Zsigó. Budapest: Central European University Press in association with Noran Libro, 2017. xii, 662 pp. Notes. Index. Tables. \$50.00, paper.

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This book is a massive (662 pages) series of twenty-five studies by well-known, liberal Hungarian scholars about the short-comings of the Viktor Orbán-led Hungarian

government. It is an abbreviated version of a previously published three-volume work by Bálint Magyar, co-editor of this volume with Julia Vársárhelyi. Mr. Bálint is identified as a sociologist, a liberal politician, and one of the founding members of the Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ). He served twice as Minister of Education in previous governments. When searching for an apt description of the current Orbán regime, Mr. Bálint characterized it as a “. . . Post-communist Mafia State” (x).

Rejecting other frameworks to describe the existing Orbán regime, such as dictatorial, authoritarian, or illiberal democracy, consecutive included essays have accepted the Mafia State paradigm. Unlike the traditional (Sicilian) mafia which spreads its tentacles underground, in the case of Hungary it has been operating in the open. After the disastrous failure of the previous center-left government, Fidesz (the Alliance of Young Democrats, later known as Hungarian Civic Alliance), gained two-thirds of the parliamentary seats at the 2010 elections, thus becoming a supermajority. The same supermajority was retained after the 2014 elections, thus giving Viktor Orbán control of practically all the institutions of the country.

The ensuing studies zeroed in on how the Orbán government had subverted the previously existing checks and balances of the multi-party democratic system. The 1989 Constitution, which had been written after long and detailed negotiations, was rewritten in 2011 by the Orbán regime as the Fundamental Law. All power was concentrated in the hands of the “godfather,” the head of the State Mafia, that is, Viktor Orbán. The Fundamental Law effectively eliminated local governments, abolished the Supreme Court, and eradicated citizens’ rights to turn to the Constitutional Court. The right to social welfare was also cancelled, just to list some more of the negative aspects of the newly-enacted law. Having unhindered control of the legislature, laws were passed for the benefit of the Mafia State and its supporters, the “family.” All the key positions have been filled by loyal members of the “family.” All areas of politics, the economy, society, culture, and education were shaped as a pyramid and came under the Mafia’s control.

Hungary has been a member of the European Union since 2004. The Orbán-sponsored undemocratic laws have been criticized by the EU, and Hungary was even threatened with sanctions. Orbán, at times, has made minor concessions to avoid losing European Union funding. Back home, however, Orbán has been playing up the “threats” to Hungary’s sovereignty from Brussels. He has been emphasizing nationalism and giving expression to a Eurosceptic attitude. Not only has Orbán defied Brussels’ request to accept a number of refugees, he had built a barbed-wire fence to prevent refugees from entering Hungary from Croatia.

Even the country’s history was not immune to the regime’s revisions. Hungary’s participation in World War II has been minimized, and the atrocities of the Holocaust were blamed on the Germans, as if Hungary’s role in anti-Semitic laws had begun only on October 14, 1944, when the Nazi-supported Arrow Cross Party seized power. The “House of Terror,” a museum which had been opened to depict the country’s suffering under the Nazis and the communists, overemphasizes the terror suffered under the Soviet-dominated communist regime.

Only one of the penultimate chapters of the book has addressed the opposition to the Mafia State. None of the writers had explained how Fidesz succeeded in gaining control of two-thirds of the parliamentary seats. Apparently, the authors have taken for granted that the readers have been following the country’s political developments. How could a group of anticommunist young democrats, mostly university students, the so-called Alliance of Young Democrats, evolve into a dominant political party in full control of all aspects of Hungarian life? There are no explanations for the demise of the post-communist multi-party system. How and why did the parties of the center-right (MDF), the center-left (MSZP), and the progressive (SZDSZ), lose control?

Currently, the Orbán-led mafia has no viable opponents. Attempts had been made to organize a democratic opposition, but they have all fizzled out. A group under the label of Politics Can Be Different (LMP) did surface to oppose Fidesz. It is made up of urban intellectuals and environmentalists, and they have been influenced by European Green Parties. This group has no cohesive program; its efforts have not appeared to effectively challenge the Orbán regime. The extreme right-wing, radical, nationalistic, anti-Semitic, neo-Nazi party Jobbik has been competing against Fidesz and has won twenty-four of the 199 parliamentary seats. Although in some instances the ideologies of Fidesz and Jobbik coincide, Fidesz has been claiming that it has been protecting the country from sliding into extremism.

The aims of these scholarly studies are clear; they are criticizing the mafia-like encroachment of the Orbán regime. However, they do not provide any alternatives or strategies on how to counter the Mafia State.

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The Russian Empire: 1450–1801. Nancy Shields Kollmann. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. viii, 497 pp. Appendix. Bibliography. Index. Illustrations. Photographs. Maps. \$110.00, hard bound.
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Grounded upon an impressive list of renewed books and articles, Nancy Shields Kollmann offers here a wonderful synthesis of her long-standing contribution to the history of early modern Russia. The theoretical architecture of this book relies upon Jane Burbank's and Frederick Cooper's notion of "empire of difference," as well as on Charles Tilly's tension between coercion and capital to classify the multiple forms of states that emerged during the last five centuries (Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital and European States, AD 990–1990*, 1990). Quite interestingly, Kollmann translates this opposition into a space between accommodation and control, much better fitting with the interpretation of Russia as an empire of difference. The first chapter describes the topography and climate of the Russian empire, while the second traces how Moscow rose to regional power during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Chapters 3 to 5 explain how Moscow practiced a politics of difference during this period by maintaining regional cultures and institutions in exchange for loyalty and human (mostly military) and fiscal resources. Indeed, the Russians borrowed pragmatic imperial policies from the Mongols (Chapter 6), as expressed in their vocabulary, institutions, and practices in finance, the military, and politics. As such, Muscovite Russia hardly corresponds to the European cliché of despotism. Of course, this does not mean that coercion did not exist. Quite the contrary, the power of the knout, the army, and the bureaucracy was real (Chapter 7). Coerced mobility, recruitment, and the state monopoly of law contributed to this issue. Meanwhile, Russian trade also developed, production and taxation with it (Chapter 8). The result, Kollman argues, was that by the end of the seventeenth century, the Russian economy was modernizing on the European model. The state completed this process by co-opting important social groups to perform social service to the tsars (Chapter 9). The Russian nobility, however, unlike their European counterparts, had no legal protection of their privileges, including ownership. The same was true for the mass of the population, including the peasants and urban taxpayers, who were a steady source of income and labor services for the state (Chapters 10 and 11). Last but not least, the state accepted other religions but without pushing so far as a real policy of toleration (Chapter 12).