

Kharkhordin, Oleg. *Republicanism in Russia: Community Before and After Communism*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018. vi + 307 pp. \$49.95. ISBN 978-0-674-97672-6.

In this book Oleg Kharkhordin asks two big questions about Russia's post-Soviet condition. The first one centers on society and explores Russia's failure to develop a Habermasian public sphere, understood as an arena where public debate takes place and diverse individual opinions regarding matters of state and society come together to form public opinion. The second one focuses on the post-Soviet individual and explores how Soviet practices of personhood and self-cognition inform the selfhood of post-Soviet citizens and restrict, according to author, the current paths of social and economic transformation and modernization in Russia. These two lines of inquiry are unified (to an extent) by the author's fascination about the origins of *res publica* (republic), understood as a form of government that draws its powers and direction from the public (hence the importance of the public sphere). While most Russian commentators lament the country's return to authoritarianism (that is, lack of democracy), Kharkhordin's focus on republicanism (as opposed to democracy) as the desired path for Russia's future development, as well as his emphasis on the role of community and its direct input into governance (as opposed to electoral politics), does represent a unique analytical approach and a novel orientation in the search for answers to Russia's political and social ills.

The book develops in stages and builds on different methodologies. The "res" in *Res publica* refers to "things," and Kharkhordin starts with the exploration of the material dimension of potential republicanism in Russia. Between 2005 and 2007 his research team conducted fieldwork in Cherepovets and St. Petersburg exploring actor-networks at the level of housing condominiums and the city as a whole. Where residents had access to management boards in housing condominiums, they were able to improve the safety and cleanliness of their surroundings. At the city level, where such access was not available, the researchers found urban machines that were efficient at "pumping up more pride than clean water" (p. 62).

This empirical work then gives way to the discursive analysis featured abundantly in the author's earlier works. His focus is on the historical evolution of the terms "social," "public," and "socialness" in Russia starting from the eighteenth-century usage exemplified by Catherine II and Aleksandr Radishchev, and, then, with the specific emphasis on the nineteenth-century intellectuals such as Konstantin Aksakov and Vissarion Belinsky. The discursive analysis veers between two main ideas. The first is that a vibrant public sphere never emerged in Russia due to the suppression of aristocratic dissent that culminated in the repressions that followed the 1825 Decembrist revolt. But, introducing the second idea, Kharkhordin also notes (following Dmitry Kalugin) that the public in Russia "had never formed into a potent force in Russian history because the cultural resources ... were not present or deployed with the necessary resolve" (p. 147). Kharkhordin complements this historical analysis with the discussion of the contemporary usage of the terms "social," "socialness," and "public," and building on Hannah Arendt he argues that the common Russian perception of the social as boring, oppressive, and stifling results from the Soviet deployment of this term and its derivatives under the rigid control of the Soviet state.

A second line of empirical inquiry builds on the study of Russian technopreneurs (technological entrepreneurs) conducted in 2011 and 2012 and set in relation to their peers in South Korea, Taiwan, and Finland. The main finding from this study emphasizes the Soviet legacy of a desire to find the Divine in the process of creating technological products—a desire that, according to Kharkhordin, hinders the focus on implementing the products in mass production and, thereby, impedes country's chances for modernization.

The book features an impressive array of sources ranging from such classics as the Bible, Cicero, Shakespeare, Orthodox saints, Karl Marx, and Hannah Arendt, and to more current researchers such as Vladimir Bibikhin, Kapitalina Fedorova, Dmitry Kalugin, Boris Gladarev, and others. Agreeing with Gladarev, for example, Kharkhordin argues that Russia has "no register of public language that would allow a group of like-minded people to effectively come to a non-emotional judgment on its public position as a group and agree on its actions." He also highlights that in

Russia there is no “infrastructure of access, either to the powers that be or to a broader quietist and nonchalant public” (p. 155). But “to rise up from things in common to *res publica*,” a community needs the “infrastructure of equal access to sites of law production” to establish “*iuris consensus*, a common sentiment in things legal” (p. 68).

Many Russia commentators would agree with the book’s observations about the significance of suitable linguistic and, presumably, institutional resources for public access to decision-making. But the final conclusion of the book is disappointing. In it Kharkhordin states that, “the hope for republicanism then would lie in abandoning euphoria and buzz. ... One should distance oneself from the sort of euphoric access to the Divine ... that we have residually received from the Soviet civilization. Instead one should rely on secular and enlightened communication to reveal a mortal character whose deeds are worthy of earthly immortality” (p. 253). From the point of view of a political scientist trying to understand the recent travails of contemporary Russia, abandoning the euphoria of creativity does not seem to offer a plausible answer to Russia’s contemporary ills, even if a plea for more discipline and less arrogance might resonate with some observers. There seem to be many more proximate causes for Russia’s problems and, therefore, potential ways forward than those related to the alleged Soviet person’s desire to come closer to God. The book’s republican sentiment and the author’s attempt to trace the republican ideas in Russia’s intellectual history are, nonetheless, worthy of attention and further discussion.

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Lebedeva, Maria M. *Russian Studies of International Relations: From the Soviet Past to the Post-Cold-War Present*. Lancaster: Gazelle Book Services, Ltd., 2018. 200 pp. £35.00. ISBN 978-3-83820-851-0.

As a 2015 UK House of Commons report on the war in Ukraine noted, reduced capacity to understand Russia caused the West to “sleepwalk” into the recent crisis. An area where Western knowledge and interest clearly has been lacking is the field of Russian international relations (IR). Marina Lebedeva bases this book on the premise that knowledge of national approaches to IR “is one of the keys to understanding the foreign policy of a particular state.” As such, a better appreciation of the field makes it “possible to better understand and foresee Russia’s foreign policy steps in the international arena” (p. 19). The book offers its readers a concise and clearly written overview over developments in the discipline of Russian IR since the beginning of the twentieth century with a particular emphasis on the state of the field today. Its systematic review of major authors categorized by issue area in the book’s second part, moreover, also provide a useful reference guide for Western academics wishing to increase cooperation with relevant colleagues and institutes in Russia. The book is essential reading not only for academics and students with an interest in contemporary Russian politics, but also for those dealing with questions pertaining to the universality and objectivity of Western approaches to IR.

Lebedeva’s book presents the fascinating journey of Russian IR from an almost exclusively Moscow-based, heavily ideological and practically oriented sphere of diplomatic activity during Soviet times into a diverse field of scholarship and education today. Her account of how domestic political developments and changes in the international order influenced IR as a field of study is particularly interesting. In Soviet times, Marxism-Leninism was the only recognised methodology. However, preoccupation with superpower competition during the Cold War led to the emergence of “national interests” as a dominant category of analysis and popularized approaches to the study of IR that Lebedeva describes as “intuitive realism.” The process of détente in the 1970s shifted the confrontational approach of Soviet IR studies to an interest in understanding interaction and cooperation in international relations. Gorbachev’s perestroika and New Political Thinking, moreover, not only led to the pluralization of political debates domestically, but also resulted in a more multiparadigmatic field of IR and, coupled with growing access to previously inaccessible IR international scholarship, stimulated an interest in liberal approaches. Path-dependence has also