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Globalisation of Nationalism

The Motive-Force Behind Twenty-First Century Politics

Edited by Liah Greenfeld

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Introduction

Collected Volume as an Experiment

Liah Greenfeld

We live in a time of confusion. So many changes occurred in our political world that contradict the image we had created of it just a quarter of a century ago, that we, political scientists, the presumed possessors of objective knowledge of politics on which its practitioners and participants can confidently rely, are reduced to the position of bewildered observers, reporters – weathermen keeping the record of yesterday's snowfalls and trying to describe as best we can what we see from the window today.

What happened in this short quarter of a century? The Cold War that defined our understanding of politics – and much of political science – during the previous forty-five years was (ostensibly) won by the West, the Soviet Union collapsed, and the bipolar world disappeared. Politics writ large was no longer the ideological opposition between liberal democracy and communist totalitarianism, representing the social forces of good and evil. History itself, it was said, reached its end and what we had understood of its course until then became of no use to us. The focus of much of political science shifted onto the process of democratisation, primarily in Eastern Europe and the formerly Soviet areas, but elsewhere as well, because now it was expected everywhere. In the meantime, what was seen as the emergence of capitalism as the victorious economic system gave a major boost to the theory and studies of globalisation in political economy.

These flavours of the first post-Soviet months were from the start embittered, however, because both democratisation and globalisation lacked the douceur that the end of history led one to expect. While the end results of the two processes were assumed to be positive, the means chosen to achieve them in the overwhelming majority of cases were those of violent nationalist conflict. Indeed, the resurgence, following the collapse of communism, in Europe and Central Asia of virulent ethnic nationalism of the kind not seen since World War II was a major surprise for political observers, second only to that collapse itself. Nationalism, generally disregarded before in the social sciences as a subject of mainly historical interest, therefore, also emerged as a fashionable specialisation in both political science and political sociology.

In general, developments in Western Europe appeared to be more in line with the globalisation theory than the claim that nationalism – and national conflict – was returning as the major political force. The newly independent republics of

the Soviet Union were rocked by nationalist passions, which seemed only to have waited for the lifting of imperial controls to erupt, and such long-existent transnational entities as Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia (just years ago regarded by the neighbouring Italy as the model for transcending provincial rivalries) were disintegrating, whether peacefully or violently, into ethnic national units. Meanwhile, France, Germany, Italy, and the Benelux countries established the European Union, dedicated to the principles of liberal democracy, with its own transnational citizenship and, within a decade, common currency, and growing membership, eventually reaching a population of over half a billion. But, in Western Europe too, nationalist passions would run high in the Basque country and Catalonia in Spain, among the Flemish in Belgium, and in Scotland.

Before we could figure out the logic behind these contradictory trends, several other international developments contributed to our confusion. The spectacular terrorist attack on American soil on 11 September 2001, which was within hours interpreted as religiously motivated, virtually wiped out the Cold War and the Soviet Union from our collective memory, temporarily eclipsed the optimistic projections of democratisation and globalisation, born out of the latter's collapse, and diverted attention from the resurgent and ever-present nationalism which rendered them problematic. Suddenly, the world seemed to be structured along another historical divide and riven by another fundamental conflict: the divide and conflict between modernity and Islam, which was resistant to it. Since September 2001, international politics – and history – was, therefore, in addition to democratisation, globalisation, and nationalism, framed by the confrontation of modern, secular, and pre-modern, religious, identities and cultures. The very large numbers of immigrants from North African, Arab, and other Muslim societies in Western European and North American countries that were considered standard bearers of liberal democracy made this international conflict a central issue in domestic Western politics. Governments and publics would attempt to reconcile their humanitarian commitments with security considerations.

In the meantime, Russia has recovered from its recent embarrassment and reverted to the old authoritarian ways. Its infatuation with liberal democracy, if such it was, proved short lived, its nuclear arsenal indestructible, its natural resources inexhaustible. With the West otherwise engaged it has had the opportunity to flex its imperial muscles in Moldova, Georgia, and the Ukraine, among other things annexing the Crimea. On the other side, in the United States, the temporary demise of its Cold War antagonist paradoxically resulted in a loss of self-confidence and dilution of identity, as if, no longer seeing constantly what they were opposed to, Americans forgot what distinguishes them. American liberals, young and old, would have equality at the expense of liberty, and the democracy to which the great republic continues to profess allegiance is more and more often understood, if not named, as the Soviet-type, i.e., social (or socialist) democracy. Thus, after all, the West and the (European/post-Soviet) East do meet and, as political scientists predicted in the 1960s, converge, but with the East standing its ground and the West, befuddled, drawing closer to it. Our victory of a quarter of a century ago turns out to be Pyrrhic.

And if it is not Pyrrhic, it turns out to be irrelevant. For these twenty-five years had more in store for us, already numb from the quickly succeeding developments which contradicted all our political notions and each other, and unable to process (or even register) them. In this quarter of a century, we have been forced to discover China. Our notion of its existence before was purely theoretical. In the course of a few recent years, it has risen before our eyes, colossal, impassive, and enigmatic, like a giant mountain range suddenly erupting out of the earth in place of rolling plains. This tectonic change in our political geography demands the redrawing of every conceptual map by which we have ever been guided in our understanding. China's population is four times larger than that of the United States, which has lost its direction, almost three times larger than the half-a-billion strong but wobbling European Union, ten times the size of the dwindling population of Russia. It is a monolith determined to play a role commensurate with its powers on the world stage. It has entered our politics. This new presence presupposes the redefinition of both the West and the East.

Contrary to what we believed twenty-five years ago, is political reality a disordered coexistence of heterogeneous processes, each driven by its own logic or is there, after all, a method even behind the madness of this quarter of a century, packed with surprises? What, if anything, unites:

- the Cold War and the contradictory post-Cold War trends of regional disintegration and integration;
- the struggles for national sovereignty and the willing devolution of national sovereignties to transnational bodies;
- the Eastern European transitions from the social democracies in politics and socialism in the economy of the age of communism to the liberal democracies in politics and capitalism in the economy, and the simultaneous drift in the opposite direction in traditionally liberal democratic and capitalist societies;
- secession and unification;
- increasing stress on particularistic identities and globalisation;
- downplaying of religious affiliations in civic life and the emergence of militant religion as a major political force
- and the tremendous, reality-transforming expansion of our political world due to the ascendancy of South-East Asia, especially China?

The argument of this volume is that, behind all these seemingly heterogeneous developments, lies nationalism – that they all result, specifically, from the globalisation of national consciousness.

It is unusual for edited volumes such as this to have an argument. It is also unusual to present an argument as this volume does. Indeed, this volume breaks away from convention in several ways. Its contributors represent a truly global community, escaping '-centrisms' of any kind and bringing to bear on the overall discussion numerous rarely combined cultural perspectives. The plurality of the authors are Europeans, three Western Europeans – Jocelyne Cesari, Emmanuel Dalle Mulle, and Axel Marion, who come from France, Italy, and Switzerland,

Chapter One

Russia's Identity of Perpetual Crisis

Nina Khrushcheva

Russia is a 'revolutionary' country, advancing through negation rather than creation; it moves forward not through evolution – a slow step-by-step development when progress occurs over time – but through perpetual revolutions – a constant upheaval and crisis. This revolutionary, crisis-driven permanence is a cultural trait that Alexander Herzen encompassed in his immortal maxim, 'Disorder will always save Russia' (quoted in World Policy Institute 1992: 49).[1] The belief has been a consolation and an inspiration for generations of Russian leaders, revolutionaries and reformers alike, who in their desire to transform or preserve the state have relied on or fought against their country's traditional inertness, stagnation, and communal order that spread across its vast eleven time zones.

Often their rebellious, reforming efforts would create a rupture – from the Decembrists' uprising to the People's Will underground to the Bolshevik Revolution to the attempts at reforming the Soviet and post-Soviet state – in the 1950s under Nikita Khrushchev, during Mikhail Gorbachev's 1980s, in the 1990s of Boris Yeltsin, or even in the lengthy 2000s under Vladimir Putin, whose original intent was to modernise Russia and to create better accord with its European neighbours (Khrushcheva 2014).

However, despite these efforts, neither the late tsarist system nor communism, nor post-communism was able to generate a viable alternative to a society where changes, when they happen, always result in destructive and malfunctional developments. In all cases the replacement of the old regime has been twisted and painful beyond expectations, in the long run yielding disappointingly insufficient results.

Not that the change from monarchy to communism or post-communism was insignificant – the abolition of serfdom of the late tsarism, total access to culture and education in Soviet Russia, international travel and relative freedom of expression in recent decades … But this was not the change that generations of tsars, Bolsheviks, reformers and revolutionaries had promised – today Russia's institutional structures of legal and civil society remain as underdeveloped as they were during the times of the seventeenth century's Peter the Great; there is little social responsibility and very limited social consciousness. One autocracy ends, but autocracies continue into the future, changing in name and, due to modern influences, in the measure of brutality – Ivan the Terrible, Joseph Stalin, Vladimir Putin, because, in the words of Isaiah Berlin, the efforts of those trying to reform Russia, be they leaders or rebels, were invariably 'the mixture of utopian faith and brutal disregard for civilized morality' (Berlin 1969: 17).

Almost two decades ago, Jeffrey Sachs, a Columbia University economist and early advisor to the first Russian president Yeltsin, suggested that Russia's geography may prove to be deterministic: it 'conditions events' and keeps 'a powerful hold even in our supposedly globalized economy ... Proximity to the West induced better policies' (Sachs 1999) throughout the post-communist region.

Indeed, Russia's geography – its position between the West and the East – can provide some answers to the country's political, social, and cultural development. Russian philosophers and foreign experts, from Pyotr Chaadaev to Mikhail Epstein to Sachs, have marvelled over the mystifying nature of this nation, whose land occupies almost the entire continent, stretching over seven million square miles from Germany to Japan: from the tsars to the terrorists, they all offered salvation but not solutions; deeds but not details.

Robert Putnam, in his book *Making Democracy Work*, once postulated something both disturbing and directly relevant to today's Russia (Putnam 1992). Putnam's study began as an experiment. In the 1970s, Italy established a slew of new regional governments. Their formal structures were virtually identical, but the regional soils in which they were planted were not. Italy's regions differed in their topographies, their educational attainments, and their levels of economic development. Putnam set out to measure the new governments' performance and, if some regions turned out to be more successful than others, to ask why.

Sure enough, some new authorities did better than others. They were innovative and well administered, and passed their budgets more or less on time. In these regions, citizen satisfaction with the new tier of government was high. In other regions, actual performance was poorer and the citizens were dissatisfied. Emilia-Romagna and Umbria came at the top of the list, Calabria and Campania at the bottom.

Why? The obvious answer was economic development: the richer the region, the more effective its regional government. But, according to Putnam, this explanation will not do. The central government skewed its grants heavily in favour of poorer regions, but often governments in those regions could not even spend the money. Moreover, in the rich north as much as in the poor south, the most successful governments turned out not to be in the most economically favoured areas. Moderately prosperous Umbria, for example, outperformed richer Lombardy, Piedmont, and Liguria.

Putnam also dismissed other possibilities, such as levels of social and political strife, educational attainment, and urbanism. Initially all seemed plausible to him; none checked out. Even the role of the Communist Party – in Italy, the party of clean government – proved marginal.

Putnam's unsettling conclusion was that regional government in modern Italy works best in regions with high levels of 'civic community' – patterns of social co-operation based on tolerance, trust and widespread norms of active citizen participation – and that the distribution of civic community among the regions in present day Italy was clearly evident as long ago as the thirteenth century. He contrasts, for example, the republicanism of medieval Florence, Bologna, and Milan with the autocratic patron–client politics of the Neapolitan and Sicilian

kingdoms. Italy's past lived on, decisively, in its present. Putnam argues that economic development does not always explain political development, but it is 'civicness' that matters.

Putnam's thesis is unsettling because it suggests that political leaders in un-civic regions and countries lack the fundamental building blocks out of which a stable democracy can be built. Putnam implies, although he does not quite say so, that 'civicness' is almost impossible to create where it does not already exist. Social capital is far harder to accumulate than physical capital. Patron–client relations, with their cycles of dependence and norms of favour seeking, are very difficult to eradicate.

These implications are relevant to the study of Russia. They could also shed light onto the post-communist development of some other former Soviet states, such as Ukraine, the country that has been an intrinsic part of Russia's history. For example, could it be that the Maidan uprising of 2013–14 against Putin-supported president Victor Yanukovich to forgo an Association Agreement with the European Union in favour of Russia and the 2004 democratic Orange revolution when the Ukrainian nation decided not to accept the first rigged Yanukovich elections, were an indirect consequence of the originally democratic Kievan Russia of the 900–1000s, with its first East Slavic 'legal code' and the tradition of the *veches* (popular assemblies)? Harvard historian Richard Pipes long insisted that Russia cannot exist without Ukraine (Motyl 2011); translated as the Edge (of Russia), it is also known as *Malorossiya* or Small Russia. When threatened with a Ukrainian push for independence, the Kremlin has never hesitated to suppress it. Modern Russia, after all, derived from Kievan Russia, and the Ukrainians have contested their supremacy and independence ever since. In contrast, which, if any, parts of Russian society possess the necessary 'norms and networks of social engagement'? How does it affect our contemporaries that the people-shared governance in Kiev, or later in the fifteenth century in Nizhny Novgorod and Pskov, was completely overtaken by the despotic Muscovite princes? Should we write off Russia's chances or find a way to encourage Russians to develop civic norms?

To draw further upon Sachs' 'geographical' idea, it is the vastness of the Russian land that has long been its handicap: in order to get anything done rationally and systematically, there have to be boundaries and laws, but in Russia the only order that matters is the one that comes from the top, from the tsars or the communist apparatchiks. Russia did acquire its many times zones, but without the sense to map out borders it can manage, or to create reasonable conditions for its people's lives. We are capable of sending a man to space, of making a Sputnik or the best (and only) computer for, say, KGB monitoring, but are hardly able to arrange consumer production of decent washing machines. Like its giant land, Russia's interests are spontaneous and spread everywhere. A contemporary cultural historian Mikhail Epstein notes that Russian successes are generally due to either instructions from the top or dilettantism and inspiration – there is no method behind them: 'Our hero was the Jack of all trades: a tailor, a tiller, and a reed-player [*i shvetz, i zhnetz, i na dude igretz]*. Each hand does

miracles: incredible dress designs, incredible harvests, incredible melodies – while in reality we had convicts in rags and starving millions' (Epstein 1992: 99).

Over a century before Sachs and Epstein, Pyotr Chaadaev in his *Philosophical Letters* also tried to clarify Russianness:

> We still look and act like travellers. No one has a definite sphere of engagement; we have no rules for anything; we don't even have a home. Nothing that can link us . . . nothing durable, nothing permanent; everything flows by, goes by, without leaving an imprint either within or outside us.
>
> (quoted in Taranov 1996: 553)

He suggested that 'the most important feature of our historic make-up is the absence of free initiative in our social development' (Chaadaev 1991, 527). A specific character of Russian culture, according to Chaadaev, was that it was 'brought from elsewhere, and imitative. Russians take on only absolutely ready ideas, and so do not inherit experiences related to making these ideas work in reality' (Chaadaev 1991: 326).

In simple terms, Russia can be explained as the *Un-West*: its values are not specific or original, as say, Confucianism in China; they are more of what the West is not, Western values with an opposite sign. In Russia *mercy* [*miloserdie*] stands for the Western *justice*, *truth* for *rules*, *spirituality* for *interests*, *trust* for *responsibility*, *love* for *contracts* and *personal relationship* for *state law*. Because of its oppositional nature, Russia is a culture, whose existence is best described by pendulum swings between imitation and the following negation of the earlier adopted influences.

Due to its size and the formative stance of being 'against [the West]', Russia's is a *hypothetical* culture. Lacking much of method or organising principle except for just being big and great, Russia has been run by despots for most of its history. Predominantly serfs until only a century and a half ago, Russians end up living in fiction more than reality – today it is the virtual reality Putin relies upon to keep people occupied and entertained as Russian TV is dominated by channels that are either run directly by the state or owned by companies with close links to the Kremlin (BBC, 'Russia profile – Media', 25 February 2015). But, in all ages of Russian history, one has had to invent an acceptable form of the everyday in order to justify constant oppression – and most of the justifications come from the notion that others are out to get the Russians, the victims of general injustice. In this reality the state, either tsarist or Soviet or Putin's, always comes first. Individual hard work and international competition, measured in GDP figures or quality of life, count for much less than the belief that the government would protect and secure Russia as a glorious – feared and respected – nation. For this glory, many Russians are often ready to accept their debasement and enslavement. In fact, progress in Russia is rarely seen as a means of improving people's lives, but as helping the state prove itself to be superior to other states.

Russian history has provided ample evidence of our grandiose, yet imitative nature: Peter the Great's famous Westernizing reforms manifested themselves in