

successfully disentangle its trade with Russia, and what products can it profitably export to the EU or elsewhere? Yet in their concluding chapter Hale and Orttung note one important “non-finding”: the chapter authors place very little weight on Russia as a negative influence prior to 2014, attributing most of Ukraine’s challenges to domestic rather than external causes.

Another set of questions revolves around the central notion of “advancing reform,” especially since twenty-five years have passed since Ukraine first embarked on this path. For example, the chapter on the economy by Alexander Pivovarsky blames Ukraine’s problems on a lack of reform, but the discussion makes reform sound like an end in itself rather than a means to better outcomes for Ukrainian citizens. Other chapter authors point out that simply calling for further reforms is of limited utility. As Paul D’Anieri notes in a useful introduction, “the lack of reform in Ukraine seems in many respects to be overdetermined” (9). In their concluding chapter, Hale and Orttung acknowledge the “fundamental reform challenges” of a more structural nature, such as the impact of the communist legacy, the identity divide, and the long historical reach of patrimonialism /patronalism. Yet they do draw out some policy conclusions from the chapters: a divided-executive constitution; proportional-representational voting; political decentralization both to check state power and to take some steam out of identity conflicts; a policy of mnemonic pluralism; the de-monopolization of the economy; professional organizations for judges and civil servants; reforming the traffic police and expanding e-government.

Yet the authors acknowledge that even these steps will prove challenging. For example, the chapter by Alexander Libman and Anastassia Obydenkova points out the trade-off between radically transforming the bureaucracy while simultaneously maintaining, if not increasing, state capacity. They also note how the imperatives of the on-going conflict with Russia can contradict the perceived necessity of reform, with the former a potentially useful pretext for ignoring the latter.

The seemingly intractable nature of these problems—revolution without reform—leads a number of the chapters to suggest that outside institutions, most especially the EU, might make greater use of conditionality, by making reforms a requirement for external support. Yet one problem in doing so is that, as Pivovarsky concedes, “social preferences” remain an obstacle to reform, since “a large share of the population depend[s] on public pensions and other social transfers and, thus, prefer[s] the status quo to disruptive change” (234). Likewise, D’Anieri notes, “what counts as reform to some observers or participants appears to others as an unacceptable injury to their interests” (13). Thus EU conditionality, even were it to be imposed, might contradict democratic preferences, leading to further social disruption, or resulting in the sort of populism seen elsewhere in Europe. Yet pointing this out only heightens the dilemmas so usefully addressed in this volume, since for Ukraine the status quo is also unacceptable.

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Building an Authoritarian Polity: Russia in Post-Soviet Times. By Graeme Gill. Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 2015. ix, 230 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Figures. Tables. \$28.00, paper.
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Graeme Gill has written a concise, readable, yet remarkably detailed account of the construction of contemporary Russia’s particular brand of authoritarianism, the

linchpin of which is its charismatic and powerful president. Gill explains contemporary Russia not as the result of failed democratization, but as the result of elite-driven state-building in the absence of an ideological template with which to coordinate competing interests and centers of power in Russia's massive federal system. Starting with Boris El'tsin but accomplished mostly by his successor, Vladimir Putin, Russia's presidents have used the power of their office to reconstruct the Russian state in the wake of institutional and economic collapse.

In Chapters 2 and 3, Gill describes state-society relations and electoral politics. Like other scholars of Russia's post-communist transition, in his discussion of the weakness of Russian civil society, Gill emphasizes El'tsin's and Putin's efforts to limit and discredit the political opposition. In addition to his treatment of presidential efforts to control sources of opposition support, such as media, trade unions, and NGOs, Gill adds an element often overlooked by others; that is, Putin has done what El'tsin failed to do: he has articulated a vision for Russia capable of captivating an audience outside Moscow. Putin's ideology, which emphasizes the history and traditions of Russia, is unabashedly nationalistic, conservative, and anti-west, and it provides an ideological justification for a governmental system that has become increasingly undemocratic yet receives wide popular support.

Gill's discussion of Russia's party system is particularly insightful. El'tsin never joined or endorsed his ostensible party of power (Russia's Choice followed by Our Home is Russia); therefore, a key mechanism that has enabled the Russian president to control most other powerful political elites did not develop until the Putin presidency. The Putin-era party of power, United Russia, is part of the president's successful strategy to centralize power in the executive branch. With a platform that reflects Putin's ideology of cultural nationalism and presidential competence, United Russia appeals to a wide base and is popular, and it provides politicians' vital connection to the presidential administration. For Putin, United Russia attracts all relevant political elites and facilitates communication between the president and other centers of political power, especially Russia's regions. Yet, as Gill makes clear, United Russia is not the foundation of a single party state. As an institution it is subordinate to the president, and its electoral message has always centered on the leadership ability of Putin himself.

In Chapters 4 and 5, Gill tackles the complex institutional structure of the post-Soviet regime as well as the network of personal relationships that animate it. Certainly, the office of the president has constitutional or legal control over many of Russia's most powerful institutions, including the security agencies, the Security Council, the Federation Council, and the judiciary. Yet it has been United Russia, serving as a recruitment tool, which has ensured that Putin loyalists have dominated the directly elected lower chamber, the State Duma, as well as the regional governorships. Putin has created a hierarchical institutional structure in which all paths lead to the president, and the glue that holds the structure together is United Russia. According to Gill, Russia is a "hybrid personalist/party regime, a regime in which the primary dynamic has been the will of the leader rather than any institutional imperative (158)."

Given the many excellent books on post-Soviet Russia, including many on the Putin period, to what extent does *Building an Authoritarian Polity* add to our understanding of Russia today? I would argue that Gill has made at least three important contributions to existing literature. First, Gill has described the bewildering complexity of Putin's institutional personalism. Second, Gill's discussion of the role that United Russia plays in Putin's Russia breaks new ground in the understanding of the role of single and dominant parties in authoritarian regimes. Finally, Gill presents the evolution of the Russia's current political system as the result of rational solutions to discrete and important problems of state-building, highlighting differences in style

and strategy between Russia's two most important post-Soviet presidents, El'tsin and Putin, a much-needed addition to our current understanding of Russia today.

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(Hi-)Stories of the Gulag: Fiction and Reality. Ed. Felicitas Fischer von Weikersthal and Karoline Thaidigsmann. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2016. 382 pp. Appendix. Index. Photographs. €48.00, hard bound.
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What significance does today's culture of remembrance accord the Stalinist camps? We already know the high stakes being accorded this question in Russia 25 years after the Soviet Union's demise. Yet, unsettling answers are also coming from the west these days, reflected for example in the musical comedy *Muppets Most Wanted* (2014), part of which takes place in a Gulag camp. The dancing *tseki* might be just an extreme—and extremely tasteless—example. Yet they also mark a phenomenon currently no less prevalent in Russia: the adoption and interpretation by popular culture of this chapter in Russia's history of violence, which thereby stands alongside the scholarly research of the Gulag and the memories of its victims, and competes with both for the public's already limited attention. This observation yields the two core issues examined in a new volume edited by Felicitas Fischer von Weikersthal and Karoline Thaidigsmann, *(Hi-)Stories of the Gulag: Fiction and Reality*—"which 'stories' from and about the Gulag are in fact shaping our current understanding of the Soviet labor camps?" (9). The exploration of the second issue, regarding "inherent relationships between reality and fiction . . . found in the various forms of Gulag narratives" (11f) is equally stimulating.

With its ten English and seven German essays, *(Hi-)Stories of the Gulag* presents the results of an international conference held in 2012. "To discuss the validity, significance, and impact of existing narratives about the history of the Gulag and the prisoners' experience there . . . on the public perception," von Weikersthal and Thaidigsmann invited historians as well as literary and cultural researchers, film specialists, and musicologists. The broad disciplinary approach was more than a successful bid to scrutinize as many of the media's representations of the Gulag as possible. It was also an exhilarating appeal for grasping memory studies as an interdisciplinary and perhaps even post-disciplinary enterprise. Moreover, the assemblage of diverse approaches and methods immediately demonstrates just how vibrant scholarly exchange in the field has become. Several authors present under-researched topics, for example Andrea Gullotta on Gulag poetry and Inna Klause on *russskii shanson*. Others confront various sources together. Lukasz Neca compares the memoirs of two Polish authors, only one of whom was actually held in the Gulag. Dan Healey's examination of malingering, on the other hand, is based on official camp documents, former prisoners' testimonies, and the documentary fiction of Varlam Shalamov. Writing about early Gulag memoirs published in Nazi Germany, von Weikersthal examines the problems surrounding translation, political censorship, and propaganda. Others, meanwhile, turn to post-millennium fictional accounts. These include essays by Karoline Thaidigsmann on Martin Amis' *House of Meetings* (2006) and Ruta Sepetys' *Between Shades of Grey* (2011), as well as Irina Gradinari on the TV miniseries *Poslendniy boy mayora Pugacheva* (2005). Yet even re-readings of supposedly familiar narrators such as Shalamov offer fresh insights—see Leona Toker's remarks on his stories *June* and *May* (both 1959).

With high academic rigor, all authors endeavor to map out the tensions between fact and fiction. The editors have subdivided the diverse approaches into three