

institutions responsible for the implementation of policy—such as health-care funds and social security funds, for example. Moreover, a parallel, such as a more extensive comparison of Kazakhstan and Belarus—arguably much more difficult to conduct because of very limited access to research materials—could greatly enhance our understanding of policymaking in more *authoritarian* postcommunist settings.

While focusing exclusively on the post-1989 politics of social policy in both Russia and Eastern Europe, Cook acknowledges the role of path dependency even while refraining from more detailed discussion of the impact of the histories of the postcommunist welfare states. The evidence showing the rapid unraveling of the communist social contract under Boris Yeltsin and Vladimir Putin is quite powerful, but more attention to the legacies of the past, and especially to the period immediately preceding the collapse of state socialism in all countries, would help better explain the variations across time and also across all countries examined in the book. Many of the political distinctions between Russia and the other post-Soviet states that Cook so nicely develops—especially the close links between greater interest pluralism (both inside and outside the formal governmental structures) and policy outcomes (social policy liberalization)—can indeed be traced back to the period of state socialism.

*Postcommunist Welfare States* is well written and accessible to readers who may not have had previous exposure to social policy literature. The addition of a full bibliography would have made the book somewhat more useful for scholars working in this area. Overall, however, I highly recommend the book to scholars of the welfare state and the former communist countries, but also to a broader audience of scholars interested in the study of regime change/democratization and the political economy of market/public policy reforms. It is to be hoped that this outstanding book will inspire comparative work of a similar kind in the future.

### **Economic Liberalism and Its Rivals: The Formation of International Institutions among the Post-Soviet States.**

By Keith A. Darden. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009. 366p. \$83.00.  
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— Paul Dragos Aligica, *George Mason University*

Keith Darden's book pivots around a comparative political economy puzzle. Despite their structural similarities, the post-Soviet states have chosen three distinct institutional arrangements for governing their trade relations with other countries: rapid entry into Western multilateral institutions (Kyrgyzstan, Estonia, Latvia, Georgia, and Lithuania); the formation of a regional bloc (Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan); and the pursuit of national autarchy (Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and, initially, Ukraine

and Azerbaijan). Similar states. Different choices. Why? The first and most obvious way of reading this book is to simply see it as an attempt to answer this question. Why did the post-Soviet states, which were so similar when they become independent in 1991, choose such different forms for managing their international economic relations?

What differentiates the post-Soviet states, answers Darden, is not their economic circumstances or institutional structures but, rather, the economic ideas embraced by the political elites in each state since 1991. To explain the case, one needs to look beyond traditional theories (such as realism, liberalism, and standard constructivism) and to develop a new theoretical apparatus. In other words, one way of reading the book is as an empirical investigation in which a theory of economic ideas (the ideas about the way that economies function and the best means of ordering social and economic life) is used as an explanatory and interpretive vehicle to elucidate a range of particular cases. Read this way, the book is about how economic ideas shaped the mental models and preferences of governing elites of the post-Soviet states and, consequently, shaped the institutional arrangements of those countries.

There is another approach to the book, however, and that is to read it as an attempt to use the case of post-Soviet states as a vehicle for developing a very challenging theory of economic ideas: Can we really treat ideas as first movers, as an independent cause? The book makes a strong claim that we can. To make the claim, the author introduces "a novel theoretical position," that the process by which political elites adopt an economic idea or another is "sufficiently contingent and resistant to systematic explanation." That means that "officials' ideas, in most cases, can be treated as independent and exogenous" (p. 313). The measure of Darden's achievement is the fact that irrespective of how one reads the book—as an applied comparative politics study or as an effort at broad theory development—the conclusion is bound to be the same: It is a remarkable contribution to the literature.

The empirical dimension of the book is outstanding for at least two reasons. First, it as an example of a bold social science conjecture, followed by a careful multi-method effort to test it. Ethnographic fieldwork, personal interviews, large-n statistical techniques, detailed study of internal government documents, historical techniques, content analysis, and process tracing are skillfully employed to test the author's empirical claim that actors' ideas about economic causation determine whether they support one institutional arrangement or another. Moreover, the reader gets the refreshing feeling that the questions asked (and the research designed to deal with them) are in control of the methodology, and not the other way around. The book never falls into fashionable methodological posturing and barren displays of technical cleverness.

The second reason the book's empirics are outstanding is the ingenious way in which it demonstrates that the

economic ideas are themselves driving institutional choice. The assumption: “the absence (or impossibility) of a systematic theory of the selection of ideas enhances our ability to test for their effects” (p. 17). The strategy: to make the case that “the factors leading to the adoption of economic ideas across post-Soviet countries were highly circumstantial and idiosyncratic” (p. 17) and, thus, not systematically related to the factors predicted by standard theories. The approach is clear: “By ruling out rival explanations, by demonstrating the contingent and unsystematic process by which certain economic ideas came to be employed by the government in each country, and by demonstrating a strong link between the economic ideas and the policy choices through both statistical methods and qualitative case methods, we gain confidence that economic ideas are genuinely driving institutional choice among the post-Soviet states” (p. 18).

Such an analysis would, in itself, be sufficient to give Darden’s book the status of a landmark. After 20 years of postcommunist transition, the essential topic of the nature and role of the economic ideas employed by the region’s elites still lacked a systematic treatment. The question has thus haunted the literature, rendering a large part of it incomplete or naive. Here is the remedy.

As mentioned, the book does much more than fill a gap in the “transition” literature, however. Its main merit comes from its contributions to a distinguished school of thought focused on the “political power of economic ideas,” to what Darden identifies as the “individualistic,” “Weberian” tradition associated with the work of Ernst Haas, Peter Haas, Peter Hall, and John Ruggie. The book contributes to this literature with new cases, new methods, and, most importantly, new theory. It is not an exaggeration to say that the volume is currently the state of the art piece that best illustrates the potential and limits of this research program. (At the same time, the book is a possible contribution to the new institutionalism and public choice debates—more precisely, to the arguments of those who consider that institutional theory and a theory of ideas are two sides of the same coin and who are paying close attention to the recent focus on belief systems, culture, and cognition announced by such luminaries as D. C. North and James Buchanan.)

In this work, one can find the elements of an original theoretical framework for the study of the relationships among ideas, government choice, and economic order. It is a theory based on individualism, contingency, and philosophical pragmatism. One quotation will be sufficient to convey the boldness of his approach: “I depart from much of the existing literature about ideas by asserting that . . . ultimately there are no systematic explanations of the selection of ideas. The freedom that inheres in individual minds means that the selection of new ideas is contingent, is undetermined, and can be described but not systematically explained. Considerable progress can be made if we

recognize the contingent, if not stochastic, elements of idea selection, and if we cease the attempt to locate/embed the idea selection process systematically in other deep holistic structures—be they material, institutional, or cultural” (p. 12).

Darden is well aware that the position he advances “runs against two disciplinary instincts” in political science. The first is “the tendency to assume that everything is conducive to systematic explanation” and that “the only true explanation is one that identifies the relevant law-like, systematic relationship.” The second is the tendency to reject ideas as a cause and “to assume that there must be something deeper, some unseen or hidden interest or mechanism that selects both the behavior and the ideas actors use to justify it” (p. 313). That is to say, this book is not only an important contribution to postcommunist studies. It is also a deliberate attempt to chart a novel theoretical position that challenges current orthodoxies from the perspective of a scholarly tradition whose growth seems to have reached a new threshold of relevance.

#### **Killing Neighbors: Webs of Violence in Rwanda.**

By Lee Ann Fujii. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2009.

224p. \$29.95.

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— Peter Uvin, *The Fletcher School, Tufts University*

Eight years ago, reviewing the state of the scholarly literature about the Rwandan genocide I observed that “[t]here is currently a major gap between the explanations developed by scholars—almost all situated at the macro level—and the nitty-gritty of the genocide: a series of acts of violence by some individuals against other individuals. We do not really know who killed who, where, why, and how. To be precise, we do know quite a bit on the ‘who’ issue, but not in a scientific manner. What we do know is written down by human rights experts; foremost the stunning work of Alison des Forges in *Leave None to Tell the Story*; but also the impressive early work by African Rights: *Rwanda: Death and Despair*. . . . However, this wealth of facts has not been connected to social science theorizing. There seem to be two parallel spheres: one of masses of descriptive micro-level data without scientific hypothesizing and theorizing; and one of theory-informed macro-level analysis” (“Reading the Rwandan Genocide,” *International Studies Review* 3 [Fall 2001]: 75–99).

Those days are now over, and the fine work under review here is one of the reasons why. In recent years, a new generation of scholars has gone into Rwanda’s hills and prisons and talked to hundreds of people—victims, perpetrators, accused, and bystanders (although Fujii precisely argues that these categories are not remotely as distinct or clear as they appear, with ordinary Rwandans