

**Michael Urban, *Cultures of Power in Post-Communist Russia. An analysis of Elite Political Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010)**

Lina Klymenko  
University of Eastern Finland

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia's transformation has been an object of study by scholars of transition studies. The challenges of political, economic, and nation-building processes occurring in post-Soviet Russia have sparked numerous scholarly debates, and with the comeback of Russia in international politics, the interest of scholars in the societal and political developments of that country became even more pronounced. Michael's Urban recent book contributes to the body of existing scholarly literature on Russia's post-Soviet transformation and, due to its alternative conceptual framework, the book presents an interesting and thought-provoking study of the Russian society and politics.

The book centers on the political culture of the Russian political elite. In his approach to studying Russian political culture, the author proceeds as follows. In the first chapter (Introduction), the author starts off with an overview over the conceptual framework of his study, laying out the concepts of political culture and political discourse. He conceptualizes political culture as a discursive formation, in which political elites construct their realities (cultures of power) through communication. The investigation of these cultures of power is based on the analysis of narratives of the Russian political elite, with a particular focus on the language that Russian politicians use to describe the world of politics and their personal place therein. In analyzing the political discourse of the Russian political elite, the author focuses on four aspects of the political discourse, namely morality, community, approval (law), and competence. He applies a discourse analysis to thirty-four interviews with Russian politicians, revolving about their political careers, their influence on political events in the country, their principles of successfully realizing political goals, the personal qualities that they associate with success in politics, the role of moral principles, and their involvement in the events of August 1991 and the Belovezh Accords. The interview partners were governmental ministers, leaders of political parties, parliamentary deputies, and officials from the Presidential Administrations that served during the eras of Gorbachev, Yeltsin, and Putin.

In the second chapter (Social Relations), the author develops a model of social relations in Russia, in which the political discourse that is to be investigated is embedded. The author contrasts the conventional model of civil society found in Western democracies to a specific Russian pattern of civil society as conceptualized in some academic works on Russia. The Western democratic model identifies civic associations as the dominant organizational form of the civil society, characterized by economic capital, weak ties among actors, specific focus of collective actions,

generalized social capital, and a strong rule of law. In contrast, the Russian civil society model constructed by the author is associated with different attributes: an informal network with social and cultural capital, strong ties among actors, a diffuse focus of the collective actions, particularized social capital, and a weak state.

In the subsequent three chapters (Community, Morality, and Competence), the author turns to exploring the discursive construction of the categories community, morality (and law), and competence, which appear in narratives of the Russian political elite within the Russian social relations framework as conceptualized by the author in the previous chapter. Here, the discourse of community is centered about the discussion of two distinct categories, state and society (people), the discourse of morality (and law) involves two different types of responders, moralists and pragmatists, and the discourse of competence (professionalism) is disaggregated in the discourse of professionals in politics and the discourse of professional politicians.

In the subsequent chapter (Revolution), the author analyzes the complexity of the above-discussed elements of the political discourse by focusing on the responders' recollections and assessments concerning the Russian anti-communist revolution (the failed Soviet *coup d'état* in 1991). Here, the elements of a political discourse (morality, community, approval (law), and competence) are examined simultaneously in order to show how the discourse elements in narratives on revolution are configured, and how certain elements express saliency and muteness. The discourse of the revolution is investigated through two notions: the emergence of the Russian state, and the socio-economic transformation that appears to be activated by the responders.

In his final chapter (Conclusion), the author presents a summary of his research on the political discourse in Russia. In his findings, he advocates for the idea that the elements of the political discourse (morality, community, approval, and competence) do not represent separate entities, but are intertwined in the political communication. The Russian model of civil society, as developed by the author in the second chapter, is to a large extent congruent with the narratives of the Russian politicians. In the understanding of the responders, the "law" signifies a formal general instruction from people in the office. Citizens, in their perception of "community", are marginalized and characterized by politicians as either a receiver of benefits or a degraded mass. "Loyalty" as a category of the morality discourse concerns the loyalty to those politicians with whom the relations of "clans" and "teams" were established. "Competence", in terms of professionalism, is seen either as knowledge that politicians bring to the government from their previous work places, or as the ability to achieve results in the world of politics. In this last part of his book, the author argues that his findings have two broad implications: for the

persistence of authoritarianism in Russia and for methodology in comparative politics.

Michael Urban's study is highly interesting due to his unconventional approach to investigating politics. By combining an innovative conceptual framework with a wealth of empirical material, the study is a strong contribution to a better understanding of the Russian society and politics. The author's direct quotations from interviews with Russian politicians in the book turn out to be an excellent writing strategy since they make the research findings visible and comprehensible. A significant part of the study's value is rooted in the original research based on interviews with Russian politicians. Scholars who deal with the exploration of Russian politics are certainly aware of the challenges that field work in Russia presents.

Furthermore, the book is a thought-provoking study for students of comparative politics. The study reveals challenges that scholars might face when dealing with the constructivist research paradigm. Since the constructivist approach is subjective and involves context-specific understanding of phenomena, it remains a challenge for scholars to combine the constructivist approach with normative positivist concepts in studies on democracy and authoritarianism. In this context, an average reader might find it difficult to follow how the author presents the concepts of political culture, language, discourse, and narrative in order to build a coherent theoretical framework of the study. Therefore, the book is recommendable for an academic audience rather than for the broad public.

**Simon Teune (ed.) *The Transnational Condition: Protest dynamics in an entangled Europe* (New York and Oxford:: Berghahn Books, 2010)**

Simon McMahan  
King's College London

*The Transnational Condition* represents a valuable development of the academic literature on social movements and transnationalism. The objective of Simon Teune has been to "take protests in Europe as an example for the crosscutting relevance of transnational exchanges" (p. 2). Protest and activism act as a lens through which we are able to explore how local, national and global (or European) levels of social relations are shaped and integrated. Although the conceptualisation of 'transnationalism' as a set of "pluri-local relations of entanglement beyond national borders" (ibid.) initially seems somewhat vague and imprecise, the case studies that complete the edition clearly illustrate how a tighter definition of boundaries between these levels would fail to capture the fluid and dynamic nature of cross-border exchanges across them. In summary, the editor has brought together a range