lished on gendered discourse and tactics in contemporary Russian politics, although it's been a prominent theme of recent ASEEES conference panels, especially since the Pussy Riot affair. Its rich engagement with interdisciplinary studies, anthropology, and cultural studies also makes a substantial contribution to political science. Beyond this, her work raises a series of compelling questions about politics, commodification, political agency, and new protest repertoires that will interest a broad range of readers.

JULIE HEMMENT
University of Massachusetts, Amherst

Patronal Politics: Eurasian Regime Dynamics in Comparative Perspective. By Henry Hale. Problems of International Politics. Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 2015. xviii, 538 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Figures. Tables. $39.99, paper.

Henry Hale has written a masterwork. In this remarkable study, he provides a cogent and concise explanation for essentially every change of political regime that has taken place in the non-Baltic former Soviet Union since the collapse of communism in 1991—not only in the former Soviet republics but also in post-Soviet "statelets" such as Transnistria, Abkhaziia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh. The author appears to have read practically every secondary source in English written about each of his cases, and he has also conducted original research with primary sources, including interviews with the key players, in many of them. What's more, Hale's main thesis arguably helps explain regime dynamics in a number of other historical and global contexts, ranging back in time to Ivan the Terrible as well as to regimes in Africa, the Middle East, Asia, and beyond.

The central argument of *Patronal Politics* is simple: in what Hale terms "patronalistic societies" (22), where the central political imperative is to find a patron capable of delivering protection and resources, the key driver of political change is the set of expectations about the future held by most individuals. The author derives this conclusion theoretically from a commonsense version of rational choice theory: if everyone knows that one's future security and livelihood depend on one's ability to locate a powerful patron, then the moment it appears that one such patron is even a bit more likely to emerge triumphant over competitors, it becomes rational to declare one's loyalty to that individual so as not to be left backing the losing side. Initial expectations that one particular patron is likely to become dominant thus become a self-fulfilling prophecy: once a clear patron has emerged, politics will indeed quickly be organized in a single "pyramid" of power, in which the need to demonstrate loyalty to one's hierarchical superior will typically trump all other political considerations. Hale does not use the more typical term *patrimonialism* to describe such a regime type, arguing that such Weberian terminology implies a sort of "legitimacy" in patronal systems that is not really necessary for such a system to emerge and stabilize. Instead, he argues, in patronal societies, instrumental rationality alone will suffice to generate

https://doi.org/10.5612/slavicreview.75.1.152 Published online by Cambridge University Press

a patronalistic social equilibrium in which politics is organized by a single power pyramid—whether individuals subjectively believe in the leader's right to rule or not.

What can shake the stability of patronal pyramids after they emerge? Here, too, Hale argues that social expectations are central. Through a reversal of the logic that leads to the emergence of single-pyramid systems in patronal societies, patronalism can break down when individuals begin to perceive that the ruler's days are numbered. Perhaps doubts arise because the ruler is a "lame duck" whose formal term in office is about to expire, raising the question of whether he (post-Soviet patrons have thus far nearly always been male) will survive the succession. Perhaps doubts arise because people have tangible evidence of the ruler's deep unpopularity. Perhaps patronal breakdown occurs because of the ruler's advancing age, which introduces a demographic limit to the logic of patronal loyalty. For these and other reasons, once individuals begin to think that the end of a particular patron's rule is nigh, defections from the pyramid of power can occur remarkably quickly. Leaders whose power seemed impregnable can end up powerless seemingly overnight. Yet in patronal societies, Hale argues, regime breakdown does not typically engender meaningful regime change. Instead, the uncertainty that accompanies the end of one power pyramid simply sets off a competition between would-be rulers to become the next patronal leader. And the moment one such contender looks even a bit more likely to beat out his competitors, the cycle of patronal regime politics ends up back where it started: in a new single-pyramid system.

Political scientists are often enamored of parsimonious theories even when they don't seem to fit much of the empirical evidence of politics in a given region. In *Patronal Politics*, in contrast, Hale engages in painstaking efforts to demonstrate the hypotheses outlined above against a mass of evidence from over twenty-five years of post-Soviet regime dynamics. Space does not permit me, obviously, to summarize Hale's analyses of every case of pyramid building, patronal collapse, and regime cycling in the post-Soviet context. Suffice it to say that by the time Hale has finished his *tour d'horizon*, the force of his central insight about the political power of popular expectations becomes undeniable. Indeed, he shows that no other factor cited by previous analysts as centrally important to regime change in Eurasia can really explain post-Soviet politics as succinctly as his theory of patronal regime cycles. Possession of hydrocarbon reserves doesn't seem to matter much: single-pyramid systems led by powerful patrons have emerged in post-Soviet polities with a lot of oil and gas, like Kazakhstan, and those with very little oil and gas, like Georgia. Geographic "diffusion" falls short as an explanation as well: patronal politics have emerged in European states, like Belarus, and in Central Asian states, like Tajikistan. Patronal regime cycles unfold in countries with major "identity divides," such as that between eastern and western Ukraine and between northern and southern Kyrgyzstan, and also in those with no significant identity divides, such as Armenia. The collapse of patronal pyramids due to rulers' lame-duck status, low popularity, or advanced age has been accompanied by major popular mobilizations termed "color revolutions," as in the Rose Revolution in Georgia in 2003, the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004, and the

https://doi.org/10.5612/slavicreview.75.1.152 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan in 2005, but also where there has been quite limited popular mobilization, as in the replacement of Vladislav Ardzinba by Sergei Bagapsh in Abkhazia in 2004. Nor have efforts by the Kremlin or by the west to support one or another side in patronal struggles had much effect on outcomes. Indeed, in many cases, politicians explicitly backed by Russia (like Viktor Yanukovych in Ukraine in 2004) or the United States (like Viktor Yushchenko and Iuliia Timoshenko in Ukraine in 2011) were the clear losers in these battles. In short, the logic of patronal politics has surprised both policy-makers and social scientists for well over two decades. But Hale has now made its underlying dynamics clear to all.

My admiration for Hale's magnum opus is profound. That said, the very success of his elegant theory naturally raises the question of its "scope conditions." In this respect, perhaps carried away a bit by the power of his important discovery, Hale overreaches at a few points in the book. In an early chapter on the historical antecedents of post-Soviet patronal politics, for example, Hale tries to argue that the entirety of Russian history from at least the Mongol period until the present has been marked by regime cycles of a very similar sort to the post-Soviet variety: "The patronalistic soil in Eurasia is as rich as its Black Earth," he declares (39). But while the building of patronal pyramids in Russia may be a very old endeavor, surely it goes too far to say that Russia hasn't actually experienced any change in regime type from the fifteenth century to the present day? That the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 and the Soviet collapse of 1991 were no different in kind than, say, the process by which Askar Akaev was replaced by Kurmanbek Bakiev in Kyrgyzstan in 2005? After all, over the course of the twentieth century the Soviet regime transformed a society consisting overwhelmingly of peasants into one that is now almost completely urbanized. To say that such massive social change ultimately made no difference to regime politics in Eurasia is to pitch one's argument at a level of abstraction so high that it misses much of the actual content of political and social history.

In addition, Hale's grand theory, despite its genuine novelty, has the odd effect of reinforcing some hoary stereotypes about the division between Russia and the west. Although Hale notes that patronal politics exist in many western countries as well, at times he seems to imply that only in the west is politics truly motivated by a struggle for abstract ideas that "unite people who have certain perceived traits in common . . . but who have not actually met or who are not joined together primarily through chains of common acquaintance and exchange" (423). His concluding comparison of the post-Soviet polities with postcommunist politics in "less patronalistic" (457) societies in central and eastern Europe, for example, is too quick to assume that formal democratic institutions in places like the Czech Republic and Hungary—territories that were once part of the Austro-Hungarian empire—are somehow "real" in a way they are not in, say, Georgia or Ukraine. After all, Vaclav Klaus and Viktor Orban have certainly endeavored, with some success, to build single-pyramid systems during their respective periods of rule. Hungarian politics today shows the limits of formal constitutionalism even in what had seemed until recently to be one of the most successfully consolidated post-communist democracies. Given that Hale himself accepts that parliamentary

https://doi.org/10.5612/slavicreview.75.1.152 Published online by Cambridge University Press

politics in Moldova and the Euromaidan revolution in Ukraine have not quite followed the "pure" logic of patronal politics, the divide between the "non-patronal" west and the "patronal" east seems a lot less sharp than initially set out in this book, raising the possibility that the diffusion of democratic norms from the European Union eastward is playing a more significant long-term role in promoting democratic regime change in the former Soviet Union than he allows.

In the end, the major lacuna in Hale's book is the absence of any theory of how non-patronal polities emerge. Without such a theory, the fate of Eurasia, and of much of the rest of the nonwestern world, must appear tragic indeed, with hopes for democratic revolution bound to be repeatedly dashed by the logic of patronal regime cycles. Yet stable, genuinely inclusive democratic orders, with political parties that represent different social constituencies and ideological principles, do exist. Why? Once analysts have figured out the answer to that question, we may be able to investigate the potential sources of democratic breakthrough in post-Soviet Eurasia more successfully as well. Until then, *Patronal Politics* will serve as a brilliant and sadly illuminating road map to the main trends of post-Soviet politics.

STEPHEN E. HANSON
College of William and Mary

https://doi.org/10.5612/slavicreview.75.1.152 Published online by Cambridge University Press