
NOTES AND REVIEWS

Mühlfried, Florian. 2014. *Being a State and States of Being in Highland Georgia*. Oxford; New York, NY: Berghahn Books. 264 pages.

Right at the beginning of this review of Florian Mühlfried's book, I need to reveal that the book caught my interest primarily because its description and summary indicated that the central argument promoted in the book is very similar to the one I defend in my book about citizens and the state in Montenegro (Sedlenieks 2013). Upon reading Mühlfried's volume I can say that the similarity of the argument is still striking despite the fact that the examples and concepts we use differ.

Referring both to his own interpretation of the history of Georgia and in particular the Tusheti region as well as some other authors who discuss processes of change and the state in the Soviet Union (for example, Grant 1995), Mühlfried advances a multi-level argument the overall effect of which is to revise the idea of what it means to be a citizen.

The background of this revision is on the one hand the understanding that the history of the state experience for the Tushetians has been complicated and turbulent, the state has been coming and going and then coming and going again (p. 64), reversing its policies towards the highlanders, reversing its policies towards the prospect of life in remote villages and desirability of the traditional lifestyle of Tushetians. The resulting practices of the Tushetians as citizens can be seen as an adaptation of sorts to this particular kind of changing environment, where one of the cornerstones of citizenship (the state) behaves unpredictably.

Mühlfried argues that contrary to classical interpretations of citizenship there is no ground to assume that citizens always need and want to be integrated into the wider community of the state. In the changing circumstances whereby the Georgians found them-

selves citizens of the erratic and unpredictable Soviet state, and later the not much more predictable independent state of Georgia, the understandable action of citizens were to keep certain distance from the state by means of creating cognitive as well as spatial and symbolic "reserves" or "room for manoeuvre" (p. 9). The concept of reserves refers to things or other entities that are kept from being used in everyday life and preserved for a possible emergency. In the Tushetian case these reserves take form as both migratory practices that allow adaptation to various state policies of settlement, as well as to the tradition of local shrines that are specifically tabooed against various influences and are guarded spatially from polluting agents (in the form of strangers or women). These reserves then give the space for manoeuvre that is needed *vis-à-vis* the unpredictable state. Consequently Mühlfried argues that citizenship does not necessarily involve active engagement or wish to engage, it also (and simultaneously) can mean taking as much from the state when possible and distancing oneself from it when desirable.

Thus the Tushetians that Mühlfried describes are simultaneously patriotic, sometimes impersonating the state and sometimes evading it and keeping a distance from it, or all of these simultaneously. Mühlfried argues that this lack of the wish to be completely integrated in the state is not to be treated as somehow defective or undeveloped citizenship, but as precisely an expression of it. Thus "Citizenship, seen from this angle, is not only opposed to any form of totalitarianism (and a form of opposing it), but is itself a means of protection from the state" (p. 203, see also p. 88).

The book is carefully crafted with meticulous outlining of the arguments and the contents of each section. However, some aspects have not been entirely explained.

The largest deficiency is that although the book speaks a lot about citizenship, the author never gives his own definition. There are places where he says what citizenship *is not*, but that does not make what it actually *is* clear. Moreover, from the perspective of Mühlfried's description, citizenship starts to resemble membership in any group or in culture in general. Thus, the concept of citizenship becomes rather fuzzy: whether a citizen does something (for example participates in state affairs) or restrains from doing it (for example guards him/herself against the state) becomes a part and parcel of what citizenship actually means. If the citizen wants to be integrated or wants to avoid integration altogether does not, it seems, matter.

It would seem that citizenship has something to do with the state. Unfortunately, the concept of state is also not sufficiently explained. The author writes that Tushe-tians at times became the state, particularly, by voluntarily taking up uniform to patrol the border (p. 159), but it is not clear what the state is if the uniform is the state and the citizen is the uniform. The fact that the Soviet state was something quite different and antagonistic to the current independent Georgia, begs for an explanation of what this state actually is apart from a mental construction or a "fiction of philosophers" (Radcliffe-Brown 1987: xxiii).

At times some exoticisation of the Soviet state and in particular Mühlfried's tendency to contrast Soviet policies to Western policies (as if Soviet policies were not direct descendants of the ideas developed and circulated in the West) seems to demonstrate some lack of insight (see for example p. 112).

Although the above critical points could have deserved more elaboration, in general the book gives a fresh and highly interesting point of view on what it means to be a citizen

(or subject) in an entity (or state) that tends to have "a century of perestroikas" (Grant 1995). The new look at what the concept and practice of citizenship encapsulates will be useful for both theoreticians and practical policy-makers.

References

- Grant, Bruce. 1995. *In the Soviet House of Culture. A Century of Perestroikas*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Radcliffe-Brown, Alfred Reginald. 1987. Preface. – *African Political Systems*, edited by Edward E. Evans-Pritchard and Meyer Fortes. New York, NY: Methuen, Routledge and Kegan Paul, i-xxiii.
- Sedlenieks, Klavs. 2013. "And Burn Today Whom Yesterday They Fed". *Citizens and State in Montenegro*. Tallinn: Tallinn University Press.

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