

for granted that there is a substantive diversity among social democratic parties (Keman points this out too), then such a general approach leads to more general conclusions. Sometimes, the book's claims might even sound trivial. The author points this out in the introduction as well (p. 19). It is not a book that explains the detailed differences between social democracies in different countries.

Instead, the main research aim is to provide a general argument about Social Democracy and its place in Western politics as related to other political parties. The book does its job and focuses on its research aim until the end. The comparative method, relying mostly on data, produces a general account of Social Democracy and its development in the institutional context of selected OECD countries. This is helpful mainly for students and beginning scholars who might use the book as a starting point for more specific research on leftist politics in parliamentary democracies. The book leaves many areas open for challenge and for more specific investigation due to its macro view of Social Democracy. However, such general accounts are needed in a field where unified narratives are scarce.

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Pleshakov, Constantine:

THE CRIMEAN NEXUS: PUTIN'S WAR AND THE CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS.

New Haven: Yale University Press. 2017. 200 pages.

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What is Crimea? This is the question Constantine Pleshakov asks the reader in the beginning of his newest book. He answers in an engaging fashion what Crimea is to him, to Crimeans, to Ukrainians, and to the world.

Pleshakov, a former analyst at the Institute of U.S. and Canada Studies in Moscow and a current professor of Political Science at Amherst College, begins the book with an introduction explaining the informal history of the peninsula and describing to the reader the unique geography of this 'Nexus'. He then closes with his own personal connection to Crimea and describes the feelings he has of being a native on the outside, looking into his fatherland in a time of turmoil when labels are forced onto those who cannot even label themselves: 'Like so many others, ours was a family of mutts. It depresses me to hear how casually many people from that part of the world call themselves "Russian" or "Ukrainian." Ethnicity is an empty word, and culture is hardly better. In the end it is little more than the mother tongue and an idiosyncratic set of prejudices.' (p. 7).

He continues the book with nine chapters of a more detailed history of Crimea and his own analysis of the events that led to the current crisis. Throughout the text Pleshakov keeps a tight scope on the area in question, only venturing out into the surrounding regions to give greater detail to the subject at hand when necessary. Unlike many other books on the

subject, Pleshakov does not show allegiance to any party involved and keeps an even-handed tone throughout the book. In fact, no party is spared his criticism. Showing his capacity as a writer, Pleshakov is able to present his evidence without hinting at bias, and thus keeps the reader's confidence throughout the work.

As focused as the book is, it shouldn't be thought of as something only for those very well read on the subject. Pleshakov is able to break down complex ideas into more manageable pieces that a reader, scholarly or otherwise, is able to understand and digest. His narration never feels pretentious, as if he is gracing you with his perspective on the matter. In fact, the opposite is true. Rather than needlessly showing his erudition, his word choice and confident pace shows that he wants to engage the reader on equal footing.

Chapter five in particular stands out in the book as a high water mark of this approachable writing style. Titled 'Fetish', Pleshakov defines this term in the most basic and comprehensible way as 'something that is assigned a value disconnected from its physical usefulness (a pearl is a good example), but having no inflated meaning outside a certain group of people.' (p. 93). By explicitly defining this term, he is able to communicate to the reader the complex plurality of values that makes the 'Nexus' so coveted. He is able to convey the raw emotions that all parties involved have for this little jut of land in the Black Sea in a way that is seen more often in literature than academic works. The reader gains a deeper understanding of not just the issues surrounding the peninsula, but the people who make up this area who are too frequently de-humanized in the name of dry academic writing.

In the final chapter, Pleshakov looks into the future of the 'Nexus' and anticipates a continuation of the clash of civilizations that have kept it destabilized. It is here that Pleshakov lays a heavier burden of blame on the West, specifi-

cally the United States and the European Union, more so than any other party. He blames the West's policy (or lack thereof) for the present situation, however not for the situation as a whole. Their refusal to acknowledge Russia as an equal only widens the gap of cooperation, which prolongs the conflict. Here Pleshakov also summarizes the faux concern for Ukraine that many in the West profess: 'It is in our cultural code to choose David over Goliath, and a weaker nation challenging a stronger nation tends to attract our sympathy – as long as David and Goliath are not wrestling in our backyard, because, with humans, avoiding damage to self and property goes deeper than empathy.' (p. 166).

For this book, Pleshakov pulls from a refreshing amount of sources, be they academic journals, literary texts, or from the realm of journalism. He does not shy away from sources outside English either; Russian and Ukrainian sources are well represented. By exploring a variety of perspectives and calling on his years of work on the region, the reader can feel confident in the validity of the information presented. The large volume of sources Pleshakov uses allows readers from all backgrounds to dive deeper into any of the myriad subjects presented in the book. The wide array of sources also gives further validity to Pleshakov's criticisms, which are unequivocally directed towards the policies and actions of all actors involved.

The Crimean Nexus: Putin's War and the Clash of Civilizations is well worth taking the time to read for anyone drawn to learn more on the subject. The book pulls in and engages the reader, allowing them to see this well-worn topic in a new light by synthesizing the author's deep knowledge of history, current events, and political science. Constantine Pleshakov's insightfulness and aptitude for presenting a complex situation is not only informative, but enjoyable as well.

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