

Reviews

Eleanor Knott: *Kin Majorities: Identity and Citizenship in Crimea and Moldova*

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Kin Majorities is primarily concerned with how individuals perceive their identity and the implications of these perceptions for national and international politics. Throughout the book, Eleanor Knott empirically examines how citizens belonging to kin-majority groups in Moldova and Crimea interact with the citizenship and quasi-citizenship policies promoted by their respective kin-states (i.e. Romania and Russia). The book is an important work because it focuses on two important and timely research topics that can help us improve our knowledge of national and international politics in post-Soviet Europe and beyond. First, Knott's book pays attention to kin-majorities, social groups that have not received much attention compared to kin minorities (e.g. Hungarians in Slovakia), but which we need to understand in the current context of the expansion of dual citizenships and the increasing interest of some states in promoting policies aimed towards their co-ethnics abroad. Second, the book focuses on Crimea and Moldova, two key territories in the post-Soviet region where identity is often used as a partisan weapon. Regarding its main findings, *Kin Majorities* shows how, on the one hand, citizens of almost all identification categories in Crimea showed low levels of engagement with Russia (either through citizenship or quasi-citizenship policies such as the Compatriot Act). On the other hand, individuals of most identification categories in Moldova interact with Romanian kin-state policies (especially citizenship).

Methodologically, the book is a qualitative, bottom-up, and comparative study. The data in the book is based on 117 interviews conducted between 2012 and 2013, 55 of which were conducted in Moldova (mostly in Chisinau) and 52 in Crimea (mostly in Simferopol). The book's bottom-up, comparative approach allows it to explore the question of identity in a comprehensive way that goes beyond artificially rigid identity categories. Moreover, this methodology also serves as a way of exploring aspects of individual political behaviour (or everyday politics) that go beyond the most popular approaches of Political Science when studying the post-Soviet region. Overall, the methodology is one of the most solid features of *Kin Majorities*, as the author, a methodologist herself, does an impressive job of collecting and analysing the interview data. I also appreciated the care Knott took to explain the methodological

underpinnings of the book, both in the main text and in a very informative and interesting methodological appendix.

The book will appeal to a wide audience of scholars because of its connections to different branches of literature. First and foremost, the book builds on the literature on identities, their formation, and their impact on political practices. Secondly, *Kin Majorities* is also closely related to the literature on how individuals interact with citizenships and quasi-citizenships in complex contexts. Finally, due to its choice of case studies, Knott's book is also closely related to literature that examines national and international politics, history, and identity in the post-Soviet space. In this respect, for example, the Moldovan section of the book builds on, and in many ways is a spiritual successor to, King's (2000) masterpiece, *The Moldovans*.

In terms of structure, *Kin Majorities* is divided into eight chapters and a methodological appendix. In the first chapter, Knott introduces the book and presents the main research questions and the object of study. The second chapter serves as a theoretical background section, situating the book in the literature and presenting the book's theoretical framework, which is based on what the author calls the identity-citizenship nexus. Moving away from simplistic and rigid understandings of the relationship between identity and citizenship, Knott's identity-citizenship focuses on the plurality of the relationship between these two elements. Chapter 3 explains the political and identity contexts of Crimea and Moldova and links these contexts to the kin states studied (Russia and Romania). The fourth chapter focuses on Crimea and presents the author's proposed inductive categories of identification in the peninsula. The fifth chapter builds on the previous categories to examine how Crimeans belonging to the different identification categories interact with Russian citizenship and quasi-citizenship. Chapter 6 develops the inductive identification categories for Moldova. In the seventh chapter, Knott explores the engagement of Moldovan citizens in the different categories with Romanian-sponsored citizenship and quasi-citizenship policies. Finally, Chapter 8 serves as the book's conclusion. In this last chapter, the author presents the main findings of the book and explores further research possibilities. Beyond the eight main chapters, the Methodological Appendix explores how the author's struggles before, during and after the fieldwork influenced some of her methodological choices. The appendix also describes the sample (and some of its biases) and the strategies the author used during the interviews and for her analyses.

In my view, the book is notable for several contributions that make it particularly relevant. First, the 'inductive identification categories' developed by the author are comprehensive and useful. Knott divides the kin-majority identity continuum into five categories for each of Crimea and Moldova. These divisions group individuals based on the respondents' self-perceived identities and

their perceptions of Russia (in Crimea) and Romania (in Moldova), ranging from the most positive towards the kin state (*Politicised Russians* in Crimea and *Organic Romanians* in Moldova) to the least positive (*Linguistic Moldovans* in Moldova and *Ethnic Ukrainians* in Crimea). The number of categories can make the book difficult to follow when the author uses the groups as the basis for her analysis of actual practices of citizenship and quasi-citizenship, however, *Kin Majorities* does include extremely helpful tables summarising the characteristics of the identification categories, as well as the findings of each of the empirical chapters. Second, *Kin Majorities* also serves as a powerful tool for understanding kin-state policies and how kin-majorities interact with them. In this sense, I found it particularly interesting how the author shows that Romanian kin-state policies towards Moldovan citizens were much more aggressive than Russia's in Crimea before 2014, a fact that is generally overlooked in the literature. Finally, the fact that Knott's field trip to Crimea coincidentally took place just before Russia's annexation of the peninsula in 2014 makes the book a very useful window into how individuals felt about the country that would illegitimately rule over them shortly afterwards. The interviews in the book also serve to debunk some of the myths about the situation on the peninsula before the invasion. In particular, the author finds no evidence of mass passportization of the region by Russia before 2014, leading Knott to argue that some sources that speak of up to 100,000 Crimean citizens holding Russian passports are difficult to believe. What Knott's research does show, instead, is that pre-annexation Crimea was, for the most part, a region where the general population had little interaction with either Russian citizenship or quasi-citizenship alternatives such as the Compatriot Policy.

Despite its remarkable contributions, the book also has aspects that could be improved. First, with regard to the selection of interviewees, the author acknowledges in the methodological appendix that there is an over-representation of young and educated urban dwellers. This, combined with the fact that many of the interviewees are highly politicised individuals (members of political parties and/or their youth wings, NGO workers, etc.), could mean that some of the identity categories that Knott considers relatively small in the book (e.g. Linguistic Moldovans in Moldova and Crimeans in Crimea) are more prevalent in rural areas or among less educated and older individuals. Moreover, this bias towards urban, educated, politicised and young participants could also mean that this book misses the chance to identify further categories of identification that are not common in major cities. Second, although the book studies kin-majorities and it is therefore understandable that members of ethnic minorities are excluded from its analyses, it is curious that the author interviews ethnic Ukrainians born outside the peninsula in Crimea and Russian-speaking sons and daughters of mixed Slavic-Moldovan/Romanian

marriages in Moldova, but not individuals from other mixed marriages (e.g. Crimean Tatar and Russian or Ukrainian in Crimea, Moldovan/Romanian and Gagauz or Bulgarian in Moldova, etc.). In Moldova, the sons and daughter of mixed marriages group is very interesting, and I think that the categorisation in Crimea would have benefited from a wider pool of respondents that included descendants of mixed marriages too. Thirdly, being familiar with the author's previous work myself, I was surprised that, although she is very thorough in explaining, for example, how methodological challenges affected this project - and even acknowledges the fact that the challenges she faced led to the publication of a paper on *Perspectives on Politics* (Knott, 2019) - I was unable to find any references to several articles (and Knott's thesis) that are also based on the author's fieldwork in Crimea and Moldova and have previously been published in various outlets (e. g. Knott 2015a, 2015b, 2017, etc.). I understand that the book required the author to rethink and update the fieldtrip's content into a cohesive work, but I would have appreciated some mention of this fact, as the book can sometimes be redundant for those who have already read Knott's previous works.

In conclusion, *Kin Majorities* is an interesting and appealing book that provides new data to help explain how the relationship between identity and citizenship works in environments in which the majority of the population belongs to a kin majority, such as Moldova and Crimea. Beyond the in-depth analysis and contextual findings that the author provides for the Moldovan and Crimean cases, the most important finding of the book has to do with its evidence that kin-majorities are much more complex and fragmented than simplistic approaches tend to suggest. It is a methodologically sound book that benefits from extensive fieldwork and numerous interviews to produce interesting analyses. Moreover, the fact that the author's fieldwork took place just before the Russian aggression in Ukraine in 2014 means that the book is one of the last examples of this kind of research in Crimea, which is a consequence of the sad fact that, as the author mentions, 'for the foreseeable future it may be too dangerous for researchers to ask such questions [of identification and engagement with kin-states] and for participants to answer them' (p. 13). Despite the obstacles for conducting new research on identity and attitudes towards kin-states in Crimea, however, the book identifies other potentially very interesting research opportunities to continue exploring this field. For example, I think it would be beneficial to utilise the framework and methodologies developed in this book to investigate how kin-majorities behave beyond of Europe (e.g. in Taiwan).

Ángel Torres-Adán
Institute for Sociology
Slovak Academy of Sciences

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