Book review of Heusala, Anna-Liisa, Aitamurto, Kaarina, and Eraliev, Sherzod (eds.) 2024. *Global Migration and Illiberalism in Russia, Eurasia, and Eastern Europe*. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 341 pp.

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BOOK REVIEW

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Global Migration and Illiberalism in Russia, Eurasia, and Eastern Europe, edited by Anna-Liisa Heusala, Kaarina Aitamurto, and Sherzod Eraliev, is a very welcome addition to the literature on international migration in illiberal and authoritarian states. While most studies of migration and politics focus on democracies, authoritarian Russia and Kazakhstan have become major receiving states for labor and other migrants, and most East European and Eurasian countries have sent and/or received large numbers of migrants since 2000. The editors ask how migration policy is made and implemented in these illiberal polities. They focus on the question of whether migration strengthens or undermines illiberalism in various states of the region. The chapters of this book focus on Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Poland, and Hungary, looking at both their domestic migration politics and the political roles of diasporas. The answers are complex, nuanced, and not easily summarized, but overall suggest that international migration and illiberalism are more often mutually reinforcing.

The editors, all established experts on migration affiliated with Helsinki University's Aleksanteri Institute, have brought together 12 contributors, half from Finland, the others from European and South Korean universities. Each of the 10 chapters makes an original and significant contribution based on recent, extensive fieldwork and other methods. The research that informs these chapters is exceptional, including surveys, interviews, analyses of social media, and thorough study of government documents. Each chapter tells the reader something new and often unexpected, for example, about the depth and diversity of Russian experts' debates on migration and the range and effects of Kyrgyz emigrants' social media use. Contributors dive deeply into their topics and reveal the complex flows of influences among sending and receiving states and their diasporas.

One of the book's core questions, raised in the editors' Introduction and again in the Conclusion, is why some illiberal states politicize migration while others do not. Scholars have tended to assume that autocrats, unconstrained by anti-immigrant attitudes in their societies, can allow as much migration as they deem useful for their

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economies (Cook 2024). Song Ha Joo's convincing study of Russia and Kazakhstan (Chapter 3) challenges this assumption, showing that as long as Russia had an element of electoral competition, candidates politicized xenophobia to boost their popularity. In more authoritarian Kazakhstan, by contrast, while xenophobic and nationalist attitudes were present among the population and opposition, Kazakhstani president Nazarbaev downplayed the issue and highlighted ethnic harmony. In a variation on this theme, Katalin Miklossy's study of Poland and Hungary (Chapter 2) shows how illiberal political aspirants used elections and the threat of immigration to increase their popular support in both still largely democratic polities.

A second theme involves the influence of diasporas on the politics of sending states, that is, emigrants' 'political remittances.' The major migrant-sending states in the region, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan, have authoritarian governments. In her outstanding Chapter 6, 'Kyrgyz Diaspora Online,' Ajar Chekirova takes the reader deep into the blogosphere created by emigrants, most of whom live in Russia. She shows how the Web can be used by illiberal politicians at home to generate support among emigrants. However, it also functions as a means of migrants' political agency, especially during crises. During the pandemic, emigrants organized online to collaborate on the ground, collecting and sending home money, medical equipment, and other supplies. Chekirova's analysis shows that the political effects of the Kyrgyz diaspora's online activities were complex, strengthening emigrants' citizenship but also revealing government corruption that strengthened a populist presidential candidate. Margarita Zavadskaya, Emil Kamalov, and Ivetta Sergeeva (Chapter 8) look at political activism among the comparatively small group of Russians who emigrated to Georgia, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Türkiye after Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine. The authors show that their post-departure activism was constrained by ties to remote Russian employers, the pro-Russian politics of some receiving states, and the pervasiveness of Russia's control of media.

Two contributors focus on the domestic politics of migration in Russia. Julia Glathe's Chapter 4 reveals the depth and richness of expert debates about migration in Russia, which surprised me as a reader. She shows three competing 'projects of post-socialist development' among experts: neoliberal, securitization, and humanitarian. The last proposes mutual benefits for states and workers through Eurasian integration and a region-wide labor market. Unfortunately, Glathe does not connect these approaches with actual migration policymaking or outcomes, and thus, it remains unclear whether these experts have influenced policy. Dmitry Kurnosov's Chapter 5 on changing electoral rights of Russian émigrés from the 1990s to the present shows that policies have become more restrictive and have sometimes been manipulated to facilitate electoral fraud.

The book also covers Eastern Europe (EE), mainly Poland, Hungary, and Ukraine. Katalin Miklossy's excellent Chapter 2 explains how illiberal politicians in Poland and Hungary broke with the European Union's (EU's) initial integrationist approach to large-scale migration from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Both were democratic backsliders, and pressure from the EU to accept quotas of MENA migrants served as an opportunity for populist politicians, Poland's Law and Justice (PiS) party and Hungary's Orban, respectively, to advance their political power. Chapter 7 by Joni Virkkunen, Kristiina Silvan, and Minna Piipponen points to the influence of Russia's and Belarus' intentional sending of MENA migrants to European states in provoking illiberal responses. In my view, the authors exaggerate this influence, as Europe's migration policy had already turned in an illiberal direction before Russia and Belarus weaponized

migration. Heusala and Eraliev in Chapter 9 discuss the war in Ukraine as a product of Russia's illiberal politics and assess its influence on migration in Central Asia (CA) as well as on Ukrainian refugees' migration to Europe.

The book's one serious weakness is that it disappoints the title's promise to consider global migration and illiberalism at the regional level. It focuses disproportionately on Russia at the expense of CA and EE. The question about the interplay between illiberalism and migration is fully considered only for the Russian case. While chapters do discuss the influence of émigrés in CA, the bigger question is whether large-scale out-migration strengthens or weakens illiberalism in these states. The editors recognize that out-migration may function as a 'safety valve' for discontent, while large-scale return migration (because of the pandemic and the Ukraine war) may be destabilizing, but they restate the question rather than providing an answer. In EE, there is only Miklossy's single (albeit substantial) chapter, showing how the threat of immigration contributed to illiberalism in Poland and Hungary. Heusala and Eraliev's Chapter 9 suggests that the Ukrainian refugee migration after the 2022 invasion was, in effect, a destabilizing move by Russia, placing stress on European social services. While there has been such stress on social services in European states, their responses to Ukrainian refugees—including those of Poland and Hungary—were largely humanitarian and caused little instability. Even the populist parties that rose on the wave of the MENA migration supported integrating Ukrainians, though that support is now waning. Both the racial and ethnic closeness of Ukrainians to Europeans and the security threat from Russia contributed to Europe's liberal response. More consideration of, and comparison with, CA and EE states on this central question would have strengthened the book.

Despite this limitation, *Global Migration and Illiberalism in Russia, Eurasia, and Eastern Europe* makes a major contribution to the still-limited literature (especially in English) on migration and illiberal politics in Russia and CA. It expands and significantly updates works by Abashin (2017), Schenk (2018), Laurelle (2021), Cook (2024), and others. The volume contributors' interdisciplinary approach, use of multiple methods, and recent fieldwork make the book especially valuable. The book will be read by specialists on migration, illiberal regimes, Russia, Eurasia, and EE, including students in graduate courses that cover these topics, and more selectively, undergraduates and readers with a general interest in migration.

Much of the research for *Global Migration and Illiberalism in Russia, Eurasia, and Eastern Europe* was carried out between 2020 and 2022. While reading the chapters, I thought that, at least for Russia, such research has not been possible since. Along with its obvious, larger, devastating effects, the war in Ukraine is sadly impoverishing our study and understanding of Russia now and for the foreseeable future.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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