

BOOK REVIEWS

Kin Majorities: Identity and Citizenship in Crimea and Moldova, by Eleanor Knott, McGill-Queens, 2022, 356 pp., \$120 (hardback), ISBN 9780228011507.

This crisply written, conceptually rich and persuasively argued book offers a strong contribution to the literature on kin-state politics and on identity in pluralistic societies. It engages with an understudied case—Moldova—and an often misunderstood one—Crimea. Based upon extensive fieldwork and carefully developed qualitative analysis, it brings forth a detailed account of complex and shifting identities among ordinary citizens and how these identities intersect with their preferred relationship with their respective kin states of Romania and Russia. The result is a compelling story of diverse identities and widely varying preferences with respect to citizenship and other kin policies, a starkly different story than conventional wisdom would lead us to expect.

The book develops the concept of kin majorities, a group that constitutes a majority in their home country but is connected to an external kin state through ethnic, historic, or other cultural and linguistic ties. It questions why, lacking discrimination in their home countries (7), such majorities nonetheless at times seek citizenship and other benefits from states that claim them as kin. To address this puzzle, the author develops a theoretical framework that she terms the *identity-citizenship nexus* (20) to explore the myriad ways that identity and citizenship interact.

This framework explores citizenship practices from the bottom up, and in so doing uncovers complex and fractured identities that inform preferred relationships with kin states in unexpected ways. It presents four types of identification and of citizenship practice. *Nesting* exists when one's identity is situated as an integral part of the kin state. Citizenship practices are concentric, with layers of loyalty and belonging. *Cross-cutting* exists when one's identity intersects partially with the kin state. Citizenship practices and loyalty intersect in part but not fully. *Separated* identity exists when there is no connection to that of the kin state. Similarly, separated practices are unrelated to each other and do not intersect. Finally, *competing* identities possess zero-sum meanings as one's identity is threatened by the kin state. Practices also are zero sum whereby loyalty to the home state is threatened by any engagement with citizenship of the kin state. The *identity-citizenship nexus* then maps these four types of identification and citizenship practices against each other to determine differentiation or alignment between how individuals identify themselves vis-à-vis the kin state and how they practice (or not) citizenship or other policy on offer.

The Crimea case study unfolds in chapters four and five. Five identity categories (72) emerged through the author's inductive analysis. *Politicized Russians* articulated a competing identity that was threatened by Ukrainian identity and state policy. They identified ethnically as Russian and with Russia itself and expressed a desire for Russian citizenship. In contrast, *Ethnic Russians* had a cross-cutting identity whereby they identified ethnically as Russian but not with Russia itself. Instead, they identified as Ukrainian citizens uninterested in Russian citizenship, which they saw as competing and a threat to the Ukrainian state. *Political Ukrainians* identified only as citizens of Ukraine, a completely civic identity that was separated from Russian identity, and also viewed Russian citizenship as competing and a threat to Ukraine. *Crimeans* possessed a cross-cutting identity that was distinctly regional and hybrid and viewed Russian citizenship as completely separated from loyalty to Ukraine. Finally, *Ethnic Ukrainians* possessed an ethnolinguistic Ukrainian identity that they viewed as competing with (and thus threatened by) Russian identity. They also viewed Russian citizenship as competing and threatening to Ukraine.

These findings (111) not only uncover fascinating nuanced identity and citizenship preferences; they challenge much of the conventional wisdom—namely that all Russian speakers—especially

ethnic Russians—identify with and support Russia itself. Instead, we see here that only a distinct minority did so, just a few months before Russia's illegal annexation. In contrast, the majority possessed much more fractured identities along ethnic, cultural, historical, and territorial lines, what the author characterizes as “multidimensional” and “blended” (243).

The Moldova case study follows, in chapters six and seven. Using the same logic, the author identified five inductively derived categories (154). *Organic Romanians* expressed a nested identity whereby to be Moldovan meant to be part of Romania and thus to be Romanian. Accordingly, Romanian citizenship was perceived as nested and not a threat to the Moldovan state. *Cultural Romanians*, in contrast, expressed a cross-cutting identity of being Romanian and attached to Romania as a kin state but were also strongly attached to Moldova, even though they perceived nested citizenship practices. *Ambivalent Romanians* possessed a cross-cutting identity but were less certain about how being Moldovan overlapped being Romanian and vice versa. They perceived Romanian citizenship as cross-cutting. *Moldovans*, in contrast, expressed a Moldovan identity that was separated from but not threatened by Romanian identity. They did not identify with Romania as a kin state, but they considered their language to be Romanian (not Moldovan). They viewed citizenship practices as cross-cutting with some overlap in loyalty. *Linguistic Moldovans*, however, possessed an identity that was competing with and threatened by Romanian identity. Unlike all of the other groups, they considered their language to be Moldovan. They also viewed Romanian citizenship as competing with and a threat to Moldova.

Thus, we see that in Moldova, across the spectrum, acceptance of Romanian language, identity, and citizenship were seen as normal, legitimate, and nonthreatening to all groups except for the few *Linguistic Moldovans*. In Crimea, in contrast, Russian citizenship, across the board, was not seen as legitimate and was perceived as in competition with loyalty to Ukraine and thus a threat to the Ukrainian state. Only *Politicized Russians*, a distinct minority, expressed a different view.

This book is sure to be of great interest to scholars and students of kin-state politics, identity boundaries, and transborder politics. Its contributions are many. It is conceptually innovative and bold and methodologically creative and rigorous. The detailed appendix outlines the research process from design, through fieldwork, and ultimately through the data analysis. This is certain to be useful to political scientists seeking to break out of the discipline's traditional suspicion of interpretive approaches and the everyday context of our politics.

The analysis in this excellent book is compelling, yet future research would benefit from further conceptualization as to what it means to study kin majorities. For example, the definition of kin majority (8) seems to exclude the *Ethnic Ukrainian* group included in the Crimea case study, although this is not entirely clear. Nonetheless, their inclusion offered important insight. In studying kin majorities, are we studying only the majority or the whole community residing in that territory? In this case, the inclusion of *Ethnic Ukrainians* (a minority in Crimea but majority in Ukraine) sheds important light on division in Crimea, as they perceived the kin state to be Ukraine and Russia as a threat, in contrast to *Politicized Russians* (a majority in Crimea but minority in Ukraine) who perceived the kin state to be Russia and Ukraine as a threat. This illustrates the utility of using this framework to study identity boundaries as well. The book is suitable for scholars, practitioners, and graduate and advanced undergraduate students.

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