

**ANOTHER SOUTH? A Review of SOPHIE HOHMANN,  
CLAIRE MOURADIAN, SILVIA SERRANO, JULIEN THOREZ (eds.),  
DEVELOPMENT IN CENTRAL ASIA AND THE CAUCASUS:  
MIGRATION, DEMOCRATISATION, AND INEQUALITY  
IN THE POST-SOVIET ERA.**

**London; New York: IB Tauris, 2014, 399 pp.**

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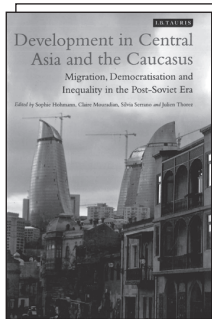
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**Abstract:** This review is devoted to the book *Development in Central Asia and the Caucasus: Migration, Democratisation and Inequality in the Post-Soviet Era*. It is the product of an international research project by historians, anthropologists, political scientists, demographers, and some other scholars. The key point of the book that connects all the authors is the analysis of the Post-Soviet Caucasus and Central Asia as a 'new Global South'. From this perspective, the problems of poverty, migration, social inequality, and state and nation-building are considered in the monograph.

**Keywords:** the post-Soviet space, 'new South', Central Asia, Caucasus, postcolonial studies, migration, poverty, inequality.

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**Sophie Hohmann, Claire Mouradian, Silvia Serrano, Julien Thorez** (eds.). *Development in Central Asia and the Caucasus: Migration, Democratization and Inequality in the Post-Soviet Era*. London; New York: IB Tauris, 2014, 399 pp.

This review is devoted to the book *Development in Central Asia and the Caucasus: Migration, Democratization and Inequality in the Post-Soviet Era*. It is the product of an international research project by historians, anthropologists, political scientists, demographers, and some other scholars. The key point of the book that connects all the authors is the analysis of the Post-Soviet Caucasus and Central Asia as a 'new Global South'. From this perspective, the problems of poverty, migration, social inequality, and state and nation-building are considered in the monograph.

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### Another South?

At the beginning of the 1990s, when many people were prepared to follow Francis Fukuyama and believe in the imminent 'end of history' [Fukuyama 2007], the dominant paradigm for explaining the processes taking place in the post-Soviet area was transitology. The post-communist transformations were treated as a movement away from authoritarianism and the planned economy, and towards a 'normal' liberal democratic state. However, towards the end of the decade there was growing criticism of the transitological paradigm [Kapustin 2001], as it became clearer that current tendencies, at any rate in the former USSR, were not adequately described in a whole range of its premisses. But if we reject the idea of a 'democratic transit' as a general framework for understanding what is happening in the post-Soviet space, what can we put in its place? And will the post-communist transformations fit into any general conceptual framework at all? Today, a quarter of a century after the collapse of the USSR, there is no generally accepted answer to these questions. The discussion continues, and this book, I am sure, will be a notable contribution to it.

The book is the result of a research project entitled 'The Post-Soviet Caucasus and Central

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Asia: another South?’ (2007–2011), the driving force behind which was the group of French scholars whose names appear on the cover of the book as its editors. They in turn involved colleagues from Japan, Russia, Georgia, Tajikistan, Azerbaijan and a number of other countries in work on the project. The finale of their scholarly efforts was a large conference that took place in Almaty in the summer of 2011, after which this book was published as the fruit of many years’ work by an international team of researchers.

As noted in the introduction, which lays out the conceptual framework for the whole book, the main aim of the project and of the book which grew out of it was to analyse the trajectory of evolution of Central Asia and the South Caucasus in the post-Soviet period and place it in its global context. How was it proposed to do this? It is well known that after the collapse of the USSR the former tripartite division of the world into capitalist, socialist and developing lost its relevance, and was replaced by the ‘North — South’ opposition, which reflected the inequality of development in the modern world. Consequently it is proposed to examine the overall logic of the processes taking place in the newly independent states of Central Asia and the Caucasus since 1991 primarily from the point of view of their entry (not to say descent) into the Global South. What is the position of these countries in the new lines of division of the modern globalising world? Is the use of the concept of ‘the South’ heuristically valuable for the analysis of the said areas of the post-Soviet space? Can theoretical approaches like those of postcolonial studies be applied to Central Asia and the Caucasus as they are to other parts of the world periphery? The thirteen chapters of the book, written by anthropologists, sociologists, political scientists, demographers and specialists in other disciplines, are thematically constructed around these questions and others like them.

The texts are structured within four sections. The first contains those chapters which generate discussion on the possibility of using terms like ‘postcolonial’ and ‘post-Soviet’ with reference to Central Asia and the South Caucasus. Claire Mouradian traces the sources of the colonial discourse and the imperial administrative practices used by Russia on its southern periphery, primarily the Caucasus. In her opinion, despite all the differences between the Russian Empire and the USSR, they are united firstly by their eurocentrism and the imperial centre’s notion that it belongs to a ‘higher civilisation’ which imposes its own culture and view of the world on others, civilising its underdeveloped borderlands (for which reason there is only a stylistic difference between Catherine II, who dreamt of taming the ‘wild behaviour’ of the mountain peoples under Russian administration, and the Bolshevik activist G. Zinovyev, who reasoned that it was the task of the Russian proletariat to assist ‘the backward workers of the East’), and secondly by their perception

of the Caucasus as a place for exploitation, for the use of its resources and for settlement. Moreover, the one is closely connected with the other: colonial domination by Russia / the USSR of its southern borderlands was always justified by the need to support and develop these 'backward' territories.

It should be noted that Mouradian's study is not limited to the reconstruction of the colonial discourse, but a large part of it consists of a quite detailed analysis of the practices of imperial administration in the Caucasus, which was a sort of laboratory for the development and testing of various administrative models (there were no less than eight territorial reorganisations of the Caucasus between 1775 and 1880). At the centre of her attention are the imperial government's attempts to achieve a balance between central and local government and between autochthonous and imperial institutions, the strategies for the integration of the local elites and the Empire's migration and economic policies in the Caucasus.

It is hard not to see the next chapter in this section as polemicising with the previous one, even though it is devoted to a completely different topic and a different region. Its author, Tetsuro Chida, examines Moscow's policy of appointments and system of party control over Central Asia during the Brezhnev era, using archival materials from the Department of Organisation and Party Work of the Central Committee of the CPSU. Chida's analysis suggests that although the USSR had a 'pseudo-federal structure', relations between the centre and the periphery and the degree of autonomy enjoyed by the republican elites varied quite considerably at different periods of the Soviet regime. In particular, Brezhnev's government, resting on the principle of 'trusting the appointed officials', reduced interference into appointments in the republics to a minimum. Even when 'signals came in' regarding various malpractices, the centre usually confined itself to recommending that they should be investigated by the local elites themselves. As a result the leaders of the Central Asian republics acquired considerable political autonomy, to which they became accustomed during the long period of Brezhnev's administration. It is not surprising that the attempt to 'sort out' the republics after Brezhnev's death (the 'cotton case', etc.) was extremely badly received on the ground as a disruption of the status quo, and by the time of perestroika led to centrifugal impulses on the part of the national elites.

The polemic between the first two chapters arises from the fact that for Claire Mouradian there is no doubt about the colonial nature of either the Russian Empire or the USSR, whereas her Japanese colleague's results make this the central research question. Chida shows that the local party leaders served not only to implement instructions coming down from Moscow (as it often appears within

that paradigm that sees the USSR as the last empire), but often played their own games and looked after their own interests. Chida's conclusions regarding the post of Second Secretary in the republics are also interesting in this respect. Since they were almost always ethnic Russians, the second secretaries are usually regarded as 'observers' from the centre and opposed to the local elites. In fact these people often pursued a career inside the national republics, spending decades moving up the party ladder there and for that reason being involved in one way or another in the republic's internal connections, groupings and so on, and becoming part of the balance of forces within the local elite — not to mention the fact that they never had more power than that represented by the extent of the powers of the first secretaries of the republics.

Sergei Abashin, the author of the third chapter, considers the possibilities and limitations of using the category of 'the nation' for analysing the societies of post-Soviet Central Asia, and the applicability of postcolonial discourse to that region. (In his opinion, 'there is not a single [Central Asian country] in which the authorities or a majority of the public are prepared to label the Soviet period colonial' (p. 88).) However, it was the question of how the former Soviet space can be 'analytically reconfigured' today that seemed the most interesting to me: whether it should still be considered as a single entity ('post-Soviet countries', 'the CIS', etc.), or somehow split up to separate out various clusters or groups of countries. As Abashin points out himself, in the first case there is a great risk of artificially giving this territory particular features in comparison with other regions and ignoring its internal complexity and the dissimilarities between the countries that it comprises, while in the second case we cannot help underestimating the 'common historical experience' of the post-Soviet states and the obvious fact that many of the socio-political, economic and cultural institutions and practices of the newly independent states of Eurasia are derived precisely from the Soviet period. The way out of this dilemma is to use the category of the 'post-Soviet' selectively: sometimes it really is extremely useful and productive for analysis, while at other times other concepts may be used in respect of Central Asian societies — 'transitional societies', 'inchoate states', 'the new periphery', 'the new South', etc. Each of these concepts sheds light on some peculiarities of this region which are not apparent within other explicatory frameworks, while relying on a single analytical model distorts and over-simplifies a reality which 'has a fractured, hybrid nature' (p. 94).

The search for an adequate analytical construct for describing the countries of the former USSR is continued by George Tarkhan-Mouravi in his chapter. He justifies the use of the term 'post-Soviet South' for eight states from the former USSR, three in the South

Caucasus and five in Central Asia. The Georgian political scientist considers that all these societies are united by common challenges and problems. These are in the economic sphere the low productivity of agriculture, in which the majority of the population is employed, mass economic migration to more prosperous countries, and the critical dependence of the economy on the production or transit of raw materials; in the political sphere, weak institutions, problems with democracy, and past or present inter-ethnic or military conflicts; and in the sphere of values, a particular political culture for which various informal relationships and loyalties are more important than ideological or party differences. This makes politics more personal, and results in the formation of different patron-client networks and clan, sub-ethnic and territorial units.

At the same time, Tarkhan-Mouravi demonstrates that not only may these states be united into a single region, but that the 'post-Soviet South' may equally be differentiated into different clusters on the basis of various signs, since the countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus differ on religious and cultural criteria, the possession or lack of natural resources, geopolitical orientation, the degree of severity of their political regimes, etc. He supposes that in the future, to the extent that they can overcome their Soviet inheritance, we can most likely expect a further divergence of the trajectories of development within the 'post-Soviet South'.

Besides their colonial past, another essential attribute of countries conventionally assigned to the 'South' is the problem of social inequality and poverty and difficulties of economic development. These form the themes of the second part of the book. Hélène Rousselot analyses the economies of post-Soviet Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, two Central Asian countries rich in hydrocarbons, defining them as 'rentier states', i.e. states which exist by redistributing the income that they get from their natural resources. Dr Rousselot shows that though the 'food supply' of the Kazakh and Turkmen regimes is very similar, the concrete economic strategies of rentier states may be very different.

Saodat and Muzzafar Olimov have devoted their chapter to the problem of human capital in Tajikistan, which has been devalued on a catastrophic scale in the post-Soviet period. Tajikistan was the country that suffered most from the collapse of the USSR: in the first ten years of independence per capita income shrank by 85 %, illiteracy has appeared in the country, and deurbanisation and deindustrialisation can be observed. On the one hand, the restructuring of the economy has led to a sharp fall in demand for a qualified workforce, while on the other economic sectors such as trade and services, which require workers with low qualifications, have grown rapidly. In addition, the growth of social inequality and

cuts in the social security system make it difficult for children from poor families (especially girls) to gain access to good education, and mass economic emigration takes children out of school to perform domestic tasks in place of the absent adults. And although its Soviet heritage still means that Tajikistan is significantly in advance of other countries of the South with a similar GDP in terms of the volume of its human capital, the authors find the tendencies in this sphere somewhat alarming.

In the final chapter of this section Cécile Lefèvre and Sophie Hohmann address the problem of poverty in the countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus. As it appears from their text, this socio-economic category, which is firmly associated with the countries of the South, is by no means clear and unambiguous. By using different methodologies to calculate poverty, we can arrive at a figure of 0 %, 5.3 % or 15.8 % for Azerbaijan, depending on whether we base it on the criteria of the World Bank (living on \$ 1.25 a day), the United Nations' Multidimensional Poverty Index, or the so-called national poverty level. Poverty statistics may consequently be manipulated and used in election campaigns and propaganda (for example, to demonstrate the correctness of a particular policy). Poverty indicators may be used as an argument for seeking international loans or even adapted to the geopolitical strategy of the ruling elite. 'Georgia, for example, tends to minimize poverty figures in an attempt to align itself with the West whereas countries such as Tajikistan use poverty figures to justify their request for international aid' (p. 184).

Poverty and economic problems are the cause of the phenomenon of economic migration from the countries of the South to more prosperous regions. This phenomenon is analysed in the third part of the book. Julien Thorez shows that one evident argument for regarding the post-Soviet transformation of Central Asia and the Caucasus as a process of 'third-worldisation' is the mass economic migration from those areas to Russia. The phenomenon of migration has played an important role in the reintegration of the post-Soviet space, which had become fragmented in the first years after the collapse of the USSR. By the end of the 1990s Central Asia was already again involved in quite a close relationship with Russia based on the movement of people, goods and capital; economic migrants were responsible for restoring the transport links between Russia and Central Asia, which had suffered a real collapse in the early 1990s (in 1996 there was only one regular flight between Tajikistan and Russia, by 2002 there were eleven, and by 2008 twenty-nine). The direction of the flow of migrants reproduces the former relationship between 'centre and periphery' in the new historical period, and is fully consistent with the classical postcolonial situation (although the flow of migrants from Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan to Kazakhstan means that we cannot speak of a purely postcolonial case).



Kazakhstan does indeed confuse the situation considerably and shows that not everything is so straightforward in this post-Soviet 'North-South' dichotomy. In theory it is, after all, Russia, as the former metropolis, that should be designated as the North, whereas the main economic divide in the post-Soviet space runs along the southern borders of Kazakhstan, and not Russia. Kazakhstan is a country that is developing dynamically, where average income is not much less than in Russia, and indeed according to results for 2015 Kazakhstan is even likely to overtake Russia in terms of its per capita GDP. Besides, as already noted, Kazakhstan has become an important destination for migration within the region, and already a serious competitor for Russia. None of this in any way corresponds to the usual situation of 'former colonies versus former metropolis'.

A further hindrance to the drawing of a clear demarcation between the North and the South in the former USSR is the fact that since 1991 inequality in development has grown not only between states, but also within them. Some subsidised regions of Russia have socio-economic indicators that are quite 'peripheral'; everywhere growth points in the form of big cities coexist with depressed areas; the gulf between town and country is growing. Besides this, huge discrepancies in standards of living may come about even within a single region (for example, the formation of elite neighbourhoods in some parts of a city and slums in others).

The chapter by Natalya Zotova and Viktor Agadzhanian, though directly connected with the subject of migration, seems to me to stand somewhat apart from the rest, since it is not the phenomenon of migration as such that it analyses, but the methodology of research into this phenomenon. Zotova and Agadzhanian reflect on their experience of their own research on 'Social vulnerability and sexual risks of migrant women from Central Asia in Moscow', carried out in 2010. As they say, the overall approach of the research was not to examine the question of migration through the dry figures of statistics, or the pragmatic logic of benefits and costs that the migrants represent for the receiving country (and that is the dominant approach in Russian migration studies), but to see the processes of migration through the eyes of the people who participate in them, and to understand the migrants' hopes, fears and difficulties and how they perceive their new situation in life.

Moreover, Zotova and Agadzhanian's research methodology had another feature which is reflected in the chapter's title: 'Migrants study migrants'. The project was built on a series of in-depth interviews conducted not by professional interviewers but by women from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan who were migrants like the interviewees. Specialists in sociology and cultural anthropology will certainly be interested in discovering the authors' thoughts on the



advantages, possibilities and difficulties of their chosen method regarding the interviewers' own perception of the life stories that they hear during their work 'in the field', and so on.

In the third chapter of the section on migration Anne Le Huérou studies the practices of managing economic migration in Russia, using material from Omsk *oblast*, where she conducted fieldwork in 2009–2010. Le Huérou convincingly shows how ambiguous migration policy is in Russia, where liberal and restrictive measures are curiously intertwined, where the need of business for a cheap workforce collides with the xenophobic mood of the majority of the population which makes immigration a political question, where post-imperial practices of domination are mixed with the inheritance of Soviet nationalities policy. As an example of the last she indicates the inclusion in the FMS social council of representatives of the diasporas, with whom the authorities interact as the 'legitimate' representatives of the corresponding ethnic groups. In Le Huérou's opinion this is a direct echo of the Soviet policy of 'affirmative action', the construction of national elites and social groups on an ethnic basis. Le Huérou shows how these complex tendencies are put into practice in a particular region of Russian bordering Kazakhstan, which is a centre to which migrants from Central Asia and China are attracted.

The authors of the last part of the book concentrate on the global context, examining questions of the diaspora and the influence of external players and international organisations on the region. Sergey Rummyantsev's text is devoted to the policy of creating and managing the diaspora in post-Soviet Azerbaijan. He introduces the concept of a 'post-Soviet bureaucratic diaspora', having in mind firstly that the Azerbaijani diaspora was deliberately constructed by the regime in power after 1991 as a political project, and secondly that the structures of the Azerbaijani diaspora take the form of a sort of pyramid (from city and regional organisations in different countries to the Coordinating Committee of the Azerbaijanis of the World) created with the direct involvement of the government. The regime in Azerbaijan deliberately created a 'political patriotic myth' about the existence of a global community of Azerbaijanis scattered over the face of the earth, who are understood as a homogeneous group in the ethno-national and cultural sense: 'a single and indivisible part of the Azerbaijani people' (p. 310).

The main motive for creating the diaspora was the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. The idea of the Azerbaijani elite was that Azerbaijanis living abroad should present the necessary point of view on that conflict in Russia, the USA and Western Europe and resist 'the Armenians of the world' in the information war. Later on the discourse of the diaspora became a major component of the official

ideology and part of the cult of H. Aliyev, who had not only created the Azerbaijanis' nation state, but also gathered together the 'fifty millions' of the Azerbaijani people and continued to be concerned with the needs of Azerbaijanis all over the world. The creation of the diaspora thus became an important instrument used by the regime in both its domestic and foreign politics.

It has become fashionable in recent years to employ the concept of 'soft power'. It is found in official documents such as the *Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation*, and a number of institutions devoted to furthering Russian interests by means of the instruments of 'soft power', such as the 'Russian World' or the Gorchakov Fund, have been founded. At the same time it is evident that informational and cultural / symbolic resources are not, so far, the highest trump in the hand of Russian foreign policy. It is all the more interesting to look at the experience of our competitors in the Central Asian region, and this is what Stéphane De Tapia's article allows us to do. He is interested in the political and cultural instruments by means of which Turkey has been affirming its presence in Central Asia over the past twenty-five years, during which, taking advantage of the new geopolitical situation resulting from the collapse of the USSR, it has been trying to incorporate the Turkic-speaking states of the region in its sphere of influence. The article analyses, *inter alia*, the activities of both private and state-controlled institutions (like the Turkish Agency for Co-operation and Development, the Yunus Emre Institutes, etc.), various 'think tanks', and the media and educational foundations which are concerned with Central Asia and (or) are popularisers of Turkish culture and conduits for Turkish political influence in the region.

De Tapia notes that the activities of the different conduits of Turkish 'soft power' are far from co-ordinated. For example, some agencies stress the ideas of Pan-Turkism, others the Turkic-Islamic synthesis, and so on. This ideological confusion is the result of identity problems within Turkey itself, which, having been for many decades at a sort of crossroads between Europe and Asia (symbolically expressed even in its geography), hesitates between the ideals of Atatürk's secularism and Islamic modernism and does not fully understand which historical roots it should take as its primal foundations. The Central Asian states themselves, moreover, having liberated themselves from the firm tutelage of their 'elder brother' from Moscow in 1991, are in no hurry to replace it, so that the question of whether the single 'Turkic world' promoted by Turkish ideologues actually exists remains open.

The book's concluding chapter is written by Mana Farooghi, a young researcher working in Britain. Her text is an attempt to look into the processes taking place in transitional societies from another

perspective than the Western-centred approach with its universal normative ideal of liberal democracy. Her attention is focused on the means by which the ruling clan of Tajikistan established its control over the country's basic resources and the active formation of patron-client networks — processes which are invariably condemned by the majority of Western experts as a manifestation of tribalism and corruption and as a dangerous pathology which threatens the stability of the Tajik polity, turning it into a failed state. Farooghi uses alternative concepts such as Alex de Waal's 'political marketplace', which sees patron-client relations as a natural replacement for formal state structures when these are incapable of ensuring stability and security in society. This means that the existence of patron-client networks need not be seen as a sign of a weak and unstable state. On the contrary, a state that can negotiate successfully with various agencies within the country is on firmer ground than one that is entirely dependent on external financial aid (as indeed Tajikistan was until the early years of this century). A system of informal redistribution of resources creates competition, which works as a political marketplace in which loyalty to the regime is bought and sold in exchange for access to resources in political negotiations between the various elite groups, which guarantees the achievement of political stability. Nor should it be forgotten that the family and clan principles were Tajik society's answer to the difficult conditions in which it found itself during the civil war and the ensuing disintegration, and for many people offered the only prospect of survival in a country where the economy and social security system had collapsed.

Therefore what is happening in Tajikistan is not fatal evidence of a failure of the process of state-building, but rather an attempt on the part of society to adapt itself to the new conditions of independent postcolonial existence and find its own model of political evolution — an attempt which has much better prospects for the future of Tajik society than the prescriptions for economic and political stabilisation offered to Tajikistan by the international financial organisations, which are infinitely distant from reality.

In assessing the book as a whole, I would remark that its authors' chosen theoretical position, once all the texts have been read, appears quite convincing. The overall logic of the transformation of the societies of Central Asia and the South Caucasus since 1991 can indeed be described as a movement in the direction of the Global South. The dismantling of the Soviet systems of education and social security, together with the post-totalitarian regime, and the disintegration of previous economic links have led to a de-modernisation of the economy and of the whole society, reduced the per capita GDP of a number of countries in the region to the level of Sub-Saharan Africa, and produced huge social inequality and poverty, resulting in mass economic migration, primarily to Russia.

Many ex-Soviet republics, like many other states in the South, have suffered armed conflicts and political coups, and some of them do indeed qualify as failed states largely dependent on financial aid from without. It is hard to speak of a successful political transit. As the book says, if there has been a political transition in the countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus, it is ‘from one form of authoritarianism to another’ (p. 8).

Furthermore, the book has also demonstrated that there are certain limits to the applicability of the chosen analytical scheme. Sergei Abashin has convincingly demonstrated that the postcolonial approach in its pure form is unlikely to prove productive for Central Asia, and it further turns out that the borders of the ‘post-Soviet South’ are not so easy to define, since Russia too, which within the framework of this paradigm ought to belong to what is designated as the North, has gone through transformations since 1991 which are of the same sort as those of its southern neighbours: it too has been affected by processes of deindustrialisation and economic degeneration, the growth of structural inequality, poverty, etc. However, this consideration does not amount to a serious criticism of the authors’ approach as such; it is rather a question of a possible direction for further research and discussion.

As for other criticisms, they are few. For example, one might point out that although the title of the book refers to both the Caucasus and Central Asia, the balance of contents is heavily in favour of the latter. Only two articles — Mouradian’s and Rumyantsev’s — are devoted specifically to the Caucasus, while the rest deal either with Central Asia alone, or with the post-Soviet South in general, again with a strong bias towards the Central Asian region. Claire Mouradian’s frequent reference to ‘the Baltic states’ in her description of the expansionist policies of the Russian Empire (p. 21) is also surprising: there is really no justification for applying this term to the realities of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Nor can one let pass the statement in the introduction that Russia is the country with the second largest number of immigrants in the world (p. 6). Many experts have already pointed out that this oft-repeated assertion is completely wrong [Malakhov et al. 2015: 11–12]: it comes from World Bank assessments which count as migrants anyone born outside their country of residence. Where modern Russia is concerned, this means that people who were born outside the RSFSR in Soviet times, or who left the former Soviet republics in the 1990s, are all recorded as migrants. It would not, therefore, be correct to use these data in assessing the scale of economic migration to Russia. However, these remarks, as may easily be seen, refer to details. Speaking of the whole, it must be recognised that the publication of this collective work, which I have had the pleasure of reading, will be of great use to everybody interested in post-Soviet transformation.

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