

Andrey Makarychev and Alexandra Yatsyk (eds.) 2016: *Mega Events in Post-Soviet Eurasia: Shifting Borderlines of Inclusion and Exclusion*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan

Mega-events like the Olympics and the World Cup—and a host of lesser-known but still significant spectacles—are about more than sport. The flourishing academic literature on mega-events boasts a wealth of material detailing how political and business interests have instrumentalized events for a variety of ends. These include improving the image of the host nation on the international stage, consolidating power at domestic level, boosting tourist attractiveness and catalyzing urban development. At the same time, the literature has something of a blind spot when it comes to the global East. *Mega Events in Post-Soviet Eurasia* is a step on the path to rectifying this oversight.

The regions covered in this edited volume are notoriously opaque. Conducting research in these less-than-open societies often presents a real challenge. Using mega-events as an entry point, Makarychev and Yatsyk have done well to present much-needed work on Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Ukraine and Russia—places generally under-represented in Anglophone scholarship. The book is at its best when demonstrating the local specificities of host nations as they enact diverse strategies of power consolidation and image management, deploying nationalist rhetoric, enriching domestic and international elites through sleight-of-hand tax shenanigans, and attempting to maintain political and economic stability throughout. These are important insights and make for worthwhile reading, but at the same time there are several problems with the book detracting from its overall impact.

To start with, the book's nine chapters are divided into three sections: 'Mega-Events and Social Issues', 'Post-Soviet Autocracies and Mega-Events' and 'Global Norms and Local Governance'. These sections do little to sort the chapters into logical thematic or conceptual groups. For instance, nearly every chapter could fit under social issues, while the section on mega-events in post-Soviet autocracies seems redundant in a book dedicated to this very topic. The reader would benefit from a rethinking of the overall structure. Since nearly half the book is devoted to the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics, why not make this explicit in one unified section? The remaining chapters could also work well in one group, as they are centred on case studies of second-order mega-events. There is nothing egregiously wrong with how the book is currently structured, but surely there must be a more coherent way to order the contents. The subject matter is fascinating and merits better presentation.

More seriously, in the introduction Makarychev and Yatsyk present their conceptual ambition: to 'discuss the origins of politicization of sports through global events' from the 'double perspective of inclusion/exclusion and the making/unmaking of boundaries' (p. 3). Indeed, the subtitle of the book itself underscores the importance of this approach. The trouble is that not every author addresses this overarching conceptual frame and, too often, if they do engage, they do so in ways that are insufficiently explored or, at worst, feel tacked on. This does not make their chapters less interesting but it does raise questions about the value of introducing these concepts in the first place.

There are two more problems worth mentioning in this otherwise engaging book. First, aside from the incomplete adherence to the broader conceptual frame, there is also a lack of theoretical alignment between chapters. Many authors deal with similar topics, for instance on the use of mega-events as a tool for creating, managing or propagating national identity. Disregarding the fact that national identity on its own is a treacherously slippery concept, it gives the reader pause when numerous chapters use uncoordinated approaches to address a single issue. In certain circumstances this variety could prove fascinating—for example, imagine a section or even a book dedicated to mega-events and national identity from multiple perspectives—but in this instance, unfortunately, the variegated approaches weaken the whole. Instead of a choir singing, we get more of a babbling crowd.

Finally, perhaps the biggest problem is also (ironically) the smallest: the unfortunate preponderance of grammatical and typographical errors. It is no crime that most of the authors here are not native English speakers—and indeed, being a native speaker is no guarantee that a writer produces perfect texts. At the same time, it is not unreasonable to expect that a published book be free of these errors, particularly an academic hardback retailing at US \$99.99. These errors are too common. They distract the reader from the contents and detract from the strength of the arguments. It also lends weight to the claim that Palgrave Macmillan is of late more concerned with producing quantity over quality. It seems inconceivable that any copy editor would allow such errors through, so the logical conclusion is that the publishers simply did not perform their basic duties. In this case, it appears that the authors are victims of the competitive pressures of the political economy of academic publishing, where scholars and publishers alike are compelled to produce more and produce it faster.

Despite these problems, significant as they may seem in this review, *Mega Events in Post-Soviet Eurasia* is a worthwhile contribution to the literature. Though the project as a whole feels rushed, it does shine light on important topics in places that are too often hidden from Westerners. It is only a shame that the production values fail to do justice to what should be an important, and polished, book.

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