***THE ‘MIGRATION STATE’[[1]](#endnote-2) AND LABOUR MIGRANTS IN CENTRAL ASIA***

***Anita Sengupta***

***Fellow***

***Maulana Abul Kalam Azad***

***Institute of Asian Studies***

***e-mail:*** [***anitasengupta@hotmail.com***](mailto:anitasengupta@hotmail.com)

Shukhrat Berdyev’s story (In *Diary of a Gastarbeiter[[2]](#endnote-3)*) is a familiar one of a middle aged Uzbek school teacher who in the post-Soviet era is faced with the prospect of traveling to Moscow to work as a loader at the Tyoply Stan market.[[3]](#endnote-4) His experiences in the market as a loader, which include his reception and help from fellow country-men in the market, his existence on the edge oflegality and the nightly encounters with the police are in sharp contrast to his first trip to Moscow in the summer of the Olympic Games when as a student but also a Soviet citizen he had enjoyed the city in all its glory, The Central Asian *gastarbeiter* experience follows a familiar trajectory. A stint in Moscow, followed by experiences in the Russian countryside as a labour (in Shukhrat’s case as a carpenter)intercepted with news about violence and the looming presence of the Russian mafia boss.It is a story of repeated return, practically every year if not to Moscow then some other location (in Shukhrat’s case Siberia) despite the dangers of aggression and fraud in a system that offers no legal protection. But it is also a story full of unexpected developments as Shukhrat, like many others enters into ‘civil marriage’ with a local woman with the knowledge and support of his Uzbek wife Gulsara. There is always the lurking threat of being replaced with local unskilled labour despite the conviction that Russians would not be interested in the menial labour contributed by the Uzbeks and the Tajiks. Shukhrat’s diary is also incomplete indicating at one level his continuing visits to Russia and on the other the on-goingglobal movement of illegal labour as anenduring reality.

Shukhrat’s story has several layers. It reflects on an economy where seasonal work as *gastarbeiter* becomes a necessity to support families and particularly families with growing children, the social acceptance of this necessity and its consequences as also helplessness in the face of hostility and the lurking fear of becoming a victim of that hostility. But it is also a story that clearly indicates the existence of well-established informal institutions of support and therefore the fact that Shukhrat’s *gastarbeiter* experience is neither isolated nor recent. The necessity of this labour is recognized at the local level and as Shukhrat moves away from Moscow the lack of dignity that he endured there is significantly reduced. However, there is also a complete lack of legal recognition of this numerically significant migrant group bringing into focus the eternal dilemma of both sending and receiver countries about this trans-national movement.

Unlike the systems that are in place for the movement of capital (the IMF) or goods (WTO) a complex network of intergovernmental organizations focus on trans-national movements of people. There is little coherence among them except in cases of refugee movements particularly from conflict prone regions. By definition the movements of people involve at least two states and in many cases three or more as labour migrants transit through third countries to reach their destination. But as long as states retain exclusive authority to decide on who enters and who leaves, the free movement of people for efficient resource allocation of benefit to all will remain restricted. The reason is not that the free movement of people, like the free movement of capital and goods would not result in more efficient use of resources, but because disregard of national boundaries would mean the end of the sovereign state. As Myron Weiner argues, even the most ardent neoclassical economists recognize that with respect to movement of people there remain other considerations than the efficient use of resources. In the absence of state control over immigration, titular communities would lose control over central cultural symbols of national life and political control over the state.[[4]](#endnote-5)Concern for maintaining particular national identities, widely shared values and control over political institutions therefore preclude a policy of open entry. Countries do however offer open entry policy to those with whom their populations share close ethnic affinity or those with whom they have ethnic ties or in cases where there is a sense of obligation or guilt. However, even here, as among the Central Asian states where there is free entry for limited periods, work permits are generally not provided.

However, the global integration of markets for goods, services and capital entails higher levels of international migration. Therefore, James Hollifield argues that if states want to promote freer trade and investment, they must be willing to manage higher levels of migration.[[5]](#endnote-6)In a globalized era, international security and stability are dependent on the capacity of states to manage migration. Many states are willing to sponsor high end migration because the numbers are manageable and there is likely to be less political resistance to the importation of highly skilled individuals. However, mass migration of unskilled and less educated workers is likely to meet with greater resistance, even in sectors like construction and health care where there is high demand for unskilled labour. The tendency for governments is to bring in just enough temporary workers to fill in the gaps in the labour market but with strict contracts between the foreign workers and the employers that limits the length of stay. In reality this creates the possibility of illegal immigration.

In the former Soviet space, Russia and Kazakhstan are the principal receiver states while labour migration in significant numbers takes place from Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.[[6]](#endnote-7) Although emigration does not serve long term ‘objective’ interest of senders, it does provide a short term safety valve. More importantly for the sender state it provides substantial income in the form of remittances and other transfers. According to Barbara Schmitter Heisler, to take optimal advantage of emigration, the interest of the sending country is best served by promoting ‘temporary but long term’ migration.[[7]](#endnote-8) Given that a country decides to export labour as a partial solution to economic problems, it benefits only if emigrants remain abroad for an extended period without settling permanently. In case of permanent settlement abroadthe sending country loses on the investment made on human capital and also possible augmentation of skills acquired abroad.Short term emigration only postpones the problems that gave rise to it in the first place. Early return aggravates conditions of unemployment and underemployment as returning migrants may not find commensurate work. The interest of both sending and receiver countries is served by temporary labour migration, though receivers prefer flexible short term migration (which entails no social responsibilities) and senders prefer long term absences without permanent settlement, which ensures a flow of remittance.Neither takes note of the interest of the migrating labour.

Moreover, stagnation of economic growth rates due to declining oil prices and sanctions and fear of economic and political disruptions has meant that receivers in the post-Soviet space are now readjusting and redefining their migration policies.Russia remains the principal receiver state here and the scale of recent transformation has made migration an issue of considerable political commentary.[[8]](#endnote-9) In the run-up to his Presidential election in 2012 Putin entered the debate on Russian migration policy with a long essay on the ‘national question’ in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* reserving particular criticism for the landlords of rubber stamp apartments who register migrant workers illegally in their homes. In June 2012, Putin signed into force a concept paper on Russia’s migration policy to 2025, which lamented the declining Russian language and professional skills of migrant workers from other post-Soviet states. The new law requires certain categories of migrant workers to be tested on their knowledge of Russian language, history and legislation.On the other hand in the sending countries of Central Asia, policy makers tend to be preoccupied with migration’s macro dimensions: how many people are on the move? How much money is being sent back? Should remittances be seen as a source of development or threat to the local economy?

Stagnating economies leading to the devaluation of the roublehasalso meant that migrants are now sending back much less money than before as the rouble to dollar rates has suffered nearly 50%.[[9]](#endnote-10)This together with the introduction of the new rules of obtaining work permits means that immigrants from Central Asia are leaving Russia in large numbers.[[10]](#endnote-11) In fact most familiar immigrant stories are of return as even those who had migrated in the mid 2000’s are now attempting to look for alternatives in their native state. While reports indicate that up to 70% of the migrants are on the move, the Russian reaction is that this is a temporary phenomenon as the labour market in the native states, whether it is Uzbekistan, Tajikistan or Kyrgyzstan do not have the capacity to absorb this labour.[[11]](#endnote-12)It is being argued that many migrants go back home for the New Year and come spring the movement would be reversed. While returning to the native state may not be an option, there is apprehension that that migrant movement from Russia may head for the states like Syria and Iraq to join the jihad movement led by the ISIS which is reported to pay large sums of money.[[12]](#endnote-13)Many young Central Asians migrants, faced with humiliating social conditions turn to Islamas a means to surpass ethnic boundaries and claim honour and respect from Russians. Islam becomes an important means of organizing life, as well as securing hygiene and moral behaviour. Mosques are increasingly used and understood as central places for social, educational and political activities. After the prayers groups form around activists who raise awareness on various issues particularly those related to migration and politics in the Muslim world.[[13]](#endnote-14)The involvement of this group of migrants in the West Asian conflicts seems plausible given their disenchantment with their current situation.

The return of the migrants is also problematic for the sending countries. And though there is rhetoric in some states about the need for return, there are few alternatives that these states can provide for the returning migrants in terms of employment.Both sending and receiver countries are also aware that their ‘image’ in the international community is influenced by this movement. For the Uzbek state, anxious to portray an image of a strong ‘self-reliant’ and economically vibrant state, the large number of labour migrants to other countries becomes an embarrassment. During a trip to the Jizzak region on 19 June 2013 Uzbek President Islam Karimov commented rather harshly on the Uzbek labour migrants engaged as janitors in Moscow by referring to them as ‘lazybones’ and ‘street beggars’. His comment clearly indicated that by travelling as migrant labour they are showing the state in poor light

Who I think lazy ones are? Those going to Moscow to sweep streets and squares. What is it about that place? This is disgusting. The Uzbek nation is demeaning itself (by doing this) supposedly one has to travel that far (to earn) for a piece of bread. Nobody is dying from hunger in Uzbekistan, thank God! I call them lazy because they are disgracing all of us by pursuing ways of earning quickly.[[14]](#endnote-15)

Karimov’s comments were met with outrage by the migrants who argued that they had travelled to survive since there were no appropriate jobs at home. There have also been comments on the state of the Uzbek economy if not for the multibillion dollar transfers from these people. In 2012 alone according to the Central Bank of Russia, remittances provided about six billion USD to the Uzbek budget.[[15]](#endnote-16)On the other hand, the image of the Kazakh state as tolerant has been affected by its attitude towards migrants.

Weiner argues that there are four sets of variables that shape international migration.

The first can be characterized as differential variables, such as wage differentials, differences in employment rates, differences in land prices and even differences in degree days. A second set of variables are spatial such as distance and transportation costs. A third group can be characterized as affinity variables such as religion, culture, language and kinship networks. And the fourth are access variables, the rules for exit and for entry. Differential and spatial variables are usually the concern for economists; spatial variables are of particular interest to geographers; affinity variables attract the interest of sociologists and anthropologists and access variables are the concern of political scientists and students of international relations.[[16]](#endnote-17)

However, for the migrant all of these come into play simultaneously and as such there is need to take note of all of these in totality. How and why states make their access and exit rules, the interplay between domestic and international considerations, the relationship between regime types and access rules and how the rules are affected by internal political considerations all become equally significant and need to be taken note of for an understanding of the everyday dilemmas faced by migrants.

Three broad themes emerge from a study of the migrant experience. The first is whether there are common patterns motivating migration from the post-Soviet states given the fact that motivations tend to morph into one another. The second relates to the problem of remaining legitimate in a context where both labour and accommodation are highly regulated. Most migrants tend to live in a state of ‘limbo’, illegal but tolerated. Finally, there remains the need to look at the impacts of migration beyond the narrowly economic. Migration not only feeds into the nationalist discourses of the sending and receiver states but also becomes a lens through which the relationship between the birthplace and the adoptive home is negotiated by the migrant himself.

**MIGRANTSAND THE STATE IN KAZAKHSTAN**

Since the Central Asian migrant experience has been dominated by racism and intimidation in Russia many prefer to work in Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan’s resource fuelled economic boom and thriving market economy have turned it into a flourishing migrant receiving state. This image of Kazakhstan as a receiver has benefitted from a consistent state policy to encourage the return of the ethnic Kazakh diaspora referred to as the *oralman* under a state sponsored repatriation programme. However, unlike the oralman programme, migrant workers from other Central Asian states remain unaccounted and invisible to state authorities due to lack of appropriate legal framework and labour policies that dooms them to an illegal and irregular status. Despite lower wages many migrant workers from Central Asia choose Kazakhstan to look for jobssince it is closer to their home countries and easier for them to adapt to local cultural norms. Since most work illegally, there are few correct estimates with numbers varying widely. About two thirds are from Uzbekistan, some 25% from Kyrgyzstan and the rest from Tajikistan and other CIS countries. At least half of them work in construction and in work that is shunned by the locals. Several others work in the expanding service sector, catering, transportation, delivery, retail and sales and the rest work as seasonal labours in agriculture, in tobacco, cotton fields, food stuff packaging and processing.The Central Asian migrant labour movement had traditionally been a seasonal one where most travelled as unskilled labours with no intention to settle.[[17]](#endnote-18)

The ready availability of cheap semi-skilled and short term migrant labour has contributed significantly to spurring rapid growth in construction and the service sector in cities like Almaty, Astana, Shymkent, and Aktau. However no official statistics or data is available on the role of the migrant workers in the labour force or in the informal economy. It is evident that though the state authorities continue to combat illegal migration, regarding it as a security threat or as promoting criminal activities, they covertly allow influential recruiters or employers to hire the *gastarbeitery*. The only change is a December 2013 law that allows individual Kazakh citizens to hire foreign migrant workers with work permits. The law clearly states that it is intended to make it easier for Kazakhs to hire household help not for profit by private businesses.[[18]](#endnote-19) Migration policy of the emerging Eurasian Union has also been the focus of attention. On January 1, 2012, an agreement on the Legal Status of Migrant Workers and Members of their Families came into effect between Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan as part of the Customs Union. The intention was to establish a legal framework necessary for the emergence of a common labour market within a single economic space supported by the Customs Union.[[19]](#endnote-20)

While there is scant state or legal focus on the migrants, the urban residents and the media tend to be critical. Reflective of this negativity is this article which says

Gastarbeiter---- an ill shaven person with a pale look and the smell of cheap deodorant. This labour migrant is shabbily dressed with ascared look. He is afraid of everything, cold, police, dark streets on which ill fed lads walk with hands tucked into their pockets, ever so watchful babushka in the bazaars who suspect a thief or terrorist in the face of foreign nationality. He is vulnerable from all corners because he has no rights, is cut off from his homeland and doesn’t know the laws of a foreign land.[[20]](#endnote-21)

Bhavna Dave argues that despite its carefully cultivated image as a peaceful and tolerant state with a long tradition of hospitality, Kazakhstan is neither migrant welcoming nor a migrant seeking state. The term migrant or migration is used in law, official statements and media reports to refer to the ethnic Kazakh returnees--- *oralman* ---- and to the internal rural migrants to cities. However, there are increasing reports of how the *oralman* faces innumerable problems in negotiating the legal institutional and bureaucratic obstacles in formalizing their status.[[21]](#endnote-22) Some of these had meant the suspension of the programme two years ago in the wake of the unrest in western Kazakhstan which was partly attributed to the social discontent stemming from the mismanaged migration of Kazakhs from abroad.[[22]](#endnote-23) The programme has been restarted in an attempt to limit Russia’s potential ability to influence Kazakh politics particularly in northern Kazakhstan. Under new terms, perks to attract ethnic Kazakhs have been reintroduced including paid travel and subsidized housing, but to be eligible for the benefits migrants are required to settle in government selected areas. Of the seven target areas, six are in northern Kazakhstan, along the Kazakh border with Russia, which has sizeable Russian population. While Kazakhstan claims that this had nothing to do with demographics and everything with economy, the fact that Kazakhstan is also offering incentives for internal migration northwards seems to indicate that Kremlin’s policies in Crimea and the armed separatist movement in the Donbass have a role to play in the recent reinstatement of the policy.[[23]](#endnote-24)

Astana has felt particularly affected by the crisis in Ukrainesince the arguments used to question the Ukrainian borders were seen by many as being those that could be used to justify a similar intervention on Kazakh territory. In fact northern Kazakhstan has been as present in Russian ultranationalist rhetoric as the Ukrainian territory. This is part of the reason why economic integration with Russia arouses suspicion among significant sections of the Kazakh population. Being aware of such reactions in a televised interview with a local channel *Khabar* on 26 August 2014, Nazarbayev said

If the rules set forth in the agreement are not followed Kazakhstan has the right to withdraw from the Eurasian Economic Union. I have said this before and I am saying this again, Kazakhstan will not be part of organizations that poses a threat to our independence. [[24]](#endnote-25)

Moscow’s reaction was immediate. On 28 August 2014, in response to a question at the *Nashi* youth nationalist movement President Putin questioned the historical legitimacy of Kazakhstan as a state, insinuating that it was a “Soviet error” and indicating that an overwhelming majority of the Kazakh population was committed to the strong relations with Russia and staying within the Russian sphere (*Russki mir*). However, he did not clarify where the conviction about the will of the majority came from.[[25]](#endnote-26) 24% of Kazakh citizens are ethnic Russians, concentrated in the north of the country that shares a border with Russia. Till date, Kazakh Russians have shown little interest in secession and it was generally assumed that they are well integrated within the new Kazakh state. However, events in Ukraine have indicated the capacity of inter-ethnic issues to divide society. The Kazakh government opted for a discrete response and announced the celebration of the 550th anniversary of the Kazakh state in 2015. The reinstatement of the *oralman* project hasto be seen within this context.

The Kazakh Migration Law of August 2011 identified three key directions and objectives of migration. First, facilitating repatriation, settlement and integration of the oralman, denoting an ethno-national vision; second maintenance of national security and prevention of illegal migration, reflecting a ‘securitization’ perspective; and third management of internal migratory processes from rural to urban areas, particularly resettlement of citizens residing in ecologically depressed regions to other regions, which addresses issues of social welfare and equal distribution. The law also contains a quota for highly skilled foreign labour. The quote is miniscule. It was set at 66,300 in 2009 but then reduced to a third in 2011. The law is however silent about the status of CIS labour migrants who can enter the country legally under a free visa free regime, indicating that the purpose of the visit is ‘personal’ on the migration card. Such migrants are required to register within five days, may only remain for the authorized period of stay and cannot work.

An ‘illegal migrant’, under Kazakh Migration Laws is simply defined as a person who has ‘violated the laws of the Republic of Kazakhstan pertaining to migration’. Migrants are routinely charged for violating the terms of stay under Article 394, Part 1 of the Code ‘On violation by foreign citizens or stateless people of rules of stay in Kazakhstan’ and deported for repeated violations under Part 2 of the same code. The one month limit is normally negotiated by leaving the country to re-enter on a new migration card with a new one month period.[[26]](#endnote-27)Many find it easier and cheaper to pay someone to take their passport for a new entry stamp. An entire informal industry has developed for acquiring documentation, though many simply overstay and pay the administrative fine of about $100 giving them a 12 day grace period within which to leave the country. A complex web of personal connections, strategies and informal arrangements enable the migrants to acquire the relevant documentation to maintain their status as a ‘visitor’ and keep their real status invisible to the law. Every lacuna in the law and every restriction imposed by the law are dealt with by relying on informal connections and personal networks and resorting to quasi-legal practices.

The state, on the other hand, remains trapped in a self-limiting discourse within the framework of ‘nationalism’ and ‘securitization’. This prevents it from addressing the complexities of a rapidly growing economy and adopting appropriate migration laws.This is true of all the states in the region and results not just in depressed trade flows but also increasing numbers of ‘illegal’ migrants.[[27]](#endnote-28)Boundary enforcement measures are introduced and justified in terms of protecting the economic and political security of the state. Nick Megoran, through his study of the portrayal of Uzbekistan as a ‘threatened state’ has demonstrated how governments frame the state border not merely as a legal line on the map but rather as a moral border where the state is depicted as a realm of order, progress, stability and wealth surrounded by disorder, backwardness, chaos and poverty. However, such boundaries also tend to overlook economic considerations and fail to come to terms with everyday experiences of negotiating borders. The likely result is further erosion of its ability to regulate or manage migration flows and the informal labour market. However, this is also a way through which the state covertly opts to let migrant workers remain invisible and illegal while utilizing the cheap labour that they provide. To acknowledge the scale of the undocumented and informal labour would entail an obligation to enact appropriate legislation.

The Central Asian *gastarbeiter* experience is closely interlinked with a process of internal and trans-national migration that is connected with what is popularly known as *Kitaiskii bazaars* in the region and the consequent influx of both Chinese goods and migrants. On the one hand these markets have created opportunities for internal migration from rural to urban centres within Central Asia but have also encouraged thespectreof ‘social problems’ that every migrant situation creates. It is also here that the interface between the migration and trade comes to the forefront bringing into focus the debate on the ‘migration state’.

**MARKETS AND MIGRANTS**

Almaty, which is situated in southern Kazakhstan, is close to the Chinese border. One of the most interesting places in the outskirts of the city is Barakholka, a large out-of-town bazaar that lies to the north-west of Almaty, reputedly stretching for nearly five kilometers. Nestled in the foothills of the Tien Shan, it is a noisy, congested and chaotic maze of zigzagging aisles where thousands shop every day. The market, which stretches along-side a road leading out of town, is organized into sections, each named differently--- ‘Europe’, ‘Evrazia’ and so on. Barakholka is a rabbit warren of stalls (actually comprised of several different bazaars, each offering specific merchandise). Most of the bazaar is outside and trying to find a particular section is nearly impossible. One can spend hours turning corners and walking through long barn like buildings weaving through the crowds. The bazaar sells literally everything that one would want to buy from clothes to food and toys, hardware to handicrafts. It is also a market where Uzbeks, Uighurs, and Dungans converge to sell products of Chinese make. Inside the labyrinths of shops and tents there are restaurants that reflect the ethnic diversity of the market. There are also always hawkers who walk through the narrow aisles selling tea, fruit and somsa, yelling alternately in Kazakh and Russian.

Typically the legal owner of a stall is a Kazakh as only a Kazakh national or permanent resident can own a stall. They then rent them out to others so all those selling goods are either migrants or employees. And virtually all the police, migration officials, and those in charge of migrant’s registration, tax collection, health, and safety inspection, compliance with hygiene and sanitary standards and those organizing raids and checks are Kazakhs. Dave talks about Gulnara whose husband is a policeman and who owns three retail outlets at Barakholka. One is leased to a Kyrgyz woman, who together with members of her extended family (shuttling back and forth between Almaty and Bishkek to manage their legal status), sells garments made in Bishkek, Her husband drives a taxi between Almaty and Bishkek, and also carriespassports of fellow Kyrgyz migrants to secure a new migration card. The other two are leased to Kyrgyz and Uzbek migrants selling fruit and vegetables. Gulnara is a ‘fixer’ who recognizes that her business interests and the wellbeing of the migrants are interlinked. She also runs a marriage agency that helps migrants obtain citizenship or residency in Kazakhstan through marriage.[[28]](#endnote-29)

Barakholka is a typical example of what is referred to as Kitaiskii bazaar (*Khitoy bazaar* in the local language) in Central Asia. From the early 1990’s Barakholka has been a place for the resale of Chinese goods transported from Xinjiang. It was quickly taken over by Dungan and Uighur traders since it was located near a former kolkhoz, *Zaria Vostoka* which had a Dungan majority at the time of its foundation in the 1930’s but then came to be numerically dominated by the Uighurs arriving from China in the 1960’s. The Uighurs who had close links with relatives in Xinjiang set up cross border trade by investing in Barakholka, or by developing related businesses such as restaurants, the hiring out of warehouses or the supply of lodging for traveling traders. Smaller markets selling Chinese goods were also set up on both sides of the border in Zharkent and Yining, allowing traders to commute without having to cross the entire Ili valley from Almaty to Urumchi. This cross border shuttle service came into competition with the new Almaty Urumchi railroad which enabled trade to take place across greater distances. As a result trade practices became more diversified. The Central Asian Uighurs started to spend less time in Xinjiang where they went only to purchase goods while the Chinese Uighurs who went to Central Asia stayed longer to establish their own stands at Barakholka or at one of the other bazaars of the region.

This pattern has been repeated at hundreds of markets, making Chinese goods ubiquitous across Central Asia. Initially, the traders at these bazaars were locals bringing scarce goods from just across the border to sell. But in recent years, they have been replaced by an influx of Chinese tradesmen who have set up permanent shops and have become a fixture of Central Asian urban life. Like Barakholka and Ya Lian bazaars in Almaty, the Dordoi and Karasuu in Bishkek shows the enormous economic outreach of Chinese products in Central Asia. The story is similar in Bishkek’s Osh Bazar. Kyrgyzstan in particular is benefiting from the re-export of cheap Chinese goods to other Central Asian states and even Russia. The Chinese traders in Kyrgyzstan can be divided into two broad categories--- the small operators and the wealthier Chinese businessmen who are referred to as *loben* or *bashlik*. The small operators often make trips between China and Kyrgyzstan themselves and do not seek to obtain long stay entry permits. They rent containers in which they stock and resell their goods and employ local workers, Dungans or Kyrgyz. The *bashlik* employ large numbers of locals for reselling and performing transactions. In addition to their sites in the market some Chinese entrepreneurs have opened factories principally in the Chui Valley.

China's trade with the Central Asian states has traditionally been dominated by barter trade. Over the last few years various diversified trading channels have expanded the bilateral trade. Border trade, local trade, border residents markets and tourist purchases now flourish in towns like Yilin and Urumchi. In addition special economic zones have been opened along the borders. For instance, the opening of a special economic zone in Yili, in north western Xinjiang near the border with Kazakhstan has the potential to transform the nearby border port at Khorgas into a centre of trade with Kazakhstan, including container transportation, processing facilities and the promotion of tourism in both Kazakhstan and Xinjiang. This is supported by the fact that the area is China’s only Kazakh autonomous prefecture populated mainly by ethnic Kazakhs. In the course of the last decade economic and technical cooperation has increased significantly between China and Central Asia. A number of joint ventures are now in operation, and Chinese entrepreneurs have signed agreements, contracts and letters of intent with their counterparts in Central Asia. The most important factor in the development of bilateral trade is that both Central Asia and China's North West are located in Inner Asia and are completely landlocked. The operation of rail and road linkages like the second Euro-Asian continental bridge will therefore be crucial for the operation of trade. The opening of the Khorog-Kashgar road link between China and Tajikistan is also significant in this context. The road route is expected to promote a significant expansion in trade between Tajikistan and China over the medium to long term and boost the share of Chinese goods in the Central Asian market.

Attitude towards Chinese goods, however, is often ambivalent. In Kyrgyzstan, for instance, the flood of Chinese imports into the country since 1991 has been a blessing. Affordable imports have been a cushion against persistent inflation. At the same time an open trade policy has created an avenue for Kyrgyz entrepreneurs to gain profits by re-exporting Chinese goods to larger better protected markets in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and even Russia. On the other hand, the rise of China’s economic influence has fostered sovereignty concerns, with many Kyrgyz complaining that their country has become the dumping ground for Chinese products. There is also a latent fear, particularly in the states bordering China that Beijing is hungry for land. And if that is the case, even a small immigration of Chinese to the region would swamp the local population. Though Kyrgyzstani consumers choose China on a daily basis, the local media plays on fears of Chinese in-migration. Research by the Central Asia Free Market Institute (CAFMI) confirms that China has a hammerlock on Kyrgyzstan’s informal economy. Over 75% of the goods at Dordoi and 85% of goods at Kara Suu ---- the country’s two largest bazaars come from China. Since much of the trade is informal, numbers about the volume of trade varies widely. Kyrgyzstan’s heavy reliance on Beijing, however, increases the Kyrgyz economy’s vulnerability to swings. Activity at the Karasuu bazaar experienced a negative trend after Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan sealed their respective borders after the events in Osh in 2010. Also quality control is a major issue.

There is also apprehension that the influx of goods and possibly migrants will lead to ‘social problems’. On the Central Asian side, there has also been some unease about a possible Chinese influx that could result from large scale Chinese economic penetration into the region. Chinese bilateral agreements on joint ventures with all the states have led to large scale resettling of Chinese in the Central Asian states. Many Chinese who came to give economic assistance then stayed on after the expiry of their visas. Some married local women and acquired property. Central Asian authorities have not moved to expel the illegal settlers for fear of antagonizing the Chinese government but a degree of concern is evident from a reading of local newspapers. Similarly, there is concern about the movements of locals from rural settlements to urban markets created by the massive influx of Chinese goods. These concerns have been reflected in the social media. An interesting example of this reflection is the documentary *The Other Silk Road* (a film by NCCR North-South and PANOS South Asia*)*which traces one such migrant movement form Ylaitalaa, a rural settlement in the southern Osh province of Kyrgyzstan to the markets of Bishkek and Almaty and then on to Moscow. The narrative is of the people involved in this movement and of the effect of this movement on their lives and the lives of those left behind. The context of this migration is defined within the general problems of the post-Soviet space that was suddenly placed within a ‘globalized’ world where the collapse of a socialist state and collective farming transformed individuals into entrepreneurs. This in combination with the fact that southern and western Kyrgyzstan shares a long border with China meant that trading in manufactured goods brought from across porous borders became a lucrative possibility. This resulted in the migration of younger people from the heavily populated and resource poor southern Kyrgyz regions to the north and the capital Bishkek. The Osh and Dordoi markets in Bishkek therefore became host to a large number of migrant traders from the southern regions who live in the outskirts of Bishkek and trade in a wide range of mass consumer products, home electronics and luxury commodities. The movement did not stop here. A significant number of them also moved further north to Almaty and even Moscow.

The film evokes the metaphor of the Silk Road to define this contemporary movement and the trade that is so intrinsic to the definition of the route. Ylaitalaa becomes the point of reference from where this movement begins and where, it is hoped, it will end one day as the migrants return. The narrative is of the period in between. It is a narrative of individuals and families who find new ‘homes’ in distant places and then grapple with the problems that this new beginning poses. But it is also a narrative of the older and the younger population who shares the benefits of this movement in terms of remittances but also lives in the hope that traditional and familial ties will ensure the return of the migrant population. Here there is portrayal of the social consequences of migration, including changes in life styles that living in an urban settlement entails, and what this would imply in terms of consideration of a return back home.

Set in the background of the pristine natural beauty of Ylaitalaa and the busy markets of Bishkek the film records the transformation of the region in terms of people displaced by economic constrains. As a micro study it is based on the experiences of a family who exemplify the situation but it also addresses the larger questions that migration poses. This is particularly significant in the Kyrgyz context since the migratory groups within the state are not restricted to the Kyrgyz. As a state sharing a long border with China it involves the question of a very large number of Chinese migrant workers and traders mainly Uighurs from western China, who are often the cause of xenophobic reactions from the local population. It can only be assumed that the problems encountered by the Kyrgyz migrants in Moscow are similar to the ones that the Chinese encounter in the Karasuu market on the Kyrgyz border with Uzbekistan.

In fact internal conflicts within the bazaars have occasionally threatened local stability. Particularly since the Tulip Revolution fires have struck the Uighur and Chinese sections of the Dordoi, Madina and Karasuu bazaars a number of times, most recently during the Osh riots in 2010. While the cause of the fires has been difficult to ascertain, the authorities have been sensitive to demands by small groups of sellers. In early 2007 the Kyrgyz government announced that it would introduce a bill to restrict foreign citizens working in wholesale and retail to 4500. It was explained that the bill did not target either investors or company heads but those who undertook individual entrepreneurship. It was aimed at reducing competition from Chinese traders and therefore decreasing possibilities of conflict in the bazaars. It was also meant to facilitate the return of Kyrgyz workers who had migrated to Russia. However, implementation has been delayed out of concern that the decision would impact on the state’s relations with Beijing. Also, the decision did not receive unanimous support from Kyrgyz economic and political circles. It has been argued that the Chinese traders bring money to Kyrgyzstan by paying for licenses for their shops and rents for apartments. In any case there is no guarantee that the Kyrgyz migrants settled in Russia and Kazakhstan would return. In fact with competition between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan growing over the transit of Chinese products, Almaty would acquire the Chinese wholesale bazaars that would be obliged to leave Kyrgyzstan. New conflictual issues have emerged with Kyrgyzstan experiencing the protest of truck drivers who are not allowed to enter Chinese territory in contrast to Chinese drivers who have access to all Kyrgyz roads. It has been argued that this leads to loss of work opportunities for locals. In spring 2010 these large scale strikes blocked truck flows between Irkeshtam and Osh for several days.

A number of issues therefore impacts on the formulation of a “Chinese question” in the public space in the region. As Marlene Laruelle and Sebastien Peyrouse intheir recently published book *The Chinese Question in Central Asia,[[29]](#endnote-30)*point out, social transformations of greater magnitude can also be explained by Chinese proximity. Even though the labour migration flows to Russia are the most visible, similar movements are in the process of taking shape in the direction of China. Less visible, in statistical terms, are the effects that the diversified interaction between the Central Asian states and China are creating. The local social fabric is being significantly modified by the economic opportunities that are now being made available by Beijing. Similarly, varied groups are now involved in playing the role of economic mediators and minorities are rediscovering their role as shuttle traders. The Uighurs who was the first to take on the role was later joined by the Dungans and China’s Kazakhs. Other small interconnected networks have also started to appear. A whole range of new professionals are also being created all linked to the service economy: transportation, freight, logistics, translation, legal and commercial services etc. Yet, much of the bazaar related activities continue to be informal and carried out principally by marginal groups on both sides of the border. This is emblematic of a lack of co-ordination that has resulted from conflicting strategies and contradictory commitments. With Kyrgyz accession to the Customs Union, there is apprehension that the re-export industry will suffer a decline with restricted market access.

**CONCLUSIONS**

Globalization has transformed the world. On the one hand it has brought societies and economies closer together, initiated flows of investments, goods, ideas and images in circulation and ended the possibility that states will act as containers of their population. But the global world is also enmeshed in instabilities and zones of disorder. It has generated refugees as also migrants looking for employment and often the distinction between the two is blurred. Once this is coupled with the fact of the growing ease of movement and communication which globalization creates it is easy to understand why there has been a dramatic increase in population movement. Globalization has placed the state in a new dilemma, one in which it seeks labour in order to remain competitive but is also apprehensive about the kinds of threats that these movements canbring with them. These points to the probability that the global world has two faces, a world of benefits and opportunities and also one that offers potential for all forms of crime, trafficking and terrorism. All of these pose a new danger to states. The migration-security nexus is an expression of the state response to this new situation, a situation where the threats to the state comes principally from these new flows and diffuse networks. In most post-colonial situations, these flows were from the newly independent states to the metropolis, and founded upon assumptions of the fundamental incompatibility of certain “cultures” and “people”. However as William Walters argues, there is no inevitable connection between migration and security.[[30]](#endnote-31) Conventional international relation perceives migration-security as a reaction on the part of states to emerging scenarios that are perceived as ‘threats’. As a result a whole series of dangers and fears come to find embodiment in the social figure of the immigrant, the refugee and the human smuggler. And by extension a series of measures are put in place to securitize both spaces and flows. This, however, ignores the fact that securitization of borders has rarely provided a solution to illegal immigration. The problem is not how to balance security policies with free trade practices but to recognize how this security perspective obstructs and marginalizes the space in which different politics of migration could take place and dualisms like national/foreigner, citizen/illegal and worker/scrounger could be overcome.

**Notes and references**

1. The term migration state is borrowed from James F Hollifield, “The Emerging Migration State”, *International Migration Review*, Vol 38, No 3, 2004. He argues that the state today is no longer a garrison state or even simply a trading state. In an increasingly interdependent world, states are linked together by international trade and finance. Hollifield argues that migration and trade are inextricably interlinked. Hence the rise of the trading state necessarily entails the rise of the migration state where considerations of power and interest are driven as much by migration as by commerce and finance. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
2. The word *gastarbeiter* was used in Germany to define the unskilled and semi-skilled migrant labours from Turkey and other countries. Though no longer used in Germany, the Russianized plural version, gastarbeitery is used for migrant workers from Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan to Russia and Kazakhstan. However, in contrast to the gastarbaiter in Germany who were brought in legally as contract workers for a fixed term and offered legal and economic protection, these migrants have no job contracts or work permit. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
3. Mumin Shakirov, “Diary of an Uzbek Gastarbeiter”, *Open Democracy*, March 18, 2009, https://www.opendemocracy.net/article.../diary-of-an-uzbek-gastarbeiter [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
4. Myron Weiner, “On International Migration and International Relations”, *Population and Development Review,* Vol 11, no 3, 1985, pp 441-445. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
5. Hollifield, “The Emerging Migration State”. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
6. Upto 27% of the population of Uzbekistan, 18% of the population of Tajikistan and 14% of the population of Kyrgyzstan are labour migrants. Most are men and over 50% do menial work. While at one time the movement used to be seasons, due to economic crisis the movement has become more chaotic. See *International Organization for Migration: Kazakhstan*, [www.iom.int/cms/en/sites/iom/home/where-we../kazakhstan](http://www.iom.int/cms/en/sites/iom/home/where-we../kazakhstan) [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
7. Barbara Schmitter Heisler, “Sending Countries and the Politics of Emigration and Destination”, *International Migration Review*, Vol XIX no 3, 1985, pp 469-484. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
8. Vsevolod Marinov, “Gastarbeiter in Russia”, *The Voice of Russia*, 21 July 2008, sputniknews.com/voiceofrussia/2008/07/21/204083 [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
9. With fewer dollars entering Uzbekistan, the Uzbek sum has fallen 15% against the dollar on the black market. The official exchange rate has fallen by about 11%. See “Uzbekistan: Rouble’s rout Breeds Uncertainty for Central Asian Markets”, *Eurasianet Weekly Digest*, 23 December, 2014. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
10. For a typical migrant stories see Shaun Walker and Alberto Nardelli, “Russia’s rouble crisis poses threat to nine countries relying on remittances”, *The Guardian*, 18 January, 2015. Aziz a migrant from the Ferghana notes that “life is miserable enough anyway, the only reason to be here was the money, I think it is time to go home”. See also Vladislav Schnitzer “Trials and Tribulations of Uzbek Gastarbeiter”, *The Moscow Times*, 15 May 2004 and “Uzbekistan: Rouble’s rout Breeds Uncertainty for Central Asian Markets”. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
11. Ivan Komarov and Anastasia Verseneva, “Priezhne iz Srednei Azii Massovo Pokidayut Possiyu”, *Gazeta.ru*, 21 January 2015. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
12. *Tsentralnaya Azia: Kuda Nodatsya Trudovomu Migrantu*, *Deutsche Welle*, 21 January 2015, [www.dw.de/p/1ENPF](http://www.dw.de/p/1ENPF). See also P Stobdan, “ISIS in Central Asia”, *Issue Brief, IDSA*, 22 October 2014, where he notes that the possibility of Central Asian migrants joining the ISIS remains significant. Concerns in the region are less today about the return of the Taliban and more about the return of trained ISIS jihadi. However, no common strategy exists to deal with them. Also Bayram Balci, “From Ferghana Valley to Syria ---The Transformation of Central Asian Radical Islam”, *Eurasia Outlook*, 25 July 2014 who argues that it is mostly Uzbeks of the ‘diaspora’ that is Uzbek migrants from Russia, but also Uzbeks from Kyrgyzstan who are getting involved in jihadi action in Syria. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
13. For a detailed discussion see Sopphie Roche, “The role of Islam in the lives of Central Asian migrants in Moscow”, *CERIA Brief*, No 2, October 2014, [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
14. “Islam Karimov: Far from Reality”, *Ferghana.News*, 24 June 2013, enews.fergananews.com/migration. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
15. See Islam Karimov: Far from Reality”. Also according to Walker and Nardelli, “Russia’s rouble crisis poses threat to nine countries relying on remittances”, 31.5 % of Kyrgyz economy, 42% of Tajik economy and 12% of Uzbek economy is dependent on remittances. With the Eurasian Union bringing together Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan and now also Kyrgyzstan and Armenia, the plummeting rouble and consequent short fall in remittances will affect the GDP of all the states. Also these figures are based on official figures the real amount transferred in person by migrants is significantly larger. See also *MPC Migration Profile: Russia*, Migration Policy Centre June 2013, [www.migrationpolicycentre.edu](http://www.migrationpolicycentre.edu). The Profile provides details of migration figures, work permits, remittances all classified by state as also the legal framework governing the status of legal migrants [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
16. Weiner, “On International Migration and International Relations”. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
17. There have been exceptions. In the aftermath of the Osh conflicts in 2010, the profile of the Uzbek migrant from Kyrgyzstan changed dramatically. Entire families including women and children were seen to be on the move for good. See Abdujalil Abdurasulov, “The quest for home”, O*penDemocracy*, 18 September 2012, <https://www,opendemocracy.net/abdujalil> abdurasulov. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
18. Richard Weitz, “Kazakhstan Adopts New Policy Towards Foreign Migrants”, *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol 11, Issue 10, January 17, 2014. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
19. Weitz, “Kazakhstan Adopts New Policy Towards Foreign Migrants” [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
20. Cited from Bhavna Dave, “Getting by as a Gastarbeiter in Kazakhstan”, *Open Democracy,* 20 September 2012, https://www.opendemocracy.net/bhavna-dave/getting-by-as-a-gastarbeiter-in -kazakhstan. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
21. Gulmira Kamziyeva, “Astana Develops New Oralman Repatriation Programme”, *Central Asia Online,* 2 November 2011. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
22. Disaffection in the energy rich western regions of Kazakhstan are fuelled by the perception that the local people do not benefit sufficiently from the petro dollars that drives the Kazakh economy. The OzenMunaygaz had been at the centre of protests in Zhanaozen which involved energy sector workers protesting over pay since May 2011. Violence broke out on December 16, the Kazakh independence day, with the injured admitted with gunshot wounds. The violence came as a shock to the state which has an image of a state as a bastion of stability and a magnet for foreign investment. For details see Joanna Lillis, “Kazakhstan: Violence in Zhanaozen Threatens Nazarbayev Legacy”, *Eurasianet.org*, December 21, 2011. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
23. Joanna Lillis, “Kazakhstan: Astana Entices Kazakhs from Abroad Amid Ukrainian Crisis”, Eurasianet.org, July 14, 2014. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
24. Cited from Nicolas de Pedro, “Kazakhstan’s Eurasian dilemma*”, Opinion CIDOB*, no 283, December 19, 2014, E-ISSN-2014-0843.. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
25. Cited from Nicolas de Pedro, “Kazakhstan’s Eurasian dilemma*”.* [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
26. Dave, “Getting by as a Gastarbeiter in Kazakhstan”. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
27. Border control policies of the Uzbek state for instance have been identified as theatrical/performative See Nick Megoran, Gael Raballand and Jerome Bouyjou. “Performances, Representation and the Economics of Border Control in Uzbekistan.” *Geopolitics* 10, no 4, 2005. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
28. Dave, “Getting by as a Gastarbeiter in Kazakhstan”. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
29. Marlene Laruelle and Sebastien Peyrouse The *Chinese Question in Central Asia, Domestic Order, Social Change and The Chinese Factor*, London: Hurst and Co, 2012. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
30. William Walters, “Migration and Security”, in J Peter Burges (ed) *The Handbook of New Security Studies,* London: Routledge, 2010. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)