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Youth Politics in Putin's Russia: Producing Patriots and Entrepreneurs is a pioneering work in that it analyzes the subjective side of a highly controversial policy field. While the book's cover features a faceless mass of Nashi activists in Red Square, waving flags and wearing capes with President Vladimir Putin's portrait on them, its content provides close-up views of six political youth activists based in the city of Tver'. Despite what the cover image may suggest, this is *not* a book about how Putin and his entourage skillfully manage to manipulate young Russians. On the contrary, inspired by the anthropology of (post)socialism, its central argument is that the young people who are involved in youth political "projects" (such as the government-initiated youth organization Nashi) are much more skeptical of these projects than is widely assumed. The book excels in putting a finger on the biggest theoretical problems of "virtual politics" approaches: the conflation of governing intentions with the actual outcomes of policies and the tendency to replace the analysis of complex social processes with merely tracing the words and deeds of a few key political players. However, the book is not mainly designed as a scientific critique of the "virtual politics" paradigm but sees itself as an "intervention" in the media discourse about a New Cold War between Russia and the United States. As such, it aims to accomplish three interrelated tasks: to explain the policies that propel "state-run youth projects" through the framework of a global neoliberal restructuring of welfare states, to provide a thick description of youth participation in these projects, and to make the case for more scientific collaboration "across geopolitics."

The chapters provide in-depth analyses of the government-sponsored youth organization Nashi (chapter 2); the youth educational camp Seliger in 2009, the year it ceased to be an exclusive gathering of Nashi and other government-sponsored activists (chapter 3); and volunteer initiatives sponsored by regional and federal government institutions for youth affairs (chapter 4). Chapter 5 stands out in that it combines material from the previous chapters to account for the pronatalism propagated by Nashi and Putin-era "sexualized patriotic performances." The first chapter contextualizes the collaborative research between the author and social scientists at the Center for Women's History and Gender Studies at Tver' State University. It highlights the impact of deteriorating US-Russian relations and the increasing nationalization of Russian academia: in the aftermath of the "color revolutions," "foreign" research funding and collaboration with "foreign" researchers, once unequivocally welcomed,

gradually transformed into a suspicious undertaking. Surprisingly, the author detects some truth in the conspiracy-oriented suspicions towards so-called foreign funding for research projects and NGOs, including her own research project (pp. 38, 61).

The book is novel in showing that Russian government agencies' dirigiste capacities are much lower than is often assumed. Instead, the examined projects are characterized as "chaotic and unstable, part of a diffuse and uncertain project of governing that did not emanate exclusively from a unified state" (p. 13). Moreover, the relatively long time frame of the research (the author collected most material during eight short-term visits to the city of Tver' between 2006 and 2011) allows her to trace the stories of the activists over the course of several years. These portraits are unique in that they show how the activists are drawn into these projects and how they were eventually promoted or became disenchanted with youth politics. The book also provides data on how those students at Tver' State University who were not involved in state-run youth projects reacted to the advertisements and campaigns of various state youth political projects. The reader thus becomes acquainted with students who are very critical of the youth projects or just try to ignore them.

Moreover, the book is among the first to highlight that Russian state youth politics deploys "techniques of the self" that are well known among scholars of neoliberal governmentality. It shows that the Russian context is not an exception: as elsewhere, these techniques are supposed to "responsibilize" young adults, transpose the burden of social welfare to voluntary associations, and boost innovations "made in Russia" (pp. 147, 105). The author shows convincingly how "governing through projects" pervaded the 2009 Seliger educational youth forum's program, for instance. She further skillfully excavates how activating techniques, such as self-optimization and self-management, are promoted in state-run volunteer programs, highlighting their commonalities with "asset-based community development," service learning, and "volunteer empowerment projects" in the US, Italy, and China. The distinctive feature of the Russian youth political projects she discusses is identified as their specific "patriotic spin, one that took on a distinctively post-Soviet inflection," as well as the ideal of glamour, defined as "an ideology of money, success, entertainment, and conspicuous consumption" (pp. 118, 29), which permeates post-Soviet Russian society.

What goes missing in this analysis of youth political projects' distinctive features is a better conceptualization of the unholy alliance between neoliberal governmentality and authoritarianism. The author maintains that categorizing Putin-era youth political projects as byproducts of an increasing authoritarianism would be to side with those "triumphalist discourses" that pitched a maligned Russian autocracy against benign Western liberal democracies and would ultimately mean reinforcing culturalist arguments about Russia (p. 212). According to the author, the intellectual task for a Western feminist social scientist and a critic of neoliberalism like herself should be to speak up for an alternative *representation* of Putin-era state youth politics: as being mainly propelled by neoliberalism (and not by authoritarian ideologies). This aim of "deexoticizing" Russia as the "other" of a liberal-democratic West (p. 60) at a time when Cold War metaphors are reactivated by the media permeates the narrative of the book. Apparently, the author is aware that accomplishing this aim by differently *repre-*

senting her research object (state youth political campaigns) willy-nilly entails normalizing Russian government policies to a certain degree: several “representational dilemmas” would have emerged from the aim to “intervene in the discourse and politics of new Cold War binarisms” (p. 17). The author tries to attenuate these “representational dilemmas” on the level of epistemology. She maintains that the current political situation of a New Cold War would make “knowing” as an epistemological stance into an inapt strategy. Instead, as she herself says, in a “time of geopolitical uncertainty” it would be advisable to adopt “a more tentative stance and positioning vis-à-vis the processes we examine” (pp. 67, 68). However, the book’s narrative does not continuously stick to the proposed novel epistemology of a “tentative stance and positioning”: whenever the narrative discusses what is called “foreign” or “international democratizing interventions” (p. 145) by the US and Western foundations in Russia during the 1990s, the proposed “tentative stance” seemingly transforms into a “knowing stance.” Because scare quotes or the attribute “foreign-identified” is not consistently used, it is sometimes not clear whether the author’s voice affirms the Russian government’s critique of interventions by “the West” (in order to deexoticize the government’s reaction) or whether she is just reporting this critique. In particular, chapter 2—which traces the development of Nashi—contains some questionable formulations. For instance, those Russian journalists who labeled financial support for Ukrainian protesters as “foreign meddling in postsocialist space” (whose space is it after all?) or tried to debase the “Euromaidan” protests by calling them “Gay-ro-Maidan” are characterized as “critical newspaper commentators” (pp. 76, 195). In fact, such commentary seems to testify more to a (widespread?) imperial nationalist, misogynist, and conspiratorial stance than to critical journalism. The Russian government is further portrayed as having “hit back with an alarmist discourse of the dissolution of the Russian Federation” (p. 77) after a change of government in Kyrgyzstan occurred, which was—like the Orange Revolution in Ukraine—prompted by public protest and which occurred against the interests of Russian ruling politicians and businessmen. Did the government hit back against Western sponsorship or Kyrgyz protesters? There is not a hint of the fact that these protests were not reducible to “US sponsorship”; nor is there any reference to a recent comparative study on the color revolutions that found that public protest and citizen networks were the revolutionary game changers, not sponsorship (cf. Bunce and Wolchik 2011).

The author avoids directing straightforward critical judgment at the authoritarian traits of the state-run youth projects she examines, because this might be misread as chiming in with a Western media discourse that would criticize authoritarian developments in Russia primarily in order to confirm the country’s “otherness.” While these traits are mentioned, the author is careful not to connect them with a broader authoritarian ideology. However, critical judgment is brought into the narrative by letting the Russian colleagues on the research team “speak.” Their verbatim analyses, which often relate state youth politics to the rising authoritarianism in Russian society (and are peppered with acutely humorous remarks), are nevertheless undercut already in the book’s introduction. The Russian colleagues’ reluctance to employ the framework favored by the author (global neoliberal developments) is attributed to

their (Russian?) intellectual subjectivity: “As liberal intellectuals invested in maintaining a dignified, middle-class subjectivity of which a sense of global, pan-European citizenship was part, my colleagues were understandably less likely than I to raise this analytic [nglobal neoliberal developments], even as they were deeply concerned about social inequalities” (p. 38). Two questions immediately arise in connection to this. First, had there been a thorough debate about how the positioning of *all* of the research team members influenced their preferred analytical framework? And second, is it possible that the Russia-based research team members were less invested due to factors relating to the *content* of the project, which had been jointly conceptualized in 2006 as a “critical comparative investigation of the restructuring of social welfare provision, citizenship, and neoliberal governance” (p. 49)?

Unfortunately, the concern for nonbinary representation, arising from the author’s deep investment in a critique of both the US government’s foreign policy and the colonial history/political usage of anthropological knowledge production, interferes at times with a comprehensive engagement with evidence. For instance, the vigilante patrols that emerged after 2008 out of Nashi and other government-sponsored youth groups (like Khriushi Protiv, Stop Kham, or Lev Protiv) are subsumed under the questionable euphemism of “socially oriented public awareness campaigns” in the introduction (p. 31). The actions of these patrols, called “campaigns” in the book, are only discussed in connection to their playful repertoire but not with regard to the activists’ harassment of those whom *they* judged to have broken the law (p. 87). The book disregards the fact that these vigilante groups often appear to choose their targets on a racial basis (e.g., taxi drivers and market vendors without licenses and non-Russian shop owners are often the first ones whose “awareness” is “raised”). In connection to this, the question arises of whether the Tver’-based campaign against smoking and drinking in public places (“Live according to the Law”) was also of a vigilante character (p. 91). Engaging in greater detail with the tactics used by “Live according to the Law” might have altered the author’s interpretation of a debate she observed between the activist Kirill, who defended the “Live according to the Law” campaign, and two “apolitical” students, who maintained that there was a legal right to smoke and drink in public (pp. 91–93). More in-depth engagement of this kind might also have prompted the author to interrogate more thoroughly the dimensions of participants’ moral conservatism. As the author maintains, Nashi activists especially were committed to “the nation, to children, and to society” and were eager to “cleanse society from its dysfunctions” (p. 216). So, why is it that the activist Kirill defined being drunk *in public* as a more relevant problem to be tackled by voluntary activism than, say, alcohol addiction and its consequences (p. 91)? How did he define public space, and who is—according to him—entitled to use this public place? Similarly, it would have been interesting to hear more about how volunteers and local Nashi activists drew the boundary between vulnerable and nonvulnerable people (orphans are to be supported, but what about asylum seekers?). How far did Nashi go to promote “cultural tolerance” (pp. 31, 73)? Did Nashi activists’ “distress at recent hate crimes against racially marked foreigners (mostly African or South Asian students)” (p. 97) translate into a proimmigration position? Or were their at-

titudes rather mixophobic—more in line with the ethnopluralist racism of the Russian government’s civilizational nationalism?

Raising such questions might have brought to the fore many more *ideological* differences between those young adults who intend to “do good” and aim to prevent “antisocial” behavior in US-based empowerment volunteer programs (e.g., Eliasoph 2011) and those involved in Russian government-sponsored youth political projects. It would also have allowed readers to trace whether activists eventually left not only their engagement with Nashi behind, but also their (presumably) morally conservative and authoritarian views. Much of the interview data which is shared in the book indicates thought patterns that have been associated by critical theorists, such as Else Frenkel-Brunswik and Theodor Adorno (Adorno et al. 1950), with the subjective side of authoritarianism: conspiratorial thinking (pp. 84, 95, 101), the belief that there must be leaders and followers (p. 124), a fascination with authority (p. 171), and the belief that society is degenerate (pp. 84, 208). While it is certainly true that “paying lip service to neotraditional values” is one thing, while “adhering to them” is quite another (p. 209), the reverse also applies: not adhering does not mean that a belief is rejected—it might just be put into practice in a different situation (pp. 204–205).

Precisely because the book provides such an important corrective to approaches such as virtual politics that focus mainly on “manipulations,” it is a pity that the author eschewed a more thorough theoretical critique of these approaches’ very limited explanatory value. Such a theoretical critique might have made it easier to distance the narrative from both the Western triumphalist discourses and the justifications of the Russian government’s authoritarian politics that have gained momentum across the globe. The attempt to intervene in a dominant media discourse by normalizing (deauthoritarianizing or deexoticizing) state youth political projects sometimes becomes entangled with the author’s scientific aim “to account for these state-run youth projects and the policies that propel them” (p. 12). It is beyond question that Western governments, certain LGBT groups, and culturalist historians have used the renewed image of a “barbarian Russia” backsliding into authoritarianism to legitimize their specific agendas as being “civilized.” However, in order to explain the different “marriages” of neoliberal governing techniques and authoritarian ideologies in both liberal-democratic and authoritarian political figurations today, the poststructuralist critique of liberal democracy cannot suffice. It is time to dig out and critically evaluate those studies on authoritarianism that did not juxtapose authoritarian thought patterns to liberal-democratic ones but attributed the former to the contradictions of economic production. It will be a crucial collaborative task to investigate how the latter intersect with the racialized and sexualized social relations in which we live—in Russia and elsewhere.

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