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From Prefix Capitalism to Neoliberal Economism: Russia as a Laboratory in Capitalist Realism

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Abstract:
This exploratory and review essay views Russia as a particular state-capital accommodation-assemblage characterized by neoliberal subjectivization of the population in a particularly stark manner. This argument is a departure from perspectives on Russia as a semi-periphery, instead proposing its thorough incorporation into the current moment of global capitalism. While 'state capitalism' has analytical purchase, 'authoritarian neoliberalism' is proposed as a more sharply focussed lens in examining Russia in the global context. This is important too in reorienting political economy to accommodate more grounded methodologies, including ethnography and other empirically subjective accounts. While beyond the scope of the essay, existing ethnographic accounts and empirical materials — particularly relating to Special Economic Zones in Russia are incorporated in the argument. In making its argument, the essay reviews the contribution of Foucauldian approaches to neoliberalism and neomarxian political economy. Then it reviews the varieties of capitalism approaches and their critics as well as the debates on state capitalism pertaining to Russia by Ilya Matveev, and as pertaining to state capitalism in general. Further the essay reviews recent work on Eastern Europe as providing examples of vanguard authoritarian neoliberal governance. Finally, this approach allows the essay to argue that Russia is not only a 'normal country', but that it anticipates contemporary developments towards more post-democratic capitalist futures, along with their counter-currents.

Keywords: Russia, Neoliberalism, State capitalism, conjunctural analysis, everyday political economy

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One of the barriers to substantive analysis via 'prefix' capitalisms is their tendency to temporal and spatial delimitation. 'Cognitive', 'platform' and 'digital' capitalisms foreground real technological and social change but can equally be contextualized as part of a broad neoliberal*izing* episteme of the quantified, entrepreurialized self [Mirowski 2019]. Neoliberalization can be seen a dynamic patterning process of regulatory transformation rather than a bounded construct [Peck et al. 2009]. Spatially, prefix capitalism has the tendency to reproduce unidirectional logics — from core to periphery, from retrograde to postmodernity. This is particularly true of attempts to situate Russia's political economy within global capitalism. Accordingly, Russia is variously seen as a 'resister state', partly outside the governance structure of 'Atlantic capitalism' [Callinicos 2010, Van der Pijl 2006] which is reflected in definitions like 'state capitalism'. In a related manner, it is merely seen as a semi-periphery supplying the core. While both perspectives have merit, they potentially obscure Russia's more thorough incorporation into a 'conjunctural' capitalism characterized by transnational 'neoliberal "economism"' [Kalb 2013].

'Conjuncture' describes the joining together (albeit unevenly but still in a recognisable pattern) of *global* processes in a historical moment that can be overlaid on top of state and political differences. Conjunctural phenomena express a particular temporal moment in capitalism, but also invite enquiry into the sources that brought that moment about and that sustain them. 'Late' capitalism may have a firm analytic and historical purchase to describe a period after the 1970s: Fordist and alternative economic models offered by the socialist experiment are both replaced by flexible accumulation via deregulation [Harvey 1989], 'dispossession' and recurring spatiotemporal capital 'fixes' [Harvey 2003], financialization [Fine 2010; Friedman 2015: 191],[1] enclosure and exclusion [Sassen 2014] and precarization [Standing 2011]. However, with the exception of Fordism, these processes are cyclically inherent to capitalism itself. 'State capitalism', 'neofeudalism', and 'kleptocracy' may all describe 'features' of the Russian case rather than 'bugs'. They are to varying degrees part of conjunctural phenomena. In other words, they are like the potholes of uneven spatial development in an otherwise expansive road that carries the vehicle of socio-economic transformation of Russia into another 'normal country' — as Andrei Shleifer and Daniel Treisman [2005] memorably wrote when they described Russia as a 'typical middle-income capitalist

1 Fine argues that today's financialization moves beyond social generalization of usury, as argued by other scholars. Instead, Fine argues that financialization underpins the persistence of neoliberalism and is not merely one of its consequences.

democracy'. Instead of seeing state 'activism' as somehow antithetical to common global patterns of accumulation, it is important to see how it is incorporated within broader trends. My argument is that focussing on distinctions in state-capital accommodations overlooks the degree of integration, and that, fundamentally, the 'neoliberal tide' is so overdetermined (particularly in the political and social domains) that Callincos's argument [2005] — that cases like Russia are examples of semi-peripheral 'economic statism' — lacks explanatory power.

Everyday Political Economy

In this essay, on the basis of my long-term fieldwork in Russia [Morris 2016], I discuss the Russian case study as neither peripheral nor politically retrograde in the production of 'capitalist realism' [Fisher 2008] and neoliberal economism. 'Everyday political economy' is necessary to this task because it draws into discussion the exploration of lived experience. This is proposed via the spatial, temporal and violent framework approach of Elias and Ria [2019: 218] who as part of a current in feminist scholarship, see 'everyday political economy' as integrating 'autonomous agency' with landscapes of structural violence. This in turn demands not only the ethnographic, but the biographical tracing — of the long-term underemployed and informal workers in former monotowns; of white-collar women's upward social and physical mobility — a corollary of Russia's deindustrialisation. While these are projects beyond the scope of this essay, giving voice to the political-economic content of biographical memory has been my long-term research aim that in turn informs my approach now. Tracing the social action of residual classes, from the technical intelligentsia and labour aristocracy of former Soviet times in particular, to the lumpenized working-class and small entrepreneurial middle class, is an exercise in interrogating and problematizing the transformation of Soviet subjecthood into liberal, neoliberal or 'authoritarian' identity [Morris 2012, 2016]. Biographical agents are not understood as 'autonomous universes of meaning, but as mediators between social structures and human agency' [Kiossev 2018]. For the purposes of this theoretically weighted essay, I rely mainly on asides to my previously published work.

Capitalist Realism — Russian Style

The 'everyday', biographical experience of capitalism fits with Mark Fisher's noun-term 'capitalism realism' because of what it says about the *internalization* of particular political-economic relations and their *externalization* in bodily practices pertaining to the violence of such relations. Taking note of the long debate on Stalinist man (sic), we should also be mindful of Anna Krylova's [2000: 27] injunction that internaliza-

tion of ideology is not the same as belief or identification. Capitalist realism proposes the inevitable and inescapable internalization of normative economic relations typified by increasing exploitation and despair. Fisher calls the effect of this a 'preemptive formatting' [2008: 9] via the recuperation of all cultural and social production to make capitalism experienced as both ineffably incorporated in everyday life, but also as an impersonal entity. Taking neoliberal precarization as an example — I show in my research that workers in former Russian monotowns take seriously governmentality — the necessity to become flexible subjects for reincorporation into the reserve army of labour at the same time as failing to imagine any structural limits or remedies. This is despite them simultaneously experiencing trauma and humiliation because they, correctly, apprise that there is no object external to their 'realism' to appeal to [Morris 2016]. This is an 'everyday' internalization of 'TINA' ('there is no alternative') — the political slogan of Margaret Thatcher and an example of what Philip Mirowski [2019: 7] calls neoliberalism as 'engine for epistemic truth' rather than just a market-centric version of neoclassical economics. In a different theoretical direction based on a Foucauldian framing of neoliberalism, Maurizio Lazzarato has explored social subjectivation beyond the discursive realm as 'machinic enslavement' even in forms of labour that are post-material. This is an objective process, rather than an ideological distortion of reality [Maidan 2014]. Authoritarian governance, according to Lazzarato, is the result of this 'subjective impasse' in the current conjuncture [2014: 21]. If we accept the significance of increasingly authoritarian neoliberalism, then shouldn't we look to regimes like those in Russia as at the 'vanguard'? However, the purpose of this essay is *not* to once more create another prefix or orientalize the Russian experience, but on the contrary to highlight points of similarity in the normalization and coercive imposition of economic subordination and flexible accumulation.

Fisher's term plays off an association with socialist realism — that perceived reality is malleable through ideology and its projection of universalism elides a present-future distinction. Russia as a *laboratory* seems to me an equally apt metaphor. In the past, given the brutality of economic transition other metaphors have been employed — such as a weapons proving ground — or *poligon* [Pokrovskii, Bobylev 2003]. Cetina [1999] argues that the laboratory environment comes to be identified as a space of work on the malleability of objects, the refitting of pre-existing states to new orders. The laboratory does not have to 'put up with an object *as it is*'. It is an authoritarian space of material throughput, and a lot of discarded, mutated waste. At the risk of simplification, one can say that Russian history offers plenty of examples of visions of a totalizing structuring of the organisation of socio-economic matter, as well as a willingness for abrupt 'experimental' shifts. Russia as a laboratory in

capitalist realism also resonates with existing critiques of 'prefix' capitalism such as Peck and Theodore's [2007]. Their approach acknowledges that while territorial differences remain, we should focus on similarities in governance, governmentality and gradations of dispossession. At the same time, exploring authoritarian neoliberalism in places like Russia as a 'spectrum' of practices and politics [Bruff, Tansel 2019] helps us anticipate the capitalist futures of what we still think of as the global 'core'. While long-term currents are important, there are also recent noteworthy recent developments in Russia — from a sudden adoption of an open discourse of biopolitical waste, to, like in China, the development of technologically enhanced biopolicing, noteworthy because it takes place in a more culturally familiar context where at least lip service is paid to individual rights. A third development is the final eradication of the vestiges of social paternalism that somehow survived after 1991. The Hobbesian mode of authoritarian neoliberalism in Russia allows us to touch the future for other 'postenlightenment' states even as we 'westerners' reassure ourselves with misplaced analysis about 'populist authoritarianism' being the East European or Latin American problem.

Peck and Tickell [2002] see globalisation as a process whereby capitalist rhetorics 'make themselves true', in the words of Bourdieu, not as exogenous forms of thinking, but as domesticated (forms) beyond the core. While the extralocal is important (as diffusion and contagion, see [Larner 2000, Biebricher 2018]) genealogically, in the current conjunction, it is increasingly surpassed by domesticated recombination. Tobias Rupprecht [2020] proposes for Russia a 'peripheral' variety of neoliberalism with both domestic and transnational roots, and a decidedly undemocratic and state-sovereign preference. This can be seen in three intertwined moments in Russia today that act as gears, each propelling forward each other in capitalist realist logic: 1. Hegemonic neoliberal economism; 2. The rhetorical retreat of the social state where social reproduction is delegated to the private sphere and zones of biopolitical waste are designated in the population. 3. Increasing state support for corporate infrastructure that would remake the former redistributive commons as private commodities [Fine, Saad-Filho 2017: 688-9]; However, in the Russian case, governance in provisioning functions is incoherently devolved, delegated or improvized — a current example is observed in the privatisation of garbage collection that creates rent-seeking opportunities, but whose 'service' is dysfunctional and profit subject to continual 'renegotiation'. State incoherence is a logical strategy, albeit a 'contingent necessity' as Jessop puts it [2007], because of the particularly truncated arm's reach of the Russian state — strong at the shoulder, but weak at the finger. Incoherence 'enforces' the previous moments — forces people to rely on their own resources and embrace internalization of governmentality as their only option to survive. 4. Recombinant populism reserves politics for libidinal expres-

sion –'bad' elites or enemies are blocking access to the desired social state, which populism promises to fix. In practice it merely results in reproducing elites by rotating internal/external foes, reproducing befuddlement and docility [Mirowski 2019: 24][1].

More concretely and in dialogue with Peck and Tickell [2002], we can focus on a broad neoliberal politics that is 'undisguised' in the Russian authoritarian context. The obvious relegation of social welfare concerns to the lowest rung in the ladder of state priorities — facilitated in part by the power of the security ministries; naturalization of social Darwinism, a lock-in of public sector austerity — the leanest fiscal regime possible, also facilitated by the absence of a public sphere. Also important are a lack of opportunities for political mobilization, an overweening security state and an exhausted population. At the same time, aggressive elite formations act as predatory forms — accelerating accumulation and the shake out of less 'competitive' actors in the stakes of elite-crony networking. Formerly fragmented markets are rendered increasingly monopolistic through the redistribution of entire sectors through state power and coercion. However, on the public policy front there is the acknowledgement of only a narrow repertoire of economic tools — everything is a nail with a supply-side hammer. Fittingly an 'incoherent' state engages in de facto 'anti-regulation'. In other words, incomplete rule of law substitutes a 'market' in enforcement, with 'violent entrepreneurs' [Volkov 2002] increasingly giving way to state-corporate formations. Similarly on a micro-level, ordinary people are incorporated into webs of corrupt 'markets' in diplomas, medical services, and other semi-formalized systems of kick-back, such as '*otkat*'. These add to incoherence, as alongside economistic reasoning they imply a caste-based order [Kordonsky 2016]. While it is true that there are rhetorical policy flourishes that may seem to herald the return of the social state, the very inconsistency and inadequacy of such measures — from postnatal grants, to state caps on food prices — points to them as plasters covering over-sized wounds on the body social-politic.[2]

1 A thorough discussion of Shield's [2019] term 'conjunctural recombinant populism' and neoliberalism (state intervention via seemingly progressive pro-family welfare and social policy which serve to entrench and intensify the notion of reprivatized social reproduction — then packaged as part of political populism) is beyond the scope of the essay. Shields though may be read alongside Mirowski [2019: 17-25] who touches directly on the Russian case in the context of 'post-truth' as serving the normalization of ignorance and the creation of demand for falsehood as a primary instrument of neoliberalism.

2 Indeed, the field of social benefits only gets more byzantine in its complexity, conditionality, and, indeed incoherence: https://www.mk.ru/economics/2021/03/24/mnimym-tuneyadcam-prigotovili-novye-ogranicheniya-po-detskim-posobiyam.html

The conclusion of this paper takes up again the issue of 'contingent necessity' contained within authoritarian neoliberalism, arguing that just as incoherence facilitates 'looting' and dispossession, so too does it open up new 'holes' in the fabric of economic relations. Lines of flight by the dispossessed continually present new challenges to the state-capital formation. This allows us to present the other side of the 'avante la lettre'—the expansion of everyday resistance. Examples are the increasing possibilities to hack the biopolitical state's informational base using low-tech tools, the withdrawal by individuals and communities into grey zones of informality and reciprocity, and an everyday politics that undermines the recombinant authoritarian populism by its very 'apoliticism' and superficial compliance.

State capitalists, or activist states serving neoliberal economism?

In the comparative study of varieties of capitalism, Russia is an instructive case of the limitations, of 'prefixing'. Similarly, searches for suitable political definitions such as neopatrimonialism, competitive authoritarianism or managed democracy reflect a problematic continuation of a Cold War perspective on Russian exceptionalism. In reality, Russian politics is no more 'managed' than in many democracies. It may be more corrupt and in the grip of a dominant elite, but no more so than Italy on the former count, and South Africa or Japan on the latter. More popular typologies of political economy, such as 'kleptocracy' [Dawisha 2014], or the more sober 'state capitalism', are either polemical, or lacking sufficient scholarly agreement on the basis for evaluation.

Neomarxian approaches [Callinicos 2010, Van der Pijl 2006] also tend to highlight differences rather than similarities, which is unfortunate. Capitalism in the East is supposedly 'parasitic' and unproductive; the inability to enforce property rights leads to predatory yet unstable formations that impede development that would allow 'normal' relations of production to arise. Centralization of economic assets in the hands of elite players and a weakly, 'decaying', hegemonic project of national modernisation hide high levels of offshoring of capital in what appear to be quite different *polities*—Ukraine and Russia. In short, there is extraction, but not surplus in the domestic economy. There is no long-term interest of 'capital-in-general' as a hegemonic system of coordination and control [Merlingen n.d]. However, what this picture tends to discount is the ever-increasing weight of the internal service sector, despite continuing reliance on raw materials and petro-chemicals export, and the ongoing salience of FDI [Connolly 2018: 186]. Despite the post-Crimea sanctions and counter-sanctions regime, Russia's position

in terms of economic complexity is better than one would expect for a petro-economy — a little more complex than Turkey, Brazil, or Bulgaria, and a little less complex than Romania, Thailand or Malaysia — all comparable countries in terms of GDP/capita.[1] While Russia's financial sector is relatively small and state-dominated (especially after 2014 — see Connolly [2018], its integration with global capital is evidenced by the continuing relevance of round-tripping capital investment, rather than permanent off-shoring [see Ledyaeva et al. 2015], integration via secondary markets of sovereign debt — again despite sanctions (a majority of Euro-denominated debt is held by foreign investors)[2], and the increasing salience of special economic zones (SEZs) dominated by transnational corporations serving the consumer sector [Gurkov & Saidov 2017]. This last example is discussed below. Finally, there is the transformation of the service sector into a major contributor to GDP and productivity growth, in contrast to China and in contrast to the interpretation that natural resources crowd out all else [Zhao, Tang 2018].

Ilya Matveev's typologization of Russia as an example of 'state capitalism' [2019a] provides a more nuanced perspective than generalist neomarxians. Matveev proposes an elective affinity between neoliberal economics and elements of dirigiste industrial policy that maintain the position of economic elites and provide political stability, but which are uncoordinated with the private sector. Notably while the primitive accumulation associated with the 1990s privatisation processes and subsequent political conflict gets oversized attention, the relative security of property rights for 'winning' elites, and the longer term development of 'normal' forms of market accumulation, are overlooked [Matveev 2019b]. Notably, banking, oil and gas, and some industrial monopolies are directly or indirectly state owned. Experiments in pronatal social benefits and elements of autarkic developmentalist policy since 2014 run against market philosophy underpinning a classic neoliberal positioning. However, Matveev argues that despite these seeming divergences, Russia nonetheless maintains orthodox neoliberal policies such as a strong

1 The Economic Complexity Rankings is an open source project by MIT based on geographical distributions of diverse economic activities. https://oec.world/en/rankings/eci/hs6/hs12. Notably, Russia comes in around the bottom of the top quartile for complexity, but well ahead of many countries whose lack of complexity is not normally interpreted as pushing them outside of the global core, or at least the global north — e.g. Australia, New Zealand, Portugal, Greece. Connolly does note, however how state interference in the financial system results in significant distortions — particularly in investment (2018: 160-2) and that sanctions did impose significant costs on raising long-term capital (2018: 170) but that this was offset by participation in multilateral financial organisations among the BRICS.

2 https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-eurobond-yield-idUSKBN27S13Y

monetarist bias, fiscal consolidation, and marketized mechanisms of discipline and competition in the public sector [Cook 2013, Sigman 2013]. Matveev provides clues to my main argument: the need to make a distinction between clientelistic and patrimonial negotiations of relative power and access to capital resources within the elite, and a broad and deep set of policies that affect the lives of the majority of Russians in the private and public sectors. Objections to Matveev's characterization of authoritarian neoliberalism in Russia are striking for their misunderstanding and misrecognition of fundamental changes that align with core deregulatory and 'responsibilizing' principles, explored further below [Ovsyannikova 2016].

Translating the substance of this transformation into the language of popular politics, localized versions of terms like 'austerity', 'the 1%', 'one rule for the rich', 'work no longer has dignity', 'the callous state', 'we are a country of paupers', resonate for Russians, W. Europeans, and N. Americans alike. Indeed, for workers in SOEs in strategic industries, such as Gazprom, exploitative and intensified labour conditions are strikingly similar to experiences of corporate change elsewhere, when narrative accounts are examined. My long-term underemployed research participant, Igor, reflects on his experience as a seasonal [*na vakhtu*] construction contractor with Yamal LNG[1] in the far North, where 80% of Russia's gas reserves are found. What is important here is the presence of lay political-economic analysis that experience generates. In terms of everyday political economy, does it really matter that SOEs exist?

> Like everywhere now a cleverly [*khitro*] designed small base 'white' [taxed] salary with bonuses that are impossible to earn. Again, like everywhere, there is a 'black' [unregistered, illegal] component of pay that is also withheld at will, as a kind of weapon over you. Terrible conditions, worse than a prison camp. I quit ahead of my term because I got neither the days off, nor the travelling expenses in the contract. As a result, they wrote a terrible recommendation letter — without which I will not get another contract. We are just another item of brittle or pliable '*inventar*' [equipment] to be used until it breaks (instead of a 12-hour shift we regularly worked 16). To me it's like Russia is a slave colony, we just don't use that term anymore. We 'manage' our slavery ourselves, with some help from machines and technology [interview in Kaluga Region, summer 2019].

While the polymorphism of state intervention in economies might justify the moniker 'state capitalism', critical geopolitics scholars caution

1 Yamal LNG is joint owned by Novatek, a private inheritor-firm of a Soviet pipe constructor, in which the Russian state has a 9% interest, other stakeholders are China's main energy SOE, the French TNC TOTAL SE, and Volga Group, Luxembourg registered private investment vehicle with Russian assets.

that this perspective tends to reinforce a discursive, or even ‘imaginary’ division of the world into ‘western’ type free-market capitalism, and ‘eastern’ type authoritarian models [Alami and Dixon 2020a]. A focus on illiberality, unfree functioning of markets and supposed ‘abnormality’ of state capital helps justify a more combative foreign policy towards Russia and China, reinvigorates epistemic purity ‘at home’, but most of all serves a powerful disciplinary and hierarchizing logic of space [Ibid]. This is symptomatic of two currents — the increasing ebb of western political and economic hegemony, thus ‘state capitalism’ becomes a self-conciliatory narrative to ‘explain’ failures at home at the same time as allowing continuing misrecognition of the very market-interventionist operations of core western states — not least the US. Alami and Dixon show how the bogeyman of state capitalism is essentially a form of psychological projection when critics accuse it of producing cronyism, inequality and discontent. While Alami and Dixon see the trope of state capitalism as partly symptomatic of a crisis in neoliberalism, they also note how it plays a role in legitimating renewed intervention at home ‘without challenging neoliberalism as a political form of market-led rule’ [2020a: 9]. If the Trump presidency has taught us anything, it is about the capacity for inter-elite learning: populist rhetoric as a cover for cronyism has come ‘home’ to the global core. Fundamentally though, elites have doubled down on neoliberal logic — as evidenced by Covid measures. Regardless of regime type, they mostly aimed at delegating responsibility for risk to the individual, provided only minimal support to the individual worker or entrepreneur. They further insisted that class positioning as previously decided by ‘market forces’, dictated economic and personal security, further ossifying inequality. Covid is an example of the instrumentalization of various crises to promote deepening neoliberalization and commodification of labour [van Apeldoorn et al. 2012, in Alami and Dixon 2020b: 80].

Matveev’s analysis, while underlining that a serious study of state capitalism has its place in any analysis of Russia, illustrates that salient features are present in large measure in ‘core’ democratic states. By the same token, strategic ownership by the state and elite corruption does not alter the fundamental division between capital concentration, cartels, financialization and the rise of a rentier-class on the one hand, and the erosion of labour’s position, the retreat of the social state, and economic neoliberalism for the majority on the other. ‘State capitalism’ may exacerbate distortions in capital allocation towards favoured producers in weapons, metals or energy, and lead to spill-over into high levels of elite corruption. However, in the ‘core’ states, capital interests also make ‘good’ use of the state to entrench and ‘enmoat’ themselves into cartels in what look like ‘new’ industries, but whose final services are eternal necessities — consumer durables, transport, and informa-

tion/entertainment (Amazon, Uber, Google). Where 'disruptors' arise, they rely, not only on financialization, but crucially, on tax subsidies and legislative capture or lag — Tesla being an example. Covid-19 is illustrative: it made these processes impossible to ignore, as one of the most deregulated of 'free market' states — the United Kingdom — engaged in some of the most corrupt practices of state-capital connivance — handing out production and service healthcare contracts without tender to crony insiders [Geoghegan 2020] who gouged both citizens and state organisations. Similarly, in supposedly solid democratic states, severe impositions on freedom of movement and assembly are imposed that focus on the individual and her economic positioning. The reader will already see where I am going with this argument: that the varieties of capitalism approach is less useful than the evaluation of the objective and subjective economic relations as dictated by a logic of 'neoliberal' subjectivation. Naturally, given the debate this term provokes as a 'rascal concept' [Peck et al. 2009] — particularly in relation to Russia — I expand on the term.

Neoliberalizing economism and authoritarianism

Neoliberalism refers to a way of thinking about organising social relations that emphasizes 'market competition [as] the basis of economic coordination, social distribution, and personal motivation' [Sparke 2013: 454-5]. Economic neoliberalism is a form of market rationality. Colin Hay [2004] provides a seven-point definition: the desirability of free capital mobility, the 'market' as an efficient mechanism for allocation, limited role for the state, supply-side economics, labour-market flexibility, conditionality of welfare based on incentivizing market participation, and private finance as more allocatively efficient in provision of public goods. Governmentality is key to the maintenance of these relations as it links social life to the logic of what Foucault called the 'enterprise society'. Governmentality is a process whereby subjectivity becomes increasingly dominated by discourses of self-regulation — inducing people to 'work upon themselves' to become ever more flexible to the demands of post-Fordism. This is not a simple top-down process of domination, however. Social control is produced though the active participation of individuals and groups in the regimentation of their own discipline. We have already seen how Matveev argues that the neoliberalism in Russia entails state involvement in supporting highly exploitative relations between individuals, firms and sectors. Stephen Collier [2011] adds to the perspective by returning to Foucault's lectures on biopolitics to argue that rather than a focus on freeing markets per se, neoliberalism is about rethinking government according to an over-determined form of economistic reasoning. The social state remains, but its governance

'styles' are influenced by '*khoziaistvo*' — the legacy of Soviet integration of politics and economy based on a narrow, managerial conception of need fulfilment. For Collier, the present moment sees governmentality as a 'formal rationality' that privileges market thinking, while acknowledging the existence of the social enterprise and social state to a limited degree. To describe this he adopts the term 'assemblage' to trace the genealogy of Russian reform in the 1990s back to core neoliberal thinkers from the US. Moreover, the idea of biopolitics from which governmentality emerges has deep roots in Soviet planning — in 'incentivisation' at different scales of labour and production [Bockman, Eyal 2002].[1] Collier elsewhere [2012: 190] reiterates Hilgers' [2012] argument about the potential synergy between activist states and marketized relations, underlining how *neo*liberalism as distinct from *classical* liberalism imagines a key role for governments 'in creating the conditions for diffusion of markets and market-like mechanisms' and may contain highly illiberal measures.

Peck and Theodore [2007] trace the debate in the varieties of capitalism literature (particularly [Hall and Soskice 2001]) concerning the justification for believing in a 'global neoliberalism' of diffusion through institutions, financial markets and foreign competition in the early twenty-first century. The 'varieties' approach anticipated a profound erosion of the nation state as adequate coordinator of the economic sphere. It focussed on the strategic interaction of mechanisms of routinized regulation at trans- and sub-national levels of analysis: 'corporate governance, education and training, labor-market regulation' [Peck, Theodore 2007: 744]. Firm level and sector scales replace an overly broad-brush macroeconomic institutional framing but are themselves prone to functionalism. In the final analysis, the 'varieties' model, in seeking to acknowledge real geographical differences, supposes an unrealistic coherence that closer analysis does not justify. For example it is problematic to clump together as 'coordinated' those market economies often synonymous with northern-European ordo-liberal types. Indeed, since the turn of the century, this criticism has been justified, as 'coordinated' models moved sharply towards their Anglo-Saxon 'liberal' brethren — especially in the spheres of labour market liberalization, and its corollary — welfare state residualization and retrenchment, two areas of interest in the Russian case [Oorschot, Gugushvili 2019]. Variegated neoliberal convergence has in part replaced the 'varieties' approach. Nonetheless, within these earlier analyses there are clear hints that coordinated market economies

1 While Rupprecht (2020) agrees that Russian neoliberal thought has indigenous roots he disagrees that the 1990s saw its implementation in any meaningful degree there.

would in any case fail to stem the tide of deregulation carried by global trends of financial liberalization.

Peck and Theodore [2007: 755] anticipate a tide rising over all developed economies, regardless of where they previously fell in the division 'coordinated'/'liberal'. This is revealed in the relative institutional weaknesses that failed to moderate or mitigate waves of neoliberal reforms when coordinated states face the entry of multilateral institutions who brought with them modes of rationalization and audit, self-monitoring and surveillance. These techniques are as important as any legislative or coherent ideological diktat. They then diffuse into new territories (such as state bureaucracies) via true ideologies such as New Public Management (NPM) (see [Romanov 2008] for a summary of its implementation in Russia). Today, international institutions themselves, ironically, cannot find a reverse gear when they need to because of their immanent neoliberal logic. For example the IMF stresses the need for slower adjustment and more progressive taxation in Russia because of Covid-19, but immediately reverts to 'neoliberal type' to suggest VAT rises and reduced payroll taxes as well as the need to 'reduce the footprint of the state' [IMF 2021]. Peck and Theodore [2007] are a scholarly bellwether of the need for more thorough acknowledgement of the multi-scalar and multi-register insinuation of neoliberal governmentality and rationality into the political-economic fabric of societies. Bruff [2014] expands the call for holism, suggesting that wider social relations require attention, not just because (meso and macro) institutionalism as a unit of analysis is inadequate, but because as social forms, institutions remain hollow and disembedded from their local contexts. Fishwick [2014] — using the example of Argentina — goes further, arguing that global production networks engender particular forms of firm-level transnational relations and at the same time produce particular working-class responses — both then are global-local phenomena.

SEZs as diffusion zones for neoliberal scales and registers

An example of applying this approach can be seen in research on Special Economic Zones (SEZs),[1] labour relations and transnational corporations in Russia (TNCs). The value is in identifying both uneven diffusion of neoliberal governmentality and its recombinant strength at a multi-scalar and multi-register level. SEZs (and the related geographical-juridical space of 'Industrial Parks') — were created supposedly to kick start diversification and higher-tech production — in reality they serve primarily as accelerated laboratories in deregulation, offering lower corporate tax-

1 A good primer on SEZs in Russia [Sosnovskikh 2017].

es, more liberal juridical regulations, ease of transnational movement of goods, and lean 'sweated' labour regimes (on the latter see [Morris and Hinz 2017]). Taking Kaluga region as an example, SEZs' success has been in work intensification, the socialization of blue-collar locals in accepting downgraded labour terms and conditions *and* training white-collar workers in more effective coercive surveillance-managerialist methods. In terms of transnational state-capital collaboration to increase productivity, global connectivity (notably with the Silk Road rail system), and in providing a relatively low-tech domestic manufacturing base, SEZs are an outstanding success.[1] These effects are not contained by the zonal boundary — they 'scale' via further expansion of 'lean' enterprises beyond the zone as TNC infrastructure and human capital investment has an effect on the whole region. Indeed, the 'zone' is not a spatially contained territory, but an elastic administrative state of exception that has expanded throughout the region to encompass many clusters containing dozens of diverse foreign and domestic firms in urban, brownfield and greenfield sites [Invest Kaluga 2020]. In terms of 'register' too, the SEZs exercise a strong discursive effect, making new working relations 'common sense' beyond the zones themselves, affecting local politicians, employers and workers in other enterprises. Overall the 'register' effect multiplier is more important than any administrative-legal deregulation, or should be seen as part of neoliberal scaling itself. My prior research has documented the 'burn through' of the local labour force by this unstoppable force, and the devil's bargain facing blue-collar Russians in particular [Morris 2016].

The SEZs illustrate another important point — that 'variegated' capitalism is more suitable as a lens on the subnational scale than the classical state-comparative units of analysis. In my Kaluga case, as elsewhere in Russia we can observe processes similar to other subnational milieu in both global north and south contexts: the accelerating subdivision of populations into productive and structurally redundant 'surpluses' [Tyner 2013]. The latter — humans as a new form of waste that require forms of disposal in contemporary capitalism [Yates 2011] — is widely viewed as integral to an argument that the current conjuncture represents a globally-shared crisis of overproduction and social reproduction. The case of SEZs examined via scalar and register analysis is capacious enough to leave room for incorporation of a state-capital accommodation. Not only in Russia, scholars observe the frequently clientelist elite-capital negotiation of sites for SEZs, which may result in further scales of

1 Overall, the literature on SEZ sees them as failing to diversify the Russian economy. The broader literature on SEZs sees them as vulnerable to rent-seeking without robust legal institutions.

collusion between regulatory institutions and capital. This is observed, for example, in my Kaluga case where German-owned TNCs directly benefit from state authoritarianism to limit the effectiveness of labour activism. The point here is that granular perspectives can show the 'happy' coexistence of state and capital interests that in no way alters an overarching, and increasingly authoritarian, neoliberal governmentality. In addition, the contingent position of TNCs in Russia within SEZs reinforces general processes of precarization and insecurity of labour, given further relocation of capital is an ever-present threat [Lee 1999]. Finally, as seen with SEZs in general, wider economic and environmental externalities are borne entirely by the host state, once more belying the view that neoliberalism is about 'small states' but rather repurposing state functions to more effectively discipline subjects and corral institutions [Moberg 2014].

This can be acutely grasped in the Russian case because of the historical necessity of continual political work to re-embed the idea of laissez-faire in the social imaginary as 'natural' — something that has parallels with Polanyi's work on early nineteenth century England. In the face of societal opposition, libertarian market ideologues need to 'naturalize' what is in fact a carefully constructed view of human economies in a set of epistemological precepts that serve politics [Mirowksi 2019]. While the Polanyian perspective saw waves of disembedding and re-embedding of the economic from the social against a constant backdrop of liberalism and then social democracy — what of today? Can neoliberal economism thrive just as well in an authoritarian consensus? If we follow the anthropological focus on the reconceptualization of the person as a moral and rational agent [Venkatesan 2015], there is no reason to doubt that neoliberalism, whether considered as an economic politics or as a form of governmentality, can — through projecting 'accountability' onto the micro-social — operate just as effectively without the cover of democratic institutions. Indeed 'democratic' institutions have transformed in the neoliberal moment of the last 40 years in the West to accommodate not so much to a shrinking of the state as a change in its function to focus on discipline. On a macro level the disciplining function makes state institutions accountable to markets. On a micro level it shapes and controls individual behaviour.

In recent years, scholars have increasingly linked authoritarianism and neoliberalism [Bedirhanoğlu, Yalman 2010, Bruff 2014, Bruff, Tansel 2019, Chacko 2018, Tansel 2017], taking up the themes of disciplining via the mobilization of 'non-market' institutional forms in new ways. Bruff [2014] sees this not as a temporal innovation, but a qualitative tendency towards coercion, exclusion and marginalization. Bruff draws on the earlier work of Poulantzas [1978] and others on authoritarian statism as a response to crisis. The result is intensification of

'responsibilization' and the delegation of social reproductive risks onto the individual. Intensified too, are the moral rhetorics of blame — both of individuals, but relating also to the 'burden' of social transfers and public debt. Later, Bruff and Tansel [2019] inject greater nuance into their analysis by proposing a stronger connection between authoritarian statism and neoliberal reforms, and the transformation of key societal sites in capitalism, including households, workplaces and urban spaces. This leaves analysis open to exploring the scalar aspects of domination, as I have attempted in relation to SEZs, but also contradictory aspects — which may well entail concessions and retreats. In addition, Bruff and Tansel highlight what I have called the importance of 'register' — in their words: the cultural buttressing of neoliberal ideology via hegemonic media and public discourse. Finally, they propose authoritarian neoliberalism as applicable in a variety of regime types, and state-capital constellations — from East and South Asia, to Latin America and the Middle East.

But what of the European East and Eurasia? Adam Fabry's work ([2019a, 2019b], cf. [Geva 2021] for a related perspective) on Orban's Hungarian regime is instructive on the seemingly contradictory fusing of authoritarianism and neoliberalism. Fabry allows us to reincorporate the experience of ordinary people in places like Russia into the mainstream of global processes of dispossession and exclusion while drawing attention to the authoritarian tendencies inherent in capitalism [2019b: 133]. Importantly, the Hungarian case alerts us to a centralizing state as reinforcing neoliberalism by making use of the perceived weakness of liberal democracy and increasing conflict in the globalized economy. While some of Hungary's 'constitutionalization' of neoliberal economism appears different from Russian policy,[1] taken overall, the supply-side bias, regressive taxes, and highly contingent and conditional social rights (focussing on individual obligations over guarantees) look similar [2019b: 140]. Indeed, Fabry argues [2019a] that by interpreting these currents as somehow exceptional we ignore how similar they are to the response in the EU core. They actually serve as a 'model' for neoliberal austerity in Europe because they propose key mechanisms to co-opt, coerce and distract domestic opposition. Fabry's reading is doubly instructive of the Russian case because he also points to the way a narrow focus on clientelism, 'state capture' and corruption as local aberrations obscures these as increasingly systemic features of widely variable, but consistently neoliberal polities. This is underlined by the acceleration towards 'cartel political parties' [Katz, Mair 1995] in democratic states after 2008. If neoliberalism

1 Hungary relies on EU FDI in place of hydrocarbon rents.

remains a devotedly 'anti-political project' [Davies 2016], then liberal handwringing at Russia's 'sins' looks once more like so much psychological projection.

Discussion

In this final section, I want to draw attention to specific symptoms of authoritarian neoliberalism as they pertain to contemporary Russia and which serve as indicators, not of its exceptionalism, but its political economic incorporation and even vanguard operationalization. An overarching process is the increasing discourse, and accompanying biopolitics, of surplus or 'waste' population. If the 'vanguard' of early neoliberalism was the objectification of rustbelts in northern Europe and America as disposable people and places, the trajectory of Russian industrial, social and macro-economic policy over the course of the 2000s is instructive of how much further an embedded neoliberal orthodoxy can push the boundaries in a highly developed state. The failure of policy, especially during the more liberal 'activist' Medvedev years of 2008-12 in addressing the long deindustrialization renders swathes of urban Russia as a 'worthless dowry' of the Soviet period to be written off [Morris 2016]. It's difficult to underestimate the deepening orthodox view of poverty as moral failure despite the rhetorically commitment to a social state in the amendments to the Russian constitution that purportedly provide social guarantees. Two discrete comments from very different political figures and times can help orientate us. The first is that of Anatoly Chubais, privatisation architect who remained a prominent liberal figure in the elite even up to 2020. In comments to a regional government audience in 2009 he said: 'if you are a university professor and you don't have a business then why the hell do I even need you'. The second comment is from Olga Glatskikh, a now ex-youth policy official from Sverdlovsk: 'The state owes you nothing… the state did not ask you to give birth…it's your life, you must make it yourselves'.[1]

Rather than seeing in these pronouncements an expression of 'amoral' liberal thought distant from that of the current core elite [Golovchenko 2018], these are merely unguarded revelations of the division of the population into morally-worthy, adaptable, entrepreneurial selves, and the surplus '*bydlo*'. Instead of seeing these clear articulations as outliers, such statements of social sorting re-

1 https://www.ural.kp.ru/daily/26903.7/3948698/. It is revealing that the addressees here are on the one hand a profession one might expect to have priorities quite far from the market, and on the other a 'talented' youth forum.

veal that a post-socialist 'regime of subjectivity' strongly delegates social reproduction and human thriving to the individual and methodically seeks to offer only the most threadbare programme of collective action [Shevchenko 2015]. Olga Shevchenko, in perhaps the most penetrating genealogical tracing of socially constructed post-Soviet personhood, notes how a neoliberal spirit aligns closely, or rather rhymes with the dominant standards of 'practical competence' in Russia that cut across class identities [Ibid: 59]. Roman Abramov [2019] and Suvi Salmenniemi [2015] also note that seemingly 'new' common-sense subject positions that contain strong overtones of self-work, and self-transformation, on closer inspection borrow or inflect earlier currents of self-improvement, 'native' to the Soviet and collective projects of twentieth-century Eurasia. Such recombined currents may intensify the internalization of such *moral* imperatives. In my own work [Morris 2012, 2016] I explore similar processes but from the perspectives of both relative winners and losers of economic transformation following 1991 in Russia. In particular, 'losers', such as blue-collar workers, are offered a stark choice — 1. wholly embrace a precarized and highly demanding flexibilization in new and newly-disciplining industrial spaces — including in SEZs; 2. accept under- and un-employment in the rust-belt zones of former monotowns and emptying rural Russia; 3. 'choose' what some interpret as resistance in the informal economy. Except that in the informal economy — whether as taxi-drivers, self-employed tradesmen, construction workers, or in the persisting sphere of market trading [Polese, Prigarin 2013], they cannot avoid an even more pressing imperative to enterpreneurialize themselves and to turn such a 'choice', or 'exit' in Albert Hirschman's terms, into a neoliberal project. Regardless, such workers more often end up in the ranks of lumpen, surplus populations undertaking everyday 'microproletarian economies' [Gago 2017: 19]. In this sense, the most marginal part of the Russian population takes on the task of maintaining the dynamism of what Verónica Gago has called 'neoliberalism from below'. There may be a space within this dynamic to resist exploitation and dispossession but this itself becomes a 'foundation for an intensification of that exploitation and dispossession' [Gago 2017: 11].

Ovsyannikova [2016] criticizes the application of the term neoliberalism to Russia in part because she believes the social state trumps any deregulatory momentum. She cites labour protections and lack of pension reform as examples. However, empirical evidence shows that employment protection in Russia is 'poorly observed' [Gimpelson et al. 2010]. Pension reform did go head, despite enormous opposition, and prior commitments to indexation were diluted to the point

that in the future it is likely the universal element will be replaced by means-testing and financialization of 'pension capital' [Khmelnitskaya 2017]. Ovsyannikova argues that 'monetisation of welfare benefits' was overdue because of underfunding and piecemeal in execution. However she ignores how monetisation closely matches patterns of welfare residualization elsewhere which are key to the austerity politics of the World Bank and other international institutions (see [Wengle, Rasell 2008: 749]).[1] Monetisation also contains within itself the key logic of 'choosing' deserving groups and making them 'responsible' citizens [Kourachanis 2020]. As Shields [2019: 657] notes in the Polish case, family-focussed welfare reform can act as a form of 'neoliberal social innovation' by appropriating the micro-scale of social reproduction as a further space of responsibilization (of benefits linked to parenthood, upbringing, domestic work) and privatization (of former entitlements such as pre-school childcare). In addition, the diffusion through welfare states of conditionality is a key plank in neoliberal reform because it realises a critique of social rights on both a discursive and structural level [Pieterse 2003, in Bindman 2017]. Bindman also reminds us of the genealogy of responsibilization in social policy stretching back to Soviet ideas around welfare provision.[2] Hemment [2009] points out that in the Russian case rhetorical concessions to a social state are not matched by policy — if anything, they serve as a cover for accelerating change. While it is true that NPM in Russia began more as performance management than marketization [Romanov 2008], the expansion of state-favoured NGOs tasked with quasi-welfare functions who then compete for funding has introduced market elements to the Russian system. Meri Kulmala [2014] sees a mixture of statism and neoliberalism in Russia's welfare policies, while Mikhail Chernysh argues that governmentalization in the public sphere led to an extreme narrowing of job autonomy and managerialism, and that Russia is pursuing neoliberal fundamentalism [2020: 54]. Even a generous interpretation of the remnants of the social state reveals extreme conditionality, narrow and patchy coverage, and tokenistic, piecemeal provision in cases of extreme social distress.[3]

1 It should be acknowledged that there is more diversity in the World Bank's thinking nowadays.

2 See also Bockman and Eyal 2002 for a discussion of East Europe as its own 'author' of neoliberal policies.

3 For example, the one-time payments for families in 2020 during the Covid pandemic, and the varying levels of prenatal payments have not addressed Russians' unwillingness to plug the demographic gap — itself a symptom of precarization. An example of the perniciousness of the logic of means-testing

Overall, it is important to acknowledge the psychological burden — which translates into real socio-economic, and political feedback effects — of what I have characterized as capitalist realism in Russia. But Russia is hardly an exception. The internalization of loser-status, the surplus populations and 'reservations', the temporal closing of horizons for betterment are all characteristic experiences of the present global conjunction as experienced by the newly proletarianized majorities. Whether we call them 'multitude' or precariat, or in the post-Soviet case 'subproletarians' [Derluguian 2005], is less important. Similarly, the retreat of the social state is nothing new and not peculiar to post-socialist states. However, as the thesis of authoritarian neoliberalism proposes, during periods of crisis, by contingent necessity it is useful to emphasise incoherence or heterogeneity of the state bureaucratic function, all the more to underline its punitive and delegative relations to the individual. The state's response to Covid-19 in Russia and its similarities and differences to core states are instructive. First, a knee-jerk authoritarian lock-down followed by a hurry to delegate responsibility back to the individual and downplay both the social costs and state responsibility. Russia, like other neoliberal developed economies, offered very limited income support for livelihoods, especially among the self-employed and poor. This affected not only lumpenized informal workers like taxi-drivers and construction workers, but also the burgeoning 'freelancer'-precariat white-collar workers — an important category in Russia, as elsewhere where there is high 'human capital'[1] but structural barriers to SMEs beyond micro-entrepreneurialism. As Shevchuk [2020] points out — labour processes that are negotiated via digital platforms in the 'gig' economy emphasise tight algorithmic control and a loss of autonomy because the platforms actually disguise incorporation of workers into 'shadow' corporations. This also divides up labour into small parcels which has a wider influence as it spills over into other domains of work. For the purposes of our argument, work for 'shadow corporations' intensifies both punitive monitoring and self-exploitation at the point of production.

Covid-19 only accelerates this aspect of neoliberal authoritarianism; digital transformation enables a 'control society', long predicted by Gilles Deleuze [1990]. Alone among European nations, in early 2020,

is the evidence that a third of Russians do not know they are entitled to benefit payments of some kind. https://www.gazeta.ru/social/2021/02/18/13483658.shtml

1 Noting that the very concept is an elision of 'labour processes' and relations in service to neoliberal ideology (Mirowski 2019: 14). Freelancers as a proportion of working-age population in Russia is high by European standards at 14% compared to 4% in the UK. https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4730809.

Moscow's government pioneered a technological system of surveillance quarantine [Orlova, Morris 2021]). While ultimately unsuccessful, and quickly giving way to broader (neoliberal) pressures to re-open the economy regardless of epidemiological risks, the Moscow experiment illustrated the tendency of control to shift from a focus on the disciplined, directly observed body, to a new order of domination. Personal data processing as a semi-autonomous system entails both the deactivation of agency and its reactivation through incorporation of the person in their own data flows (where choices about what images we view online and what products we buy are then fed back to us to reinforce existing behaviour). Of course digital governance apriori assumes a set of political values to be 'inputted' into any algorithm which can then make judgements as to the conduct and movement of real individuals, just as the data attached to persons themselves can become another 'fictitious commodity' to further marketize social domains that previously resisted incorporation [Haggart 2018]. The term 'surveillance capitalism' [Zuboff 2015] is often focussed on individual privacy rights, and monopoly capitalism in general, rather than the implications of data commodification for individual behaviours observable via the everyday political economy, hence my preference for the broader term authoritarian neoliberalism. The nascent Russian system (which will possibly develop along the lines of the Chinese 'social credit' system) illustrates the potential further reinforcement of self-monitoring and inscription in one's micro-social actions of neoliberal logics. Moscow serves as a suitable test bed for the further expansion of such technologically integrated systems of governmentality in the 'democratic' countries.

The Russian experience of Covid shows how authoritarian governance, increasingly the purview of all states, contributes to the accelerating implementation of surveillance practices which benefit corporations, including SOEs. Further pressures are brought to bear on groups and individuals to conform or internalize behaviours, practices and mindsets that entrench neoliberal thinking and allow the biopolitical to undermine any alternative 'mechanisms of accounting' [Hardt, Negri 2004: 148]. This conjunction of state and capital power can be observed everywhere, but I want to end this essay with two further brief examples of Russia as 'vanguard'. Russia offers a good example of the broad and deep roll-out of the surveillance state due to its particularly fruitful experience since the 2000s of aligned state and capital interests in extracting economic rents from populations. In just the most obvious example, the peppering of public (and increasingly private) highways with revenue-generating traffic enforcement cameras should be seen for what it is: an authoritarian technical solution to overcome limits on rent-seeking elsewhere. The plethora of these cameras puts every other

developed country's efforts to shame.[1] Truly, in linking the control society to rent-seeking it is as pure a public-private partnership you can wish for. A part of the proceeds goes to regional budgets, but the 'take' from private companies supporting the cameras' operation is 15-times greater than their real cost.[2] To move to a different scale — that of the individual, a similar process can be observed in the microproletarianization of workers such as food couriers and taxi-drivers. They, as elsewhere, are subject to algorithmic control for maximum extraction of surplus value within shadow corporations. This happens of their own 'volition', via internalization of the demands of maximal self-exploitation and the delegation of all externalities to the individual and wider society (health costs, accidents, insurance, pollution) by the platforms themselves. However, here again we observe the imbrication of state (which owns bonds in such companies, allows them to operate as quasi-monopolies, and sustains anti-labour legal environments) and financial and political elites who own such companies. The scaling effect of microproletarianization of swathes of economic activity in Russia via concentration of market share is unprecedented outside of China.[3]

In conclusion, we should view Russia as just another "'normal' country, just not in the optimistic sense Daniel Treisman and Andrei Shleifer [2005] intended: a middle-income country facing typical developmental challenges. Instead, I would contend that Russia is 'normal' in a ways that reflect its peripheral-as-vanguard authoritarian neoliberalism. Its characteristics are the dominant politics of "austerity" (a continuously residualizing social state) accompanied by the other disciplining factor of real incomes falling over protracted time periods; limited social mobility and the privatizing of educational opportunity leading to a small plutocratic class or caste; the expansion of indebtedness and precarity in the population; social reproduction as largely responsibilized and privatized; the expansion of the horizons of the rentier alliance between state and capital interests and a relative strengthening of multinational corporations' clout and the intensification of their role in the economy (a

1 The world speed camera database records 15,000 control devices in Russia — likely an undercount — the GIBDD counts nearly 19,000 devices in 2020. This is 9000 more than the next highest European state and four times the number in the USA and 20 times the number in Canada. https://www.scdb.info/en/stats/

2 http://lse-ikb.com/activities/blog/201-kuda-idut-shtrafy-gibdd. See also https://www.rbc.ru/rbcfreenews/60334c9f9a79475eb6162883?from=from_main_9. The road tax system known as Platon has some similar characteristics https://www.forbes.ru/kompanii/344145-platon-mne-drug-no-istina-dorozhe-kuda-uhodyat-vznosy

3 For example, the most popular search engine in Russia also owns the main social network, the most popular email service, and controls both the main ride-hailing app and an increasing share of the food courier business.

process actually accelerated by sanctions; see [Gurkov, Saidov 2017]). All watched over by the nascent digital control society.

Rogers [2016] cautions against 'uniting things under the theoretical sign of the "neoliberal"', but at the same time agrees with my core aim: a more serious ethnographic examination of how flexible labour regimes, SOEs and the neo-authoritarian state are linked. As I argue here these linkages intensify the politics of resignation on the part of ordinary people at the same time as they are further incorporated into neoliberal (self)governmentality. The only limits on incorporation are certain incoherences of the state-capital accommodation-assemblage. As Rogers [2016] noted in his study of the oil and gas industry in the Urals, capitalist 'incorporation' via privatisation after communism does not necessarily mean coherence or coordination in governance and corporate identity. In addition, the term 'incoherence' is distinct from 'hybrid assemblages' [Ong 2006] or 'parasitical co-presences' [Peck 2004]. 'Deregulatory' governance (in the sense that it lacks finality or fixity) inevitably and often unintentionally opens up holes in the fabric of economic and social relations. Emergent practices both reinforce but also undermine economistic and bureaucratic rationality [Molyarenko 2016; Morris 2019] in what Ananya Roy [2009: 80] calls 'law as social process'. Conjuncturally, Russia is notable for the continuing expansion of the informal economy in tension with state and capital surveillance — even though, as I have argued, informality entails in part internalisation of neoliberal governmentality [Morris 2019]. As a space for autonomism, non-market orientated exchange and labour its potential is limited. Nonetheless for imagining non-capitalist alternatives, its sheer size means informality is important. Informality in Russia should be seen as offering similar counter-hegemonic potential as that of models that derive from 'deregulated' and informal systems from below in other global contexts — such as horizontalism [Sitrin 2012], baroque economics [Gago 2017], and 'insurgent' citizenship practices within the former socialist spaces [Polese et al. 2017]. These are beyond the scope of the current essay, but deserve equal attention in any approach that proposes an everyday political economy with a view to uncovering space for the emergence of 'commons' beyond state and market [Caffentzis, Federici 2014].

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