

Intimate Autocracy: Russian society between resentment and resistance

This book is a close examination of people's everyday practices to answer why there seems to be so much 'resentment' in Russian society. I recast the debate in terms of power and domination to show how political subjectivity is shaped by a long-term sense of displacement and hurt. This produces an intimate feeling for loss – of structuring meaning in people's lives.

What does it mean to say there is mass support in Russia for the Ukraine invasion? Before the war, scholars assumed elite narratives and opinion polling were in lockstep. This distorted our picture because it focused on imperial revanchism and societal preference for authoritarianism. My book challenges some core assumptions made about Russia. Many knowledge claims have been made since the invasion on little available evidence. By contrast, I propose the first, long overdue, political anthropology of contemporary Russia: I take seriously how 'everyday politics' dramatizes people's social desires, their political agonism, and their struggles. The book is based on my decades-long participant observation with diverse people in Russia – from police officers to factory workers, from young men avoiding military mobilization to citizen journalists and antiwar activists. While my claims are based on immersion over many years, the book focusses on the period since 2014 and Russia's first Ukraine intervention.

The question of why Russia has seemingly become so authoritarian is, in many ways, Arendtian. Like Arendt's *Origins of Totalitarianism*, my book uses a wide array of ideas to build a powerful explanatory mechanism. Based on the idea of an epoch's 'structure of feeling', I argue that the traces of socialist-era 'commonality' are relevant. Throughout the book I use ethnographic encounters to return to this paradox: that people do not mourn the passing of the Soviet political or geopolitical project, but they do continuously feel an absent presence – its social ordering and sense of belonging. This is a 'haunting' that even young people may experience. I map my ethnography onto contemporary social and political theories. Among others, I dialogue with Keti Chukhrov on the idea of the 'good' in the socialist project and Gulnaz Sharafutdinova on the traces of the Soviet person. From anthropology, I engage with Michael Lambek, Didier Fassin, Cheryl Mattingly, and other researchers who are interested in how morality and ethics are mobilized in everyday life. I show that moral economies have an encompassing power as

strong as elite political ideologies. This is revealed in the quiet and not-so-quiet political content of ordinary lives.

Part I dramatizes the tug of war between elites who propose geopolitical revanchism and ordinary people who sense the social loss of the socialist project. I address people's immediate response to the Ukraine war and find much more deep content of disquiet and regret than resentment and enthusiasm. In the middle part of the book, I use ethnography to create a vivid portrait of the unhappy political-economic deal of Putinism. Here I draw on the work of feminist anthropologists and others to examine the problem of social reproduction. The Russian elites see human beings as little more than a new oil – to lubricate the workings of elite enrichment. Ensuring the 'good life' of the next generation and even making ends meet is a daily challenge. One chapter of this second section looks at socio-economic relations through the prism of authoritarian neoliberalism. This is both an enforced and internalized ideology where 'man (and woman) is wolf to man'. Another chapter examines the state's paradoxical role. The state enforces ideas of individuals as atomized and having to fend for themselves. But at the same time, state withdrawal is incomplete. Socialist-era notions of paternal care for the citizen never fully disappear. Using ethnography, I show that state capacity is built with the informal involvement of ordinary citizens. It involves moral judgements and negotiations around the idea of a duty of care. Here I build on feminist and global south theories of state-making and stategraphy, proposed by scholars such as Tatjana Thelen and Ananya Roy.

In the final part of the book, I shift to desiring 'nomads'. Based on observation, I theorize about desiring drives for social connectiveness as representing freedom. Loss of social project leads to nomadic searches for a new socius. While largely frustrated, micropolitical attempts arise to recreate connection and the 'good' life in sometimes unlikely places. Inspired by Gilles Deleuze's micropolitical theories which find their origin in Spinoza's ethics, I look ethnographically at movements of people and places and practices that resist capture and control by the state, even in the wartime present. The last three chapters all describe ordinary, and not so ordinary forms of resistance. I describe the philosophy of mobility-as-resistance made visible in the metaphor of the garage spaces. Then, I turn to the ordinary practices of craft and salvage which have political content. Finally, I talk to politically active citizens in their struggle to continue to resist and make their world better – in labour politics, environmentalism, and antiwar activism.