

Youth Politics in Putin's Russia: Producing Patriots and Entrepreneurs. Julie Hemment. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2015. 208 pp. New Anthropologies of Europe Series. Notes. Bibliography. Photographs. \$22.95. Paperback.

Sofia Kalo, University of Massachusetts, Amherst

Youth Politics in Putin's Russia explores state-run youth projects in the Putin era (1999 - present). Julie Hemment's ethnographic research is centered on understanding the politics that have propelled these controversial initiatives as well as the impact they have had on the first post-Soviet generations. By exploring several of the projects that the Russian state has crafted to politicize, empower and instill a sense of responsibility among young people, the author discusses the ideologies behind them, while also relaying a thick description of youth participation in and negotiation of such projects (18). In doing so, she traces the extent to which the projects appeal to or revive the Soviet past, their similarities to democratizing interventions in the nineties and, importantly, their resemblance to and sometimes divergence from broader global forms in the neoliberal era. At the same time, Hemment makes a case for collaborative ethnography as an invaluable method in the face of ever-deteriorating Russia-US relations. The result is a rich ethnographic account that weaves together the narratives of students, educators, project leaders and organizers, as well as the author's own reflexive thoughts, with theoretical and methodological implications beyond Russia and the postsocialist region. *Youth Politics in Putin's Russia* thus makes several contributions: it challenges problematic yet persistent assumptions about Soviet and post-Soviet society which often rest on binary oppositions such as oppression/resistance, truth/lie, and authentic/inauthentic (7). It further legitimates collaboration as an ethical and insightful ethnographic method; and it advances our understanding of the shifting relationship between the state, society, and capital as it is unfolding on a global scale.

Hemment's discussion focuses on several state-run projects: the pro-Kremlin movement Nashi, which was founded in 2005 and dissolved in 2012; the state-run camp Seliger 2009, developed as a way to address the problem of youth mobility and employment in the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis; initiatives run by the Russian state to encourage youth voluntarism; and sexualized political campaigns. The discussion of these projects, which are all framed by the portraits and narratives of differently positioned participants, is headed by a chapter on the author's long-term collaborative work with her Russian colleagues, its unexpected outcomes, and the insights it generated. The research on which this book is based was conducted primarily in the peripheral town of Tver' between 2006 and 2011.

Hemment's analysis of state-run projects unfolds throughout the book, telling a different story from those often iterated on mainstream media or other scholarly accounts. Critics from Russia and the United States, for instance, have often highlighted their supposed continuities with Soviet-era organizations, interpreting the projects' goal as an attempt to produce "loyal and politically docile youth" (7). Others have viewed them as efforts to deflect young peoples' attention from more independent forms of engagement. As the author traces the shifting relationship between the Russian state and its citizens over the years, she argues that such projects

are not simply Soviet throwbacks and that participating youth are not without agency. Instead, these projects are animated by different interplaying and often contradictory logics. While they strategically repurpose or draw on the Soviet past, they employ different aspects of neoliberal rationality combined also with Orthodox or nationalist forms (143). Importantly, they are personalized by participating youth, leading to uncertain and unintended outcomes. For example, in Chapter 4, Hemment describes how the work of *Vazhnoe Delo*, a youth volunteer organization that was set up by the governor of Tver' in 2005 to help the needy, recalled Soviet-era activities, i.e. the type of work volunteers engage in, their use of uniforms and mass actions, while also exhibiting neoliberal technologies such as self-monitoring and seeking individualized solutions, which ultimately proved adaptable and negotiable by the participants. The other projects discussed in this book exhibit similar continuities with Soviet-era technologies while also bearing resemblance to reconfigurations of governance that are taking place globally. This leads Hemment to suggest that anxieties over youth in Russia, of which such projects are an expression, should not be analyzed in isolation, but as part of "a broad renegotiation of the contract between state, civil society, and individual citizens" that is happening elsewhere in the world (10).

Hement's collaboration with her Russian colleagues has generated rich insights that are reflexively discussed throughout the book, but especially in Chapter 1, a section that might be particularly compelling to readers interested in the possibilities of the collaborative method in postsocialist space. In this revealing meditation on what it means to do ethnography in the Putin era, we get a good sense of how shifting geopolitics and the escalating tensions between Russia and the US have given the author and her colleagues a different, more fraught but insightful nevertheless, experience from that of earlier participatory action research conducted in the late nineties.

Youth Politics in Putin's Russia is a remarkable ethnography, in its attention to detail, descriptive richness and analytic sophistication. Written in an engaging style, it is thorough and precise, making an important contribution to the second generation of scholarship on postsocialist societies. By pointing to the ways in which state-run youth projects in Russia are prompted by disenchantments shared all over the globe in the twenty-first century— disenchantments with income inequality, economic crisis and political liberalism— it contributes specifically to recent scholarship that has been concerned with "unbinding postsocialism" by extending its scope beyond the boundaries of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union (Rogers, Douglas. 2010 "Postsocialisms unbound: Connections, critiques, comparisons." *Slavic Review* 1-15). This is a study that will undoubtedly be of interest to scholars of postsocialism, neoliberalism, youth politics, civil society and engaged anthropology.