

Everyday Post-Socialism: Working-Class Communities in the Russian Margins. By Jeremy Morris. London: Macmillan, 2016. Xxvi, 261pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Photographs. Figures. \$109.99, hard bound. \$84.99, e-book.

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For anthropologists of (post)socialism, it has become customary to criticise the naïve economism of liberal thought. However, in practice this is usually easier said than done. In a lucid and intimate ethnography of working class lives in Russia's periphery, Jeremy Morris makes a wonderful exception. His focus is on Izluchino (a pseudonym), a former "monotown" of 15,000 people settled in the Kaluga region near Moscow. Previously a major extractive base and a Soviet producer of cement, lime, and plastic, the town's industries were depleted in the 1990s, making the workers dependent on factory in-kind payments and improvised attempts to get by. When Izluchino's economy slowly re-emerged in the 2000s, then, its residents understood their existence as *nam khvataet* ("we have enough"). Morris starts from this sense of "here-and-now well-enough-being" (p. 7) to explore how working-class men and women try to make their place liveable despite scarcity and beyond mere survival. The result is a monograph of class, postsocialism and resourcefulness that avoids both the functionalism of much economic anthropology, and the romanticism of some anthropologies of "the good." Centred on several characters and their social circles, eight chapters cover an impressive array of subjects: blue collar personhood, informal economy, male networks and women's double burden, aging and trauma, youth, consumption and car ownership.

The book's central contribution is the concept of "habitability"—the constant effort of making do, of carving out a comfortable niche with available means and significant others. Drinking to excess with friends in a garage, while repairing one's car; turning a small flat's lodge into a child's study, a painting room and shooting ground; painting neighbors' nails or cutting their hair as a favor: these are simultaneously attempts to exercise agency within the realm of the possible, reinforce the relationships one depends on, and wrestle out some joy and dignity in the process. Such resourcefulness is not an act of heroic negation of precarity. Rather, Morris' interlocutors

understand risk and contingency as inevitable parts of their lives. Nor is resilience a sign of neoliberal entrepreneurial personhood. Instead, people adapt to improvisations —such as illegal taxi driving—as a way out of the imperative of “work on the self” required in new work arenas (p. 10). Finally, habitability differs from ‘normality’—a concept anthropologists of postsocialism explored predominantly among middle classes—by its focus on blue collar relationality: “habitability emerges in small acts of relatedness, practices and classed being” (p. xvii).

An important theme of the book is the quest for “habitable” work places, between the post-Soviet “inheritor firms” and their lean, neoliberalized foreign counterparts. Local inhabitants differentiate jobs by “the perception of the relative level of paternalism” (p. 31), itself a remnant of the Soviet “social wage” and a key factor behind high labor turnover. When new factories seem not to offer autonomy or even better pay in exchange for stricter discipline and higher tempo, some young men, like Sasha, tend to choose illegal, risky jobs such as “gypsy” cab-driving as a way to achieve *avtoritet*, a sense of dignity and propriety. For others, like Nikita, however, it is the locally familiar firms that provide comfort, as they allow for a sense of belonging and intergenerational skill appreciation within a blue-collar community. Even though new generations inherit the experience of precarity from their parents, what distinguishes them from workers in the Global South is the “moral memory” of socialism, and the “paternalistic guardians of labor” that continue its legacy (p. 41). However, such legacies are not deterministic: notions of dignity, autonomy and integrity are open-ended, and each person finds their meaning in highly personalized universes of work biography and value.

Another topic concerns acts of care and dependency, what Morris calls “symbolic kinship and affective work” (p. 41). Because the enterprises are in decline, “the value of others and the value of self is continually rediscovered” (p. 27). Refuting discourses of self-improvement, new practices create alternative forms of care-for-the-self and care-for-others. This is understood as simply being true to one’s own predicament, with both its positive and negative sides: “We are stewing in our own juices,” as an elderly forewoman describes her love of the enterprise and why she stayed in it despite all the adversities (p. 127). Such love is often difficult: “You do what you can to care, but the recipient of that care, whether enterprise, worker or elderly relative, may not acknowledge or thank you for it. But care must go on, nonetheless” (p. 126). In an incisive reflection on gender

and class mobility, Morris describes the new double burden of “ultra-flexible femininity” (p. 139), which puts young, working-class women’s need to uproot themselves through education at odds with their moral duty to care for others.

Finally, Morris’s interlocutors live neither in a world of total abandonment where nothing works nor in a middle-class context of consumerist self-care. Rather, getting by means being dependent on significant others and their abilities to make semi-operable objects and life’s half-chances really function. Maintaining a cheap car takes a network of confrères who know how to fix it; decorating your flat means turning the scrap gleaned from the factory into a work of art. It is here where Morris finds, guided by Alasdair MacIntyre, “practices for their own sake” (p. XV): deeds of virtuosity and craftsmanship that, even if initially motivated by scarcity, create the internal good of habitability that goes beyond functionalism and makes the apex of his interlocutors’ class ethos. Constructing lavish DIY aquariums for tropical fish, themselves bred in the neighborhood; making amateur sushi rolls; these are working class extravagances that make the community relatively self-sufficient while creating performative arenas for wit and resourcefulness. Craftsmanship here becomes a value itself, the “pleasure of competence” it brings and a moralised commentary on class (p. 115). Because why pay for something if you can make it yourself? Working class *bricoleurs* relate to objects as if they were never commodified, constantly bridging the poles of labor and consumption.

At times with dizzying detail, Morris builds on two decades of experience with his interlocutors. This book is a virtual treasure trove for anybody interested in class, postsocialism, Russia, work and care, paternalism and autonomy, and moral revalorisation of precarity in general. Not least, it is a wonderful testament of how rich, lively and intimate ethnography can be.