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Neoliberal Authoritarianism: An Ethnography of Russian Universities

Iuliia Gataulina

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This work was supported by Tampere University Foundation sr.

ISSN 2947-7980 ISSN 2947-7999 (electronic)
Central and Eastern European Perspectives on International Relations
ISBN 978-3-031-89450-3 ISBN 978-3-031-89451-0 (eBook)
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-89451-0

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Acknowledgments

I started this research project in January 2018, and it seems that it had been a different world back then. This journey has been challenging but surely enriching, and such journeys are never made alone.

This research became possible with financial support of two research projects I have been fortunate to become a part of: “Towards Good Neighbourliness with Higher Education Cooperation” (EDUneighbours) financed by Kone Foundation (201608897) and “Assembling Postcapitalist International Political Economy” (POSTCAPE) financed by the Academy of Finland (3121325976). The research has been also supported by the individual research funding from Kone Foundation, “Assembling a post-socialist university: The politics of higher education in Russia” (202105839).

I am indebted to Sirke Mäkinen who, back in the days when I was still a master’s student, offered me the opportunity to become a member of the EDUneighbours research project as a PhD researcher. The project and her competent leadership enabled me to start my research and to get to know the academic world. Dear Sirke, you are a great colleague and always provided the support and advice needed when I had just started this journey into the unknown.

I want to thank Anni Kangas, my first supervisor and the principal investigator of the POSTCAPE project, whose academic and professional support and guidance cannot be fully captured in the words of these acknowledgments. Thank you, Anni, for opening up new and intriguing research realms, for having fruitful discussions, for providing a standing

example of unique and creative ways of doing research, for challenging me, and for teaching how to become an independent researcher. My acknowledgment extends to Mikko Poutanen, my second supervisor, who has always provided help, support, or advice whenever I needed it.

I must say that none of this research had ever been possible without people who kindly agreed to participate in this exploration and dedicated their time and effort to conduct interviews with me, answer my questions, and navigate the knowledge of the field. I am indebted to their trust and inspired by their integrity: despite dealing with sensitive political topics, these people have been invaluable in sharing their expertise.

I have been fortunate to enjoy the productive and stimulating academic environment of two research projects. I want to thank Sirke Mäkinen, Gleb Iarovoi, Dmitry Lanko, Anni Kangas, and Svetlana Shenderova from the "EduNeighbours" project for our collaborative work and discussions. In POSTCAPE, beyond Anni Kangas and Mikko Poutanen, I have had a chance to work with other brilliant scholars in the project: Tiina Vaittinen, Anna Rajala, and Anna Heikkinen. The reading circles, seminars, and arts-based writing sessions of our project deepened and stimulated my academic thinking greatly.

Throughout my research journey, my thinking and argumentation have been enriched thanks to the comments of, and discussions with, colleagues and peers I met at different academic sites, that is, conferences, seminars, and summer schools. It is important to remember that no academic analysis happens in isolation; thoughts and ideas are born in constant collaboration.

I want to thank Natalia Batrakova, the artist whose illustrations grace this book. Natalia has been a dear friend and a comrade in thought. Our endless conversations have greatly shaped my arguments.

TATTE—Tampere Association of Researchers and Teachers—has become a dear community to me, and I am honored to be surrounded by likeminded people who work tirelessly for the collegiality and freedom of research and education.

I want to extend my gratitude toward my friends and family who have been there for me in the happiest and darkest times alike. Due to the rising conflicts and crises in different parts of the world, I am now separated from some of you by large distances and different border regimes. For those who are now far away but close to my heart: I hope we will meet soon enough again.

Finally, my deep indebtedness goes to my mother, Svetlana. Мама, спасибо тебе за всю любовь и поддержку! It is you who taught me what kindness and justice are. This light always shows me a way.

I dedicate this book to everyone who works for the sake of critical and compassionate knowledge despite pervasive oppressive political powers.

In solidarity,
Iuliia Gataulina
Tampere, January 27, 2025

Competing Interests This research has been financially supported by the following research projects: "Towards Good Neighbourliness with Higher Education Cooperation" (EDUneighbours) financed by Kone Foundation (201608897), "Assembling Postcapitalist International Political Economy" (POSTCAPE) financed by the Academy of Finland (3121325976), and "Assembling a postsocialist university: The politics of higher education in Russia" financed by Kone Foundation (202105839).

About the Book

Russia's status as an authoritarian state is widely recognized. Authoritarianism in Russia has often been explained through the workings of domestic institutions and the legacies of decades of centralized governance. However, constructing linear, essentialist, and historicized narratives fails to acknowledge that the modern Russian state has successfully integrated into global structures of capitalist economy and neoliberalization, along with all the inequalities, violence, and dispossession that contemporary capitalism generates on a global scale.

I argue that the construction and consolidation of authoritarianism in Russia depended on new methods of power accumulation and techniques of government that emerged from penetrative global competitive neoliberalism. I call this process neoliberal authoritarianism. Contrary to liberally biased studies on authoritarian regimes, the concept of neoliberal authoritarianism engages with previous works that analyzed authoritarian-neoliberal linkages to reinforce dispossessive neoliberal economies or to endanger undemocratic political culture. While other research mostly focused on the relations between neoliberalism and authoritarianism as an economic theory of class relations, in this book, I want to put the question of *governance* at the center of the political story of neoliberal authoritarianism.

The goal of the book is to critically address both authoritarianism in Russia in relation to neoliberal globalization and the phenomenon of global neoliberalism itself. What kind of states and governing practices has reigning global neoliberalization produced over the last decades? What has the Russian state and its authoritarianism become in the context of neoliberal globalization?

Neoliberal authoritarianism is a process by which an authoritarian state deals with reigning neoliberal globalization, that is, how the former has attempted to manage and supervise the state's performance in the global neoliberal competition. Neoliberal authoritarianism also involves the penetration of neoliberal rationalities into the system of the authoritarian state, the leaking of neoliberal governmentalities into the institutional foundations and reproduction of the state. This changes the formation and composition of an authoritarian state: its institutions, policies, and economy. Neoliberal rationalities and an authoritarian state find affinities and produce a new composition of governance marked by control, regulation, and dispossession: neoliberal authoritarianism.

Neoliberal authoritarianism represents a new state formation: an authoritarian state penetrated and reinforced by neoliberal rationalities, sustained through authoritarian-neoliberal institutional practices of control and dispossession. This form of state authoritarianism not only protects the interests of capital, as seen in neoliberal states of the Global North, but also reproduces a territorially and ideologically coherent state of control that safeguards the political ruling apparatus at the center of the state.

Analyzing neoliberal authoritarianism through universities is an important case here. In the contemporary world, universities have largely become an extension of neoliberal economic development and a new frontier of global economic neoliberalization, being captured to serve the imperatives of economic growth, innovation, and competition. At the same time, universities, built into the institutional architecture of the state, especially in Russia, shift our gaze from neoliberal economic governance, which has usually been the subject of analysis in terms of neoliberal-authoritarian linkages, to the question of governance of public institutions and, more generally, the state under global neoliberalization.

Methodologically, this book is an ethnography of penetrative global neoliberalism, state reproduction, and neoliberal authoritarianism—examined through knowledge economies and universities. By ethnography, I mean a close examination of the institutional and everyday practices of global neoliberalism and the authoritarian state, which are performed, reinforced, and mutate in the process of their becoming. Instead of viewing neoliberalism and authoritarianism as stable abstractions, the ethnographic gaze focuses on their mutations and lived realities. This perspective allows us to move beyond "universals" (what neoliberalism and authoritarianism might mean) and to continually start anew in specific

situations—by observing actually existing neoliberalisms and the lived realities of the enforcement and reproduction of an (authoritarian) state.

The book unfolds as follows. Chapter 1 engages with the theoretical debates around authoritarianism and neoliberalism, providing the theoretical background for this work. Chapter 2 is dedicated to universities, where I show how universities became the sites through which neoliberal authoritarianism flourishes, both on a global scale and in Russia. After a short methodological interlude in Chap. 3, where I explain the ethnographic gaze as methodology, I proceed to the analytical chapters. Chapters 4 and 5 illustrate the workings of an (authoritarian) state in the environment of global competitive neoliberalization. This is the story of the rise of a securitized authoritarian state to manage this competitiveness and neoliberal globalization on its own terms—and the rise of great power aspirations fueled by this competitiveness.

But authoritarianism is not only a reaction to penetrative neoliberal modernization; neoliberal rationality produces the practice of the authoritarian state itself. Chapters 6 and 7 tell the story of how neoliberal rationalities have penetrated the state's institutional governance and how neoliberal-authoritarian control as a mode of (public) governance has diffused into the everyday life of universities through institutional regulations. These chapters show the dual relations of neoliberal authoritarianism: the state securitizes against neoliberal globalization but eventually becomes soaked in the same practices of control and dispossession promoted by neoliberal rationalities.

The analysis ends with Chap. 8, which examines academic projects subverting neoliberal authoritarianism into something more livable and hopeful. I conclude the book with some last remarks about neoliberal authoritarianism, ungovernmentality, and solidarities in Chap. 9.

The textual narration in this book is intertwined with illustrations created specifically for this book by the artist, and my dear friend and comrade in thinking, Natalia Batrakova. Besides their aesthetic purpose, I believe the illustrations productively engage with the epistemologies of lived existences (rather than stable abstractions) of neoliberal authoritarianism. This artistic practice is intended to both challenge the authority of the text and make sense of it. The visual language of these illustrations, hopefully, complements—and somewhat productively challenges—the hegemony of logocentric linear geometries of thinking spurred by an academic text. It is hoped that these illustrations will enrich the reader's

affective, perceptual, and intellectual journey, generating understandings of the described realities in more-than-linguistic registers.

Finally, it is important to note that in this book, I concentrate on the developments that occurred prior to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and the ruptures it produced. Surely, the compositions and the international system brought about by global neoliberalization have changed, with the rise of ethnonationalist states and the escalation of various imperial wars. However, to adequately understand the form into which the world is transforming, we need to understand how the workings of penetrative neoliberalization have shaped the world as it is now. Moreover, without understanding the effects that penetrative neoliberal modernization has produced—such as the erosion of labor rights, the strengthening of verticals of power, and ideologies of nationalistic competition—we cannot fully comprehend the capturing and draconian authoritarianism of the Russian state at the moment.

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About the Author

Iuliia Gataulina is Postdoctoral Researcher at Tampere University, Finland. Currently, she is a member of the "International Political Economy" research group. Her main research interests spring around international political economy, the workings of global capitalism and neoliberalism across East/West divide, and ethnographic methods in International Relations. More broadly, Gataulina is interested in how different politico-economic regimes of oppression and dispossession are composed across borders and how we can theorize more hopeful political alternatives.

Gataulina has been actively involved in issues around university democracy and autonomy, academic freedom, and international cooperation and solidarity. In 2018–2021, Gataulina worked in the research project "Towards Good Neighbourliness with Higher Education Cooperation" (funded by the Kone Foundation). She has been active and held different positions of trust in student and, later, researcher unions in Finland and Russia.

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CHAPTER 1

Control and Dispossession: A Tale of Neoliberalism and Authoritarianism

Introduction: The Problem of Russian Authoritarianism

In his address after staged referendums on Russia's annexation of occupied territories of Ukraine in 2022, Putin remarked that the invasion and the war atrocities are justified as a fight against "neoliberal culture," which he described as a civilizational project imposed globally and universally by Western states (President of Russia 2022). This was not the first instance when Putin employed the concept of "neoliberalism" as essentially alien and threatening, which the Russian state has taken it upon itself to confront (TASS 2023).

Simultaneously, the political ideals of (neo)liberalism, similarly associated with the "West," have been central to most oppositional movements in Russia—especially in the context that this is particularly what Putin seemed to be "fighting against," using it to justify the state's brutal crackdown on dissent. The binary between brutal (Eastern) authoritarianism and liberatory (Western) (neo)liberalism has been prevalent in both political and academic circles of post-Soviet Russia. With the intensification of draconian state authoritarianism in Russia and the rise of imperial wars, such as those in Ukraine and Palestine, the geopolitical and militarized divisions between freedom (associated with the liberal West) and

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I. Gataulina, *Neoliberal Authoritarianism: An Ethnography of Russian Universities*, Central and Eastern European Perspectives on International Relations,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-89451-0_1

"barbarianism" (associated with the authoritarian East) seem to have solidified. However, after years of strengthening the state's control, violence, and dispossession, as well as the rise of authoritarianism across different political contexts, the question remains: how does authoritarian control operate, and what could be our liberatory actions informed by this knowledge?

Russia's status as an authoritarian state is widely recognized. It stands as one of the most prominent global examples of authoritarianism, extensively documented in numerous scholarly works. The key milestones of Russian authoritarianism usually include the pervasive presence of the state in regulating various aspects of life, the strengthening of the police force, control over the media, electoral fraud, and the suppression of civil society. Authoritarianism in Russia is often associated with Vladimir Putin and the vertical of power he has built since becoming president in 2000 (see, e.g., Gel'man and Ryzhenkov 2011). This vertical includes, for example, centralizing authority by reducing the influence of regional governors and extending presidential terms. The vast territory of the state was also centralized and integrated into the vertical of power through more controlled governance of the regions and institutional compliance with federal directives.

Authoritarianism in Russia has often been explained through the workings of domestic institutions and the legacies of decades of centralized governance. The contemporary Russian state has indeed inherited a significant portion of its centralized governance from the Soviet Union (specifically, in the domain of universities, see Kuraev 2016). However, constructing linear, essentialist, and historicized narratives fails to acknowledge that the modern Russian state has successfully integrated into global capitalism and neoliberalization, along with all the inequalities, violence, and dispossession that contemporary capitalism generates on a global scale (cf. SovMode n.d.). In this book, I argue that we cannot understand the Russian state without considering this relation. As Boris Kagarlitsky argued in the early 2000s (Kagarlitsky 2002: 7), "[t]he degree of continuity [of post-Soviet capitalist Russia] with Soviet times is striking"; however, "this continuity has seen the survival, for the most part, of the worst elements of the old society – bureaucratism, authoritarianism, and corruption." The barbaric capitalism has been breeding on all the negative aspects of the Soviet system, while progressive welfare policies have gradually diminished.

The main protagonists in the book—the Russian state and the global neoliberal reforms—are usually assumed to be the sources of very specific world-making projects that oppose each other. In this book, however, I want to position these two political projects in relation. What this book

attempts to show is how neoliberal governance has long penetrated the Russian authoritarian state. While it mobilizes the concept of neoliberalism in its propaganda against the "West," the Russian regime itself uses oppressive neoliberal practices of control and dispossession. The Russian state, in its current form, is partly a product of the global neoliberal and competitive environment.

After the barbaric capitalism of the 1990s, the beginning of Putin's rule saw the rise of a regulating and omnipresent state once again. However, this time—and this is a crucial point—the state was coupled with attempts to supervise participation in, and even catch up with, the global neoliberal architecture. Putin's neoliberal policies rejected the unregulated marketization, privatization, and liberalization that characterized Yeltsin's era in the 1990s, but still aimed at neoliberal projects of modernization and economic growth, albeit under strong state regulation (Nesvetailova 2005). Supposedly contradictory elements such as state-centered (economic) nationalism and neoliberalism came together and stabilized in contemporary Russia (Kangas 2013).

Both scholars and political activists have tried to understand state authoritarianism and global neoliberalization in a consistent way. Pauliina Lukinmaa quotes one of her research participants, a political activist named Vania, who uses the metaphor of a matryoshka doll to describe the "different layers" of power structures in Russia (imperial, authoritarian, neoliberal):

> The phenomenon of post-Sovietness is like a matryoshka doll. Russia acted and still acts as an imperial universe in relation to the former republics of the union, declaring the coloniality of thinking and attitudes […]. And at the same time post-Soviet Russia is influenced by the global world, westernization, and neoliberal tendencies. (Lukinmaa 2022: 236)

Similarly, Marianna Pavlovskaya (2013: 1295) argues that the "aggressive neoliberalization" in Russia since the collapse of the Soviet Union has not led to "a uniform system of private property and profit-maximizing enterprises," prompting her to analyze the diverse economic landscape that consists of "pre-Soviet, Soviet, and post-Soviet" elements in their complex interactions. Boris Kagarlitsky (2002: 7) suggested that "Russia is a capitalist country to the extent that it is part of the global capitalist economy, of the world capital market and of the international capitalist division of labor. At the same time, Russia remains communal, corporatist, authoritarian 'Asiatic' and even feudal-bureaucratic." Anna Schwenck (2024) claims that from an economic point of view, Russia is not an example of

the implementation of neoliberal economic and monetary policies. However, neoliberal relationality, that is, individualism and competitiveness, has shaped society and the nature of authoritarian rule. Galina Gurova (2018), in her study on the implementation of neoliberal quality assurance and evaluation policy in Russian school education, problematizes the dichotomy between neoliberalism and postsocialism, challenging the assumption of simple "convergence" with the "Western" or "global" by adopting these policies (see also Kangas and Salmenniemi 2016). Gurova (2018) analyzes how seemingly discrete political elements—neoliberal policies and Soviet and post-Soviet educational legacies—produce a powerful policy formation despite their differences.

However, often, research epistemologically separates authoritarianism and neoliberalism into separate ontological entities and analyzes them through the ideas of discrete "layers" or "parts" that co-exist despite their differences. This stance also usually involves separating these layered neoliberal-authoritarian developments within state borders, effectively dissecting global neoliberalization into pieces and examining only the part that exists within the territory of an authoritarian state. In this work, I am less interested in producing categorizations of the extent to which the Russian state has been authoritarian or neoliberal. Instead, I am interested in seeing them in relation to each other: how the state and the neoliberal rationalities of modernization have been shaped by reigning global neoliberal capitalism. I argue that the construction and consolidation of authoritarianism in Russia depended on new methods of power and techniques of government that emerged from penetrative global competitive neoliberalism. I call this relation neoliberal authoritarianism.

Neoliberal Authoritarianism

Neoliberal authoritarianism is not a discrete category or a concept with an essentialized definition. Instead of understanding what (global) neoliberalism and state authoritarianism essentially are, I attempt to understand what they become in relation to each other. Neoliberal authoritarianism tells us about both the workings of global neoliberalization and the workings of an authoritarian state, as well as the movement and change that happens in-between.

Neoliberal authoritarianism is about new modalities of authoritarian and neoliberal governance. The goal of the book is to critically address both authoritarianism in Russia in relation to neoliberal globalization and the phenomenon of global neoliberalism itself. What kind of states and

governing practices has reigning global neoliberalization produced over the last decades? What has the Russian state and its authoritarianism become in the context of neoliberal globalization?

Neoliberal authoritarianism is a process by which an authoritarian state deals with reigning neoliberal globalization, that is, how the former has attempted to manage and supervise the state's performance in the global neoliberal competition. Neoliberal authoritarianism also involves the penetration of neoliberal rationalities into the system of the authoritarian state, the leaking of neoliberal governmentalities into the institutional foundations and reproduction of the state. This changes the formation and composition of an authoritarian state: its institutions, policies, and economy. Neoliberal rationalities and an authoritarian state find affinities and produce a new composition of governance marked by control, regulation, and dispossession: neoliberal authoritarianism.

Neoliberal authoritarianism can be understood through two concepts that describe the spatial and relational movement between neoliberalism and authoritarianism: penetration, or osmosis, and staticity. Here, I am inspired by the works of Deleuze and Guattari, especially their idea of a state as an apparatus of capture (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: ch. 13) and geometrical ontologies of totalitarianism (ibid.: ch. 9). I am also partially drawing from Hardt and Negri's analysis of empire and their description of oppressive forces, which might be characterized by both hybridity and stasis (Hardt and Negri 2000).

The process of leaking neoliberal rationalities into the governing structures and logics of an authoritarian state in this book is described by the word penetration. What I find equally beneficial for the visual and spatial conceptualization of this process is the idea of osmosis. Osmosis, in physical chemistry and cell biology, is "the tendency of a fluid, usually water, to pass through a semipermeable membrane into a solution where the solvent concentration is higher, thus equalizing the concentrations of materials on either side of the membrane" (Osmosis n.d.). The osmosis of neoliberal authoritarianism is the process of reigning penetrative neoliberalization which, while looking for new frontiers, penetrated through the usually securitized and semipermeable institutional arrangements of authoritarian states, equalizing neoliberal rationalities and authoritarian governance of both (Fig. 1.1).

This equalization, however, changes the spatial workings of authoritarianism and neoliberalism. While neoliberal globalization has also been described in terms of authoritarianism (and I will return to this issue in more detail below), its authoritarianism is different: it is more fluid and

Fig. 1.1 Neoliberal authoritarianism. Illustration by Natalia Batrakova

expansive, acting in terms of frontiers and horizontal lines of capture. Neoliberal authoritarianism—a state authoritarianism founded on neoliberal rationalities—is about *staticity*. Staticity (as in static but also statist) is a vertical and scalar reverberation of power within the institutional state formation. This authoritarianism is an overcoded apparatus that captures vertically. Staticity is repetition and stasis—for the sake of reproducing a territorially and institutionally coherent state of control (Fig. 1.2). The neoliberal rationalities of efficiency, which usually mean unobstructed hierarchies of decision-making, produce a new composition of an authoritarian state.

Neoliberalism is usually associated with the restructuring of the economy (Akçalı 2020: 97), but it is equally about "the projects of societal and governmental transformation" (Bogaert 2018: 15). Neoliberal rationality has become a global market-oriented modality of government that penetrates different societies and states, drastically changing what those mean. Instead of the social contract of justice, the foundation of societies and states shifts to the market requirements of competition, calculative choice, and efficiency, which often implies unobstructed production through streamlined and uncritical decision-making (Brown 2020: 12). In this book, in order to analyze neoliberal authoritarianism, I understand neoliberalism mostly as a project for a specific type of globalization and as a governing practice that penetrates states through this globalization. I examine the penetration of its global movement into existing governing practices and the emergence of new stabilized hybrid political forms out of this difference: global neoliberalization and state authoritarianism.

This is what interests me in relation to neoliberal authoritarianism: what governance neoliberal reforms propagate once they penetrate the (state) governing practice. Analyzing neoliberal authoritarianism through universities is an important case here. In the contemporary world, universities have largely become an extension of neoliberal economic development and a new frontier of global economic neoliberalization, being captured to serve the imperatives of economic growth, innovation, and competition. At the same time, universities, built into the institutional architecture of the state, especially in Russia, shift our gaze from neoliberal economic governance, which has usually been the subject of analysis in terms of neoliberal-authoritarian linkages, to the question of governance of public institutions and, more generally, the state under global neoliberalization. I will return to the issue of universities and their capture for economic production and competition in Chap. 2.

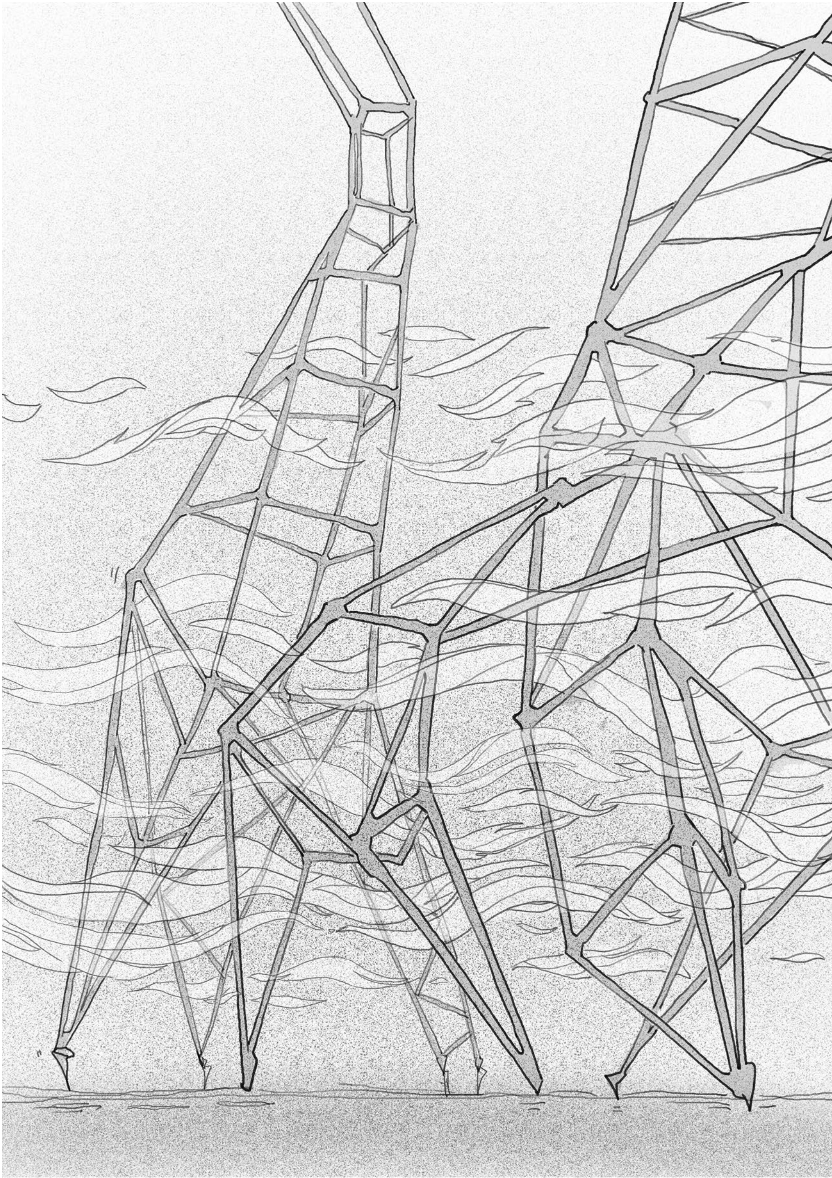

Fig. 1.2 Capturing authoritarianism. Illustration by Natalia Batrakova

Authoritarian Neoliberalism: Reinforcing a Dispossessive Economy and Endangering Undemocratic Political Culture

It is important to acknowledge that there are plenty of works that analyze the co-constructive relationships between neoliberalism and authoritarianism. Despite the widespread belief in "neoliberal freedom" and the separation between the markets and the state, in practice, neoliberal governance often embodies authoritarian rule, underpinned by the erosion of democratic politics and the deployment of coercive state power.

To start with, there are plenty of *empirical* examples of authoritarian-neoliberal linkages: "post-coup developments in Pinochet-era Chile, the attacks on national self-determination embodied in structural adjustment programmes for countries in sub-Saharan Africa, and the co-existence of 'free market' policies and strengthened security apparatuses in countries such as the USA and China" (Bruff 2016: 107). Similarly, Turkey's transition to neoliberalism was arguably enabled by a specific form of authoritarian regime—the military dictatorship (Pinar 2021: 40). Scholarly works from the Middle East and North Africa have shown how neoliberal economic reforms enhance the coercive state practices that discipline, marginalize, and criminalize oppositional forces, limiting the avenues for challenging neoliberal policies (Hinnebusch 2006; Dahi and Munif 2012). Authoritarian neoliberalism also extends its grip to the military: Ahmed (2023) argues that the military in Pakistan extended its market-led reforms in collaboration with local and foreign capitalist classes.

When it comes to *theoretical* work, the co-constructive relationships between neoliberalism and authoritarianism have usually been explained in two prominent ways. First, it has been formulated in terms of reinforcing a neoliberal (often dispossessive) economy in an authoritarian way—either within its own state or in the dependent states of the capitalist peripheries through neoliberal globalization. Here, authoritarianism has been emerging as a way to resolve the crisis of capitalism and secure accumulation regimes. Another strand of authoritarian neoliberalism literature argues that neoliberalism propagates an authoritarian/undemocratic political culture through privatization, individualization, deregulation, and the overall economization of political life. The relationships between neoliberalism and authoritarianism that I describe in this book are somewhat different, but I find it important to draw from other similar discussions: in my view, these are streams of the same conversation.

First, let us take a closer look at how the current literature explains the rise of authoritarianism in relation to the securitization of capitalist accumulation regimes. In this line of thought, the expansion and strengthening of neoliberal economic governance have always relied on authoritarianism, which emerges in the efforts to design and reinforce the dispossessive neoliberal economy. According to this Marxist critique, authoritarianism is immanent to the neoliberalization process because the utopian neoliberal project can only be sustained through authoritarianism (Harvey 2005: 81). From the beginning, neoliberalism was about engineering and managing the markets it wants, not giving them free rein (ibid.). Neoliberalism here is understood as an economic and political formation that reinforces itself through administrative and legal mechanisms and limits spaces of resistance. Capital imposes discipline, which often leads to intrusive authoritarianism (van der Pijl 2018: 36). The most recent rise of authoritarianism as a governing tendency has emerged to cope with the 2008–2009 global neoliberal crisis.

Authoritarian neoliberalism here is closely connected to the reproduction of economic inequalities and the suppression of class conflict (Bruff and Tansel 2019; van der Pijl 2018: 16). The oligarchic pursuit of commercial-financial profit relies on authoritarianism to paralyze public debate (van der Pijl 2018: 35) and repress the rights and organizations of the working classes (Pinar 2021: 35). In this light, Bogaert (2018), for example, analyzed the neoliberal urban projects in Morocco as a class project of authoritarian transformation. Similarly, authoritarian neoliberalism, which the Eurozone applied to Greece, became a process of class formation and a tool to discipline not just the southern Eurozone but European society as a whole (van der Pijl 2018).

In this book, putting aside the claims that authoritarianism is immanent to the neoliberalization process and capital accumulation regimes, I am interested in what happens when the authoritarianism inherent to neoliberalism couples with an already existing authoritarianism of a state. Universities, which are a relatively new frontier of neoliberal expansion under knowledge economies, help us analyze not only (authoritarian) economic management but also public governance, the intrusion of corporate and state interests in it, and the entanglements between global neoliberalization and state authoritarianism.

Analyzing the co-constructive workings of neoliberalism together with a strong state, as I do in this book, is not something new, despite the widespread belief that neoliberalism is the opposite of state intervention. In the authoritarian neoliberalism literature, which analyzes regimes of capital accumulation, it has been shown how neoliberalism does not solely rely on

authoritarianism but on a capitalist-authoritarian *state* in order to protect corporate interests and secure capital accumulation (Harvey 2005: chapter 3; van der Pijl 2018). The state is essential for the imposition of neoliberal policies, especially in their today's globalized forms (Bruff 2016; Pinar 2021: 25; Akçalı 2020: 99; Bogaert 2018). This argument was initially covered in the New Left Review in 1984 (Jessop et al. 1984), and it is often ignored by liberal accounts that view state intervention as conflicting with neoliberalism. Actually existing neoliberalisms (and not what has been thought of in neoliberal theory) have involved coercive and disciplinary forms of state intervention (through military, defense, police, and legal structures) in order to impose market rule upon all aspects of social life, to secure private property rights, and to guarantee—by force if need be—the proper functioning of markets (Brenner and Theodore 2002: 352; Harvey 2005: 2; Berberoglu 2021). If anything, neoliberalism aims to liquidate a welfare state, not a state itself, especially not an authoritarian one.

Besides enforcing neoliberal policies, a neoliberal state also works to suppress dissent against corporate power, prevent the rise of social solidarity and collectivity, and impose strict limits on democratic governance and representation.[1] As Harvey notes, "Internally, the neoliberal state is necessarily hostile to all forms of social solidarity that put restraints on capital accumulation" (Harvey 2005: 75). Furthermore, a neoliberal state may resort to coercive legislation and policing tactics, such as anti-picketing rules, to disperse or repress collective opposition to corporate power. Surveillance and policing multiply, with incarceration becoming a key strategy to manage marginalized populations. The state's coercive arm is thus augmented to protect corporate interests (Harvey 2005: 77) and "discipline, marginalize, and criminalize oppositional forces and judicial and administrative state apparatuses" (Akçalı 2020: 101–102). This changes what a state means: by abandoning its social investments in public welfare, the state becomes progressively reduced to its repressive functions to secure corporate power and the rule of capital and to suppress conflictual social relations arising from those capital accumulation regimes (Yalman 2021: 17; Kutun 2021: 49–50; Pinar 2021: 35).

The rise of authoritarianism and the repressive workings of a state have been specifically observed in relation to the global nature of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism as a global phenomenon has hardly gone smoothly or beneficially for everyone. In this book, it is sufficient to remind that global

[1] Moreover, neoliberalism has always been suspicious of democracy as governance by majority rule. Instead, it advocates for governance by experts and elites, with key institutions insulated from public pressure (Harvey 2005: 69).

neoliberal policies, often exercised and reinforced in an authoritarian manner (Hadiz 2006), by the financial interests of international institutions (e.g., the World Bank, the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund) and states, have often been understood as a continuation of colonial policies (Bogaert 2018: 14; Fouskas 2018). These policies have been used to pursue aggressive free-trade agreements, which often come with conditions that enforce capitalist values for granting loans, further entrenching economic inequalities (Giroux 2004; Bandarage 2023). This economic imperialism is often disguised under the civilizational ideas of progress and development (Giroux 2004: xix). Similar observations have been made about the post-Soviet economic condition: rather than explaining contemporary dependencies of the post-Soviet states on Russia solely as a continuation of "Soviet colonization," we need to understand how those dependencies are prompted by the introduction of these states into the global capitalist system (Kluczewska 2024).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, new frontiers for capital accumulation were opened within the global neoliberal economic architecture (van der Pijl 2018: 24). This led to the peripheralization of the post-Soviet states and their economies (Nesvetailova 2005) and, eventually, a desire to catch up or become integrated into neoliberal modernization. As I show in the ensuing chapters, the Russian state attempted to actively intervene in managing this international competition to align with the prerogatives of neoliberal modernization and return to the cradle of "civilized nations." The Russian state has often critiqued Western economic and political imperialism; however, unlike in socialist times, it can hardly propose anything new (cf. Ishchenko 2024) and is itself built on neoliberal governance characterized by austerity, competitiveness, and dispossession. Whether it is China, Hungary, or Russia, which claims to rise authoritarianism in their fight against neoliberal culture, we should understand that the political cultures and institutional arrangements of these states have long been penetrated by neoliberal rationalities of control, dispossession, and competition (cf. Schwenck 2024: 7). The goal is often not to build something new but to secure their own version of neoliberal authoritarianism.

The post-Soviet situation in this regard is not unique but reminiscent of various accounts of how the reigning and coercive neoliberal architecture often influenced the behaviors of states, economies, and societies, which tried to adapt, catch up, securitize against, or benefit from this global situation. In the era of neoliberal capitalism, it is not just companies

and labor markets that had to adapt swiftly to market changes, but also states and their citizens needed to do so to stay competitive (Schwenck 2024: 7). This explains the multiplicity of hybrid political and economic forms of neoliberal governmentality across the globe: different states and economies were doing their best to integrate into this competitive global system (Akçalı et al. 2015). "Countries as different as communist Vietnam, Islamic Malaysia, paternalistic-authoritarian Singapore, or market socialist China" (ibid.: 7)—or authoritarian postsocialist Russia—all applied different state forms to become successful entities in neoliberal globalization. The global competition often led to the rise of nationalism: since a state is expected to behave as a competitive entity in global politics (Fougner 2006), nationalism is required to solidify its efforts (Harvey 2005: 79). Neoliberal modernization often started to mean *national* modernization (Kangas 2013; Mäkinen 2021; Akçalı 2020: 100; Akçalı and Korkut 2015: 80).

When it comes to theoretical work about authoritarianism in relation to penetrative global neoliberalization, it has been understood in two ways. First, the globalization of capitalism necessitates authoritarian regimes to maintain social order and extract economic surplus from countries incorporated into the global capitalist system (Canterbury 2019). Excessive marketization, unrepayable foreign debts, and the imposition of austerity measures generate social counter-reactions, and to suppress these reactions, authoritarian politics often rise (Bond 2019). Simultaneously, the penetrative, coercive, and competitive nature of global neoliberalism leads to the rise of securitization. Global hegemony aspires to national security, leading to a culture of fear and the securitization of economic policies (Giroux 2004: 3). I believe that these two processes, although seemingly exclusive, actually portray the nature of neoliberal authoritarianism, which aimed at both succeeding in and securitizing from global neoliberalization.

These previous discussions on authoritarian neoliberalism, however, unfold only a part of the story about penetrative and dispossessive neoliberalization. Here, authoritarianism is reduced to the workings of dispossessive economies and the suppression of class struggle. The literature on authoritarian neoliberalism, stemming from Marxist critique, often focuses on what neoliberalism or authoritarianism essentially are (i.e., their immanence). In contrast, I aspire to examine how these forms of governance become what they are through processes of change, movement, and

transformation. This perspective does not necessarily contradict the existing literature but offers a different angle, emphasizing the dynamic processes of becoming rather than static states of being.

There are other reasons for state authoritarianisms, even when coupled with penetrative neoliberalization; those reasons are not exhausted by the securitization of markets (cf. Bello 2021: 250). The Russian case demonstrates that the state, through neoliberal imposition, serves itself rather than independent corporate interests. Already in 2005, David Harvey observed that neoliberalization in authoritarian states like China and Singapore is converging with the increasing authoritarianism in neoliberal states such as the US and Britain (Harvey 2005: 81). The boundary between state and corporate power has become increasingly porous (Harvey 2005: 77–78). Surely, authoritarianism in Russia has also secured capital for oligarchic classes (Matveev 2021). However, the Russian state, penetrated by neoliberal rationalities of governance, suppresses dissent not only for corporate interests but also for the ideological, geopolitical, political, and socio-economic reproduction of the state and the survival of its political apparatus.

Authoritarianism described in relation to capital accumulation and state authoritarianism penetrated by neoliberal rationalities, as I describe in this book, are different primarily in the workings of their spatial capture. In this book, I understand authoritarianism in terms of "staticity" when the role of the corporation is actually played by the state. Corporate authoritarianism of capital accumulation is about expansion, horizontal penetration, and frontiering in search of new areas of accumulation. Neoliberal authoritarianism of staticity penetrates vertically: this is about a scalar resonation of power within the overcoded apparatus of the state, which in the Russian case has been referred to as a vertical of power. Staticity is repetition, reproduction, status quo, stasis. The state, through neoliberal authoritarianism, reproduces its institutional and territorial coherence.

Some scholars have, however, already attempted to theorize the relations between authoritarianism and neoliberalism not only in the domain of the economy but also in public welfare. These discussions are important to acknowledge in the context of this book, which deals with questions of state governance. In particular, political theorists and cultural critics such as Wendy Brown (2015, 2019, 2020) and Henry Giroux (2004, 2009), analyzing political developments in the US, have linked the rise of undemocratic and authoritarian political culture to the processes of privatization, dispossession, and deregulation that neoliberalism generates in public life. Neoliberal rationality destroys social solidarity and produces authoritarian subjectivities that demand competition, performance, and flexibility. This

results in precarization, hyper-exploitation, and a state of permanent individual and collective anxiety.

This scholarship reveals a "faceless" authoritarianism that is not associated with specific dictators but with the erosion of political culture by neoliberalism. This form of authoritarianism is characterized by the subordination of democracy to market rule, where corporate decisions are freed from territorial and social constraints. Both Giroux and Brown emphasize that neoliberalism is not a neutral economic discourse but an ideology that subordinates democratic politics to market imperatives.

Henry Giroux contends that neoliberalism depoliticizes political culture by organizing collective life around privatization, deregulation, and commercialization. This depoliticization erodes democratic political culture, transforming all problems into private rather than social issues. Giroux also points out that neoliberalism undermines vital democratic institutions and public spaces, aligning the state with corporate power, transnational corporations, and militarization. He highlights that neoliberalism subordinates democratic politics to market laws, expanding its reach to all aspects of social life. This transformation is evident in the suspension of civil liberties, the incarceration of marginalized populations, and the provision of security forces to protect capital interests. Neoliberalism is both a dispossessive economic policy and an undemocratic political culture—and it should be challenged on both fronts.

Wendy Brown similarly argues that neoliberalism, as a politico-economic ideology and governing rationality, assaults the principles, practices, cultures, subjects, and institutions of democracy through the logic of extractivism and profit-seeking (Brown 2015: 9–10). Brown's academic project is rooted in the analysis of antidemocratic movements in Europe and North America: she connects the workings of capitalism and neoliberalism, which penetrate and infect all spheres of social life, with "the Christian nationalist ambition to (re)conquer the West" (Brown 2019: 8). Brown furthermore introduces the concept of "authoritarian freedom" by arguing that neoliberalism promotes freedom for a few while excluding the many, attacking social justice as totalitarian and legitimating authoritarian political power through conservative Christian annexations of secular public and economic life. Similarly to Brown, Akçalı (2020: 101) argues that "tyranny is inherent in the utopian ideal of freedom, just as here, authoritarianism is in neoliberalism."

This line of critique extends beyond the Global North. Springer (2010), in their acute analysis of neoliberalism and authoritarianism in Cambodia, argues that neoliberalization suffocates public spaces necessary for

democratization to blossom. Intense marketization prevents the consolidation of democracy; therefore, the authoritarian governance of the elites prevails. Violence is used to securitize the freedom of the market, ostensibly to promote order and stability. In the book, Springer analyzes the spatial politics of neoliberalism and how the neoliberal market order of security takes over the public space necessary for democratization.

In this strand of research, undemocratic and authoritarian political culture is endangered by the privatization and deregulation of the public sphere, which is not always the case in Russia and other postsocialist states of the Global East. The strong state there seems omnipresent. However, authoritarian-neoliberal control is present across authoritarian states, albeit in a different form. Political culture penetrated by the ideas of individualism, competition, and entrepreneurship undermines collective struggles and actions, and streamlines obedience to state authority (Schwenck 2024).

These observations make the claims that neoliberal policies would have essentially led to democratization and good governance even more ironic. These claims come from the neoliberal canon, under which democracy is linked to economic liberalization, and "good governance" is only possible if the state adheres to free-market principles (Springer 2010: 4). This is related to the liberal bias of democratization and authoritarianism studies, which I discuss next.

The Liberal Bias of Authoritarianism Studies

Many mainstream theoretical approaches to authoritarianism have been held captive by a liberal bias. These mainstream approaches hardly engage seriously with questions of how authoritarianism relates to neoliberal globalization and international political economy. As Bogaert argues (2018: 35), studies on authoritarian regimes, such as those on transition, authoritarian persistence/survival, and democratic backsliding, "are blinded by the established truths of liberal democracy and liberal ideology." Needless to say, this blindness extends to any regressive social, economic, and political implications of neoliberal free-market policies and neoliberal globalization.

Studies on authoritarianism are dominated by comparative political science on the one hand, and political psychology on the other (Glasius 2018: 516). While working on this research, I often noticed how critical scholarship on capitalism, neoliberalism, and other forms of globalized oppression (patriarchy, colonialism, and racism) flourishes, providing new

forms of thinking and interrelating them, while the literature on authoritarianism remains mostly untouched by these discussions. While the critical approach to authoritarian neoliberalism makes an effort to engage with mainstream understandings of authoritarianism, this engagement is rarely reciprocated. Even after more than 30 years, the legacies of the Cold War seem to be still present: studies on authoritarianism are methodologically trapped within specific territories, the East. Suffice it to say, even common sense suggests that authoritarian practices cannot be possibly captured by specific territories in the world, but such a view persists and makes us blind to other workings of authoritarianism.

Studies on authoritarianism tend to focus too heavily on specific dictators and their supporting elites, rather than examining the broader political culture and institutional arrangements that sustain authoritarianism (cf. Bogaert 2018: 37). The omnipresent face of leaders like Putin, Modi, Trump, Erdogan, and others is surely affective and breeds on our feelings of fear and excitement, but their personalities can only explain part of the story. The projection of authoritarianism onto leaders often leads to the mistaken belief that removing a single leader from the authoritarian states of the East would resolve the issue of authoritarianism, allowing society to align with Western ideals of global neoliberal globalization (van der Pijl 2018: 32). This personification of authoritarianism overlooks the complex spatial and compositional dynamics of authoritarian power.

Other studies on authoritarianism particularly single out the authoritarian behavior of specific individuals. Political psychology is also preoccupied with studying the psychological profiles of authoritarian personalities who desire and establish order and hierarchy. These strands of research usually explain voting behavior with such traits and their support for authoritarian leaders (Glasius 2018: 516).

There also exists another strand of research that does look into wider political authoritarian systems. These often focus on electoral autocracies and democratic backsliding by analyzing domestic political and electoral institutions. An authoritarian political system in this strand of research is usually equated with a specific state and is reduced to its rigged elections, controlled court system, censored media, and suppressed civil society, often enforced with the brutal force of police. In liberal political science, these institutions are usually rendered properly "political" and differentiate democratic regimes from authoritarian ones. Understanding authoritarianism contained within properly "political" institutions also creates another theoretical problem, as it usually overlooks the issues of

governance, resource distribution, and workers' rights as essential to authoritarian rule (cf. Pinar 2021: 43). This is largely a story about Russia: as I showed at the very beginning of this chapter, Russian authoritarianism is usually explained through the failure of these domestic political institutions.

Those dominant understandings of what counts as (state) authoritarianism, often described in a simplified vocabulary of a "regime," frequently clash with real political developments. For example, Turkey's move toward authoritarianism in the 2010s defies some fundamental assumptions of liberal democratization theories, which associate democratic collapse with weak party systems, weak civic attitudes, or economic failures—none of which defined Turkey in the mid-2010s (Bedirhanoğlu 2021: 69). In examining authoritarian uprisings in regions like Turkey and the Arab world, scholars have tried to move beyond simplistic liberal-illiberal dichotomies. Concepts such as "competitive" or "electoral" authoritarianism focus on internal political institutions but often ignore the broader transnational and neoliberal workings of power. Terms like "New Sultan," "despotic regime," and "competitive authoritarianism" are used to describe regimes in Turkey, but similar terms are also applied to Russia, such as "authoritarian modernization." This approach, which dominates political science, tends to explain authoritarianism through the lens of "the regime," without adequately considering globalization, global politico-economic forces, or international political economy.

The liberal bias of these studies sets epistemologically violent limitations: by understanding "authoritarian regime" in very narrow, essentially liberal terms, they limit other ontoepistemological and theoretical work on how authoritarianism can be understood and how it comes to be. These perspectives overlook other forms of governance (which are often considered "apolitical") within the state as well as those that trespass state borders. Surely, state authoritarianism, as well as other authoritarian practices, is reproduced through different institutional and everyday arrangements beyond the Kremlin, and we need to understand how those come to be and work.

Another methodological—and ultimately political—problem with these approaches is that they focus on domestic political systems, territorially trapping "authoritarianism" within state borders. This is similar to the old methodological nationalism: "the assumption that the nation/state/society is the natural social and political form of the modern world" (Wimmer and Schiller 2002: 301; see also McCann and Ward 2013; Daxecker et al. 2020). The world's division into nation-states has been taken for granted and has greatly influenced analytical tools in the social

sciences. Conducting research within "national containers" reinforces unequal power relations sustained by the nation-state system (Shahjahan and Kezar 2013: 21). The state, as an institutional apparatus of power, surely plays a crucial role in strengthening authoritarianism, but comparative political perspectives often miss how the state is positioned within the global neoliberal context and the specific governmental practices that form state authoritarianism. Understanding authoritarianism in countries like Russia requires looking beyond the Kremlin and its political institutions and including them into global neoliberal forms of governance, such as ideologies of efficiency, austerity, managerialism, and nationalistic competitiveness.

The tendency to explain authoritarianism within domestic political regimes or even through "culture" is inherently essentialist and racist (Springer 2010: 153). These views, contaminating political struggle in different parts of the world, are also overly present in discussions about Russia, implying that Russia is doomed to authoritarianism. This pseudo-argumentation usually goes along the lines that people in Russia are "genetically" authoritarian, having lived for many centuries under strong leaders. Such essentialist and racist views do not advance our understanding of contemporary political developments, which are largely globalized and neoliberalized, and are regressive for our political struggle.

A similar territorially trapped methodological gaze is seen when studying capitalist transformations in what are classically understood as authoritarian states. Previous debates on authoritarianism and capitalism have often centered around the concept of "crony capitalism" (Aslund 2019)—as if one form of capitalism ends and another begins once you cross the territorial borders of states (Bogaert 2018: 13). Similarly, in Russian studies, the workings of neoliberalization have sometimes been described as "authoritarian modernization." These approaches imply that properly functioning capitalism and neoliberalism exist somewhere else, but in authoritarian states, they take ugly and impure forms. This approach suggests a disconnect between capitalism in so-called authoritarian regimes and capitalism in so-called democratic systems. In reality, global capitalism and neoliberalism create a deeply relational geography (Bogaert 2018: 13) that these approaches neglect. This is not to say that capitalism is homogenous; not at all. But the multiplicity of capitalisms cannot be simply explained by their existence in different states. The multiplicity of capitalisms is a transnational quantum, not an accumulative sum of territorially divided capitalisms.

When methodologically trapped within state borders, authoritarianisms (and democracies) create superficially neat global geographies—democratic West and authoritarian East. “Orientalizing” authoritarianism underpins a mainstream moral geography of today, “wherein the West is spatialized as a noble front against authoritarian political configurations, which are portrayed as essentially foreign and backward” (Koch 2022: 4). I need to acknowledge, though, that recent years have shown the rise of studies on “authoritarian learning.” This research on authoritarianism does allow some methodological movement of authoritarian practices and ideas, but it is still mostly framed in terms of learning between dictators and their territorially trapped regimes.

Thinking of authoritarianism and democracy as moral categories across geopolitical blocs becomes even more dangerous today, when these mental and moral geographies are increasingly militarized. For example, there is a widespread view that the war in Ukraine is a war between barbaric (Eastern) authoritarianism and noble (Western) democracy. barbaric (Eastern) authoritarianism and noble (Western) democracy. Methodological nationalism has turned into analytical militarism. The Russian state, of course, is accountable for all the war atrocities in Ukraine. However, our political thinking for liberation should be able to detect authoritarianisms in all its forms across spatial boundaries. It is important to understand political and economic processes and the relations of power and oppression beyond the national categories imposed on us by the current international system. In the context of this research, for example, it meant moving the analysis beyond the geopolitical Russia (East)/West binary, which increasingly drives today’s international politics.

The liberal bias is also visible when understanding what neoliberalism is and to whom it belongs. (Neo)liberalism is perceived positively and as value-neutral, and these moral origins of common-sense neoliberalism are usually associated with the West. For example, in the case of Turkey, some scholars argued that Turkey’s shift from democracy to authoritarianism is often linked to the rise and fall of EU influence over domestic politics, for example, through the policies of conditionality (Gehring 2021: 103). Similarly, during my research, I often heard questions: “But then what happened with neoliberal policies in Russia after the gradual disintegration with the EU?”, assuming that neoliberalism cannot possibly exist without the EU (neoliberal policies were also taken quite positively in these statements). Instead, as I show in this book, the Russian state implemented many neoliberal reforms in its attempts to catch up with neoliberal

modernization, and these reforms dissolved and stayed within the institutional frameworks of Russia, which goes beyond direct cooperation with, for example, the EU.

Decoupling from methodological liberalism would also allow us to destabilize the binary between democracy and authoritarianism, recognizing that there are different types of democracies and authoritarianisms. The liberal bias and Cold War legacies have led to the perception that democracy is synonymous with liberal democracy, while authoritarianism is seen as an Eastern state system defined by the absence of liberal democracy. Our understanding of democracy solely as liberal democracy is further reinforced by various institutional rankings, such as those of Freedom House. The contemporary usage of "authoritarianism" often labels anything deviating from the ideal type of liberal democracy, typically reserved for regimes in conflict with Western powers. Instead, authoritarian as well as democratic practices are varied and hardly contained by state borders.

Liberal bias fully informed the paradigm of transitology. Transitology, which emerged from the experiences of Latin America and Eastern Europe, posits an almost hegemonic belief in a linear transition from authoritarianism to liberal democracy, contingent on structural preconditions, rational choices of ruling elites, and the establishment of a free market. This approach, having dominated both scholarly and political work in the post-Soviet space, assumed that political trajectories worldwide would eventually mirror those of Western modernity (Morozov 2013). Transitology fails to account for the complex, uneven developments in the global capitalist economy and its peripheries (Nesvetailova 2005). This "evangelical belief" (Giroux 2004: xv) in free-market neoliberalization produced many disastrous effects, and as this book shows, strengthened authoritarianism, eroded labor rights, and contributed to the rise of nationalism. The persistence of the belief in transitology is astonishing to this day, despite the abundance of research showing the devastating effects of free-market policies on social and economic welfare and democracy, as I showed above.

Studies on the Russian political system, stemming mostly from the same liberal bias of comparative political science, have largely overlooked the impact of neoliberal globalization on state authoritarianism and the rise of authoritarian practices overall. Worth (2005) and Nesvetailova (2005), already 20 years ago, challenged the ideas of transitology by emphasizing the instability and incoherence of neoliberal hegemony. This critique highlighted the brutal implementation of market economies in post-communist states, proclaiming them as "turbo-capitalist" (Gržinić

et al. 2020: 17). Rather than facilitating a smooth transition to democracy and marketization, these processes led to neoliberal autocracy in Russia (Kagarlitsky 2002). While the devastating effects of free-market policies on labor regimes and economic inequalities have been observed, this book attempts to contribute to these discussions by analyzing the effects neoliberalization produced on the governance of the state: something that I refer to in this book as neoliberal authoritarianism.

Authoritarianism as a Governing Practice of Coercion

In this book, I aim to bridge the literature on neoliberalism and authoritarianism further, showing how global neoliberalization informs our understanding of authoritarianism, particularly in Russia. This involves examining the practices and compositions of control, the role of the state, and its relation to global neoliberalization, moving beyond methodological nationalism and methodological liberalism. By understanding authoritarianism as a practice that can reverberate to the scale of a state but is essentially found across state borders, I closely examine various everyday institutional arrangements and regulations to dissect the workings of the state and different practices of control and dispossession. Authoritarianism is not confined to an identifiable space but traverses political, economic, and social relations and structures globally and within states and societies. This understanding necessitates a critical revision of the spatial categories used to analyze authoritarian transformations worldwide. By examining how neoliberal reforms travel and materialize at different scales, we can better understand the complex dynamics of authoritarianism beyond the regime level, encompassing various institutions and elites. My approach differs by incorporating global and international contexts and examining institutional arrangements within universities and their governance, which are usually outside mainstream political science research. This can reveal other workings of authoritarian governance not confined to traditional political institutions.

Despite the fact that in this book I mostly talk about state authoritarianism, my understanding of authoritarianism, paradoxically, lies beyond the category of a state. The literature on authoritarianism, dominated by comparative political science, has become territorially bounded to specific states and their (non-liberal) institutional architectures, paralyzing our possibilities for detecting authoritarianism in its different forms and across

temporal-spatial contexts. While analyzing what authoritarianism means on the scale of a state, I want to start by understanding authoritarianism first and foremost as a mode of governance actualized through imposed hierarchies and coercion in institutional arrangements.

Decoupling authoritarianism from its liberal bias and state-centered understanding, we can see that there are many more affinities between so-called authoritarian regimes and liberal democracies—and more generally, between the East and the West (cf. Kangas and Salmenniemi 2016; Müller 2019). Liberal values can co-exist with authoritarian practices. In capitalist democracies, authoritarian elements are crucial for maintaining, reinforcing, and expanding the system. As previously discussed, neoliberal capital accumulation processes are often authoritarian. This is less about state-led authoritarian governance (though the state is usually involved) and more about a broader authoritarian regime of capital accumulation. Authoritarian practices can exist within democratic regimes, demonstrating that democratic regimes do not always equate to democratic practices, just as authoritarian regimes do not always equate to authoritarian practices. While we often focus on the overt displays of force by authoritarian populists, liberal democratic regimes—whether led by liberals, conservatives, or social democrats—also employ authoritarian practices. These regimes increasingly rely on control and discipline rather than building consent or offering material concessions to the governed. Authoritarian populists can be neoliberal-statist, while authoritarian (neo-)liberals use reactionary rhetoric against migrants, unions, and welfare recipients (International Research Group on Authoritarianism and Counter-Strategies 2022). This book seeks to move beyond the binary between an authoritarian state and a liberal democracy—a binary that has shaped our thinking, research practices, and political actions.

The search for a precise definition of authoritarianism is inherently challenging, as it is a concept that evolves out of reality and takes on different forms over time (Koch 2022: 3)—similar to neoliberalism, as I discuss below. Instead of seeking an essential definition, it is more productive to understand authoritarianism as a set of governmental practices that emphasize control, discipline, and univocal authority (Glasius 2018; Koch 2022: 2). It involves various methods of subverting democratic demands through force, coercion, or social engineering (Azar 2015). Authoritarianism is not limited to the structure of states but can be seen in any context where power is monopolized and dissent is suppressed (Koch 2022). Rather than essentializing authoritarianism into specific (state)

territories, it is more beneficial to notice, analyze, and dissect what might constitute different authoritarian practices, so we can recognize them in other settings, especially in today's world where authoritarianism is on the rise globally.

Authoritarian governance does not only mean the violent destruction of dissent and the exercise of brute coercive force (Adaman and Akbulut 2021). Performed and open violent coercion is usually easier to observe. In this book, I am interested in more subtle arrangements: how authoritarianism, coupled with neoliberal rationalities, has contaminated and shaped the institutional frameworks and governance within a state to supervise, control, classify, set benchmarks, and, finally, limit the possibilities to do otherwise. Authoritarianism is about the reconfiguring of state and institutional power in an attempt to impose certain policies and institutional practices (Bruff 2014: 115). It makes people and institutions comply with the imperatives of political and economic hierarchies through enforced institutional and legal arrangements.

When we start seeing state authoritarianism in more than state-centered (and liberal) terms, it implies that there is no "authoritarian state" as an essential category; rather, an authoritarian state gets performed, actualized, and reinforced by specific practices and institutional arrangements. When the practice reverberates to the scale of the state through institutional arrangements and exercises its unobstructed reproduction, it marks an authoritarian state.

Global Situation and Its Ontoepistemological Emergence: "Actually Existing" Neoliberalisms

In order to finalize my discussion on the different elements constituting neoliberal authoritarianism, I must also further take up how I understand neoliberalism as a global situation that has been emerging and moving around: its spatialities, mobilities, and, consequently, the ontoepistemologies arising from the latter.

Neoliberalism has become a global situation: there are rarely places on this globe that are untouched by the reigning neoliberalization. One way to analyze this global situation has been through understanding neoliberalism as a "global" theory and practice that is flexible to "local adaptation and interpretation" (Ban 2016: 3). Here lies one crucial ontoepistemological problem. Even when paying attention to the "hybridity" and "mosaic" of neoliberalism, such research avenues still seem to aim to identify what "neoliberalism" essentially is. For example, Cornel Ban in *Ruling*

Ideas: How Global Neoliberalism Goes Local asks, "Do [specific regions] live under a neoliberal policy regime or a non-liberal one?" and "How do we know that the mosaic is still neoliberal?" (Ban 2016: 8–9). Even when acknowledging that neoliberalism is characterized by hybridity, such epistemological stances seem to imply that something "purely neoliberal" exists, and scholars should aim at formulating its conceptual boundaries. Such approaches have been criticized. Doerthe Rosenow (2009: 508), for example, claims that determining neoliberalism's global structure "can only fail […] because it steamrolls a multiplicity of different neoliberal practices" into a "singular hegemonic project."

Overgeneralized definitions of neoliberalism might fall into the trap of producing the definition from an epistemologically more powerful stance. Theorization of neoliberalism has been previously characterized by the "coloniality of knowledge": the idea of neoliberalism originating in the First World led us to believe that some original neoliberalism exists, and any deviations from it are just local (usually, non-Western) versions (Kangas and Salmenniemi 2016; Bockman 2007, 2011; Fabry 2019; Bruff and Tansel 2019; see also Stone 1999; Dobbin et al. 2007; Evans 2009; Marsh and Sharman 2009, on the "linearity" of the policy transfer literatures). The coloniality of the politico-economic world and international system leads to the coloniality of knowledge because we copy the same logics into our analytical work. Theorizing "neoliberalism" as a theory or a set of practices that travels around the globe receiving "local color" presupposes the idea of "pure" neoliberalism existing somewhere. Ironically, if we look closely enough, "pure" neoliberalism is itself characterized by "local color," usually by its manifestations in liberal democracies of the Global North. For example, academic discussions around the neoliberalization of universities led to the emergence of a new discipline—Critical University Studies (Morrish 2018). However, the discipline has its roots in developments in the UK (specifically, the Universities Superannuation Scheme pensions strikes of spring 2018), despite the fact that neoliberal reforms have been introduced much earlier elsewhere, including in Russian universities since the 1990s. The complex connections of neoliberal reforms to other elements of economic and political power (not least of the authoritarian state) beyond the Global North contest the global and seemingly universal conceptualization of neoliberalization. Following these discussions, I seek to destabilize monolithic understandings of neoliberalism, which are usually rooted in an epistemology from the Global North and often fail to engage with the legacies of

state authoritarianisms. I want to understand authoritarianism in its production of neoliberal governance.

The globality of neoliberalism does not make it universal. Neoliberalism "cannot just be reduced to some pure theoretical abstraction disconnected from locality" or "some kind of ideal type, one of what neoliberalism is supposed to represent or what a neoliberal state is supposed to look like" (Bogaert 2018: 12–13). Instead, neoliberalization is always articulated in specific situations.

Here, I rely on previous discussions on the globality of neoliberalism as an assemblage. What Stephen Collier and Aihwa Ong (2005: 11) refer to as "global" is a quality and capacity for movement across distinct social and cultural situations and "assimilate themselves to new environments": for decontextualization and recontextualization in new places. "Global forms," such as the processes of neoliberalization, are always "articulated in specific situations" and "territorialized" in assemblages (Collier and Ong 2005: 4). The "global," thus, does not explain everything that happens in different places at the same time; rather, it refers to the social and political projects that "grow from spatially far-flung [...] interconnections" (Tsing 2005: i). The neoliberal project is constantly reinvented due to contradictions and conflicts along the way; this has been the continuous process of change in global neoliberalism (Bogaert 2018: 7). There is no distinction between global neoliberalism and its local variations; global neoliberalism *is* the multiplicity of its local variations (Bogaert 2018: 246).

Neoliberalization arises from encounters and interactions and reappears in new places (e.g., the Russian state and, more specifically, Russian universities), changing "the event" of neoliberalization (cf. Tsing 2005: xi). Such changes within the composition are actualized through differences in social, political, and economic contexts where such components travel and attach themselves to a new formation. "Global" policy can unexpectedly change in transit in numerous ways; thus, globalized policies are very fragile and unstable (Prince 2016: 336). The attachment of neoliberal policies to a new set of localized components (e.g., state legislation, institutionalized governance, funding models, etc.) is a process that leads to peculiarities and specificities of global connections. The globalized connections do not erase the differences; rather, they highlight the multiplicity of territorialized compositions and their surprising encounters along the way (Tsing 2005: i).

I consider global neoliberalization not as a set of "fully formed, off-the-shelf policies" that traveled to the Russian state (cf. Peck and Theodore 2001: 449), but as emerging out of a new composition that "claim[s] a

territory" (Wise 2005: 77) and penetrates already existing governing practices. Drawing from the Deleuzian understanding of capitalism, neoliberalism is "a vast enterprise" that simultaneously decodes and recodes itself (Smith 2016: 279). In their edited volume *Assembling Neoliberalism*, Higgins and Larner call on readers to avoid "monolithic understandings of neoliberal rule" and to pay attention to "actually existing neoliberalism" and forms of "experimentation, adaptation, and mutation through which neoliberalism is enacted and rendered workable across different spaces" (Higgins and Larner 2017: 2). In every time and place, neoliberalism is specific (cf. Rowe et al. 2019). My focus is on these "specific situations" (Tsing 2005: 1), or ethnographic encounters of global penetrative neoliberalization and an authoritarian state (cf. Gorur et al. 2019: 5).

David Harvey (2005: 87) has specifically noted how neoliberalization differs in relation to the type of state it penetrates. There is no universal type of neoliberal state, or what a state can universally mean under global neoliberalization. The relationships between different state forms and global neoliberalization have varied extensively—be it the postsocialist states, the developmental states of Asia, or the social democratic states of Europe, and they all "have taken the neoliberal turn only partially" (ibid.). In this book, I am interested in the evolving form of the Russian state and its practices of governance under global neoliberalization.

Thus, my take on neoliberalism is that it ceased to be a coherent ideology, theory, and practice a long time ago (cf. Dean 2019) (or, as Harvey argued (2005), it had never been coherent in the first place). It is strange to assume that policies and rationalities of such a scale as neoliberalism would stay coherent and universal across different types of states, spheres of life, or governing practices. As Peck et al. (2009) argued, since its inception in the 1970s, neoliberalism has never manifested in a single, uniform way. However, this has been precisely the most common critique toward my analysis from some researchers of post-Soviet and specifically Russian politics. They claimed that there is nothing "neoliberal" about governance in Russia because the people who design those policies (Putin and the government) are not ideologically and coherently "neoliberals"—whatever that might mean. The question that interests me, however, is not whether something or someone is neoliberal, but rather, what the Russian state has become in relation to the global reigning neoliberalization. In this light, my understanding of neoliberalism is close to that of Mitchell Dean, who uses the term "rogue neoliberalism" to describe a set of neoliberal effects

diffused around different spheres of life. Neoliberalism, according to Dean (2019: 340), "has lost its identification with a unified political movement"; Dean, instead, calls for theorizing it as "a series of rogue affects" that "belongs to no one side and attaches itself to diverse political and economic formations."

Neoliberalism, in this understanding, exists longitudinally, throughout time, and not only in moments when explicitly neoliberal decisions are being made. We observe that neoliberalism in general nowadays has become less palpable; instead, ethnonationalism is increasingly on the rise. However, the reigning neoliberalism has not disappeared without a trace. It produced multiple effects, and it lives in diffused institutional and governmental practices. "Actually existing neoliberalisms" can exist years after the policies have been implemented. What situations did they create in everyday realities? What are their temporal aftermaths? How do we see and trace them in everyday life? Our analytical and methodological toolkit should be able to register this longitudinal lifespan of neoliberalism. In this book, through the ethnographic gaze, I analyze Russian universities and the effects that neoliberalism has produced on labor conditions, funding models, and governance structures—sometimes years after such decisions have been discussed or implemented on different decision-making platforms.

Some scholars, though, criticize such ontoepistemological multiplicity of neoliberalism. They argue that neoliberalism as a concept "has translated and mutated to such an extent" that it lacks any scholarly precision (Rowe et al. 2019: 151). It has become "an overblown notion which has been used [...] to characterize everything from a particular brand of free-market political philosophy and a wide variety of innovations in public management to patterns and processes found in and across diverse political spaces and territories around the globe" (Dean 2014: 150). Analysis of neoliberal effects is usually characterized by "chains of inconsistencies between policy domains if one goes beyond a single policy area" (Ban 2016: 8). Emma Rowe et al. state:

> [Neoliberalism] is used analytically, descriptively, or pejoratively; it is common to utilise neoliberalism or 'the neoliberal' to encompass both the material or immaterial; places and spaces – from the micro to the macro, real or imagined. For example, there are 'neoliberal schools', 'neoliberal universities'; we are 'living in neoliberal times'; but it can also refer to urban spaces, such as the 'neoliberal city'. We have 'neoliberal discourses', 'neoliberal globalisation', 'neoliberal urbanisation', the 'neoliberal society' or it can even be applied to the nation-state, such as 'neoliberal Britain.' (Rowe et al. 2019: 151)

But I believe that this lack of precision is actually very precise. Neoliberalism as a politico-economic rationality and practice has been moving around the globe and different spheres of life. Along with this movement, its ontological workings have changed. To comprehend them, we need another epistemological gaze rather than understanding (global) neoliberalism as an essentialist and stable theoretical category that stays intact (cf. Gibson-Graham 2006). Neoliberalism as a theoretical concept needs to catch up with the multiplicity of politico-economic models it has produced globally. It needs to be understood more relationally, less totalizing, and less Western-centrically.

The reliance on pre-existing conceptualizations of neoliberalism risks operating with outdated conceptual definitions of reality—a reality that is transforming, emerging, and changing on an everyday basis and across contexts. Our theoretical definitions of neoliberalism—the phenomenon we tried to abstract into a theoretical definition, but which is actually practiced in everyday life—are lagging behind lived experiences. In this book, I show how different reforms in the field of higher education in Russia have been inspired by, copied from, or reacted to the global neoliberal reign of the ideas of efficiency, progress, growth, competitiveness, innovation, and excellence, but which became assembled into the political system of state authoritarianism, changing along the way what state authoritarianism and neoliberalism are.

Production Out of Difference

So, what has neoliberalism become in relation to the Russian authoritarian state? What is its "actually existing" version there? The different forms that global neoliberalism has produced in its reign, including neoliberal authoritarianism, can be described as the production out of difference. The global situation, which includes this multiplicity of forms, is about the processes of difference—and eventually, about sometimes violent, sometimes smooth processes of attachment and emergence.

The connections across differences produce new power arrangements. When two seemingly contradictory political elements meet, one does not necessarily win over the other. Instead, by establishing connections and rubbing away contradictions, frictions allow political formations to survive through a new composition of an assemblage as a mechanism of power (cf. Tsing 2005, 2015). Sometimes, the components that "grip" each other are different to the extent that their connection is almost paradoxical: "[s]ome of the tangled relationships that lie before us may co-exist

uneasily with one another, to the extent that it may seem odd that they are part of the same formation" (Allen 2011: 154). Arrangements characterized by incoherence and tensions are precisely what make powerful formations possible (Allen 2011: 155). Instead of resolving this contradiction by either seeing the socio-material realities around us as a set of contingent practices or by slipping into analyzing it as "a tight seamless world of well-defined shifts and formations" (Allen 2011: 154), we ought to learn how to notice and conceptualize such instabilities in powerful territorialized assemblages. Global neoliberalism is not a "well-oiled machine" (Tsing 2005: 5). When attaching to localized components, some "features" of neoliberalism evaporate while others are reinforced. Neoliberalization is not necessarily disrupted but is lived in a variety of forms, including neoliberal authoritarianism.

In the ensuing chapters, the book portrays different workings of this production out of difference—neoliberal authoritarianism, which is born out of the interaction between penetrative global neoliberalization and state authoritarianism. In Chap. 2, I first show how universities became the sites through which neoliberal authoritarianism flourishes. After a short methodological interlude in Chap. 3, I proceed to the analytical chapters. Chapters 4 and 5 show the workings of an (authoritarian) state in the environment of global competitive neoliberalization. This is the story of the rise of a securitized authoritarian state to manage this competitiveness and neoliberal globalization on its own terms—and the rise of great power aspirations fueled by this competitiveness.

But authoritarianism is not only a reaction to penetrative neoliberal modernization; neoliberal rationality produces the practice of the authoritarian state itself. Chapters 6 and 7 tell the story of how neoliberal rationalities have penetrated the state's institutional governance and how neoliberal-authoritarian control as a mode of (public) governance has diffused into the everyday life of universities through institutional regulations. These chapters show the dual relations of neoliberal authoritarianism: the state securitizes against neoliberal globalization but eventually becomes soaked in the same practices of control and dispossession promoted by neoliberal rationalities.

The analysis ends with Chap. 8, which examines academic projects subverting neoliberal authoritarianism into something more livable and hopeful. I conclude the book with some last remarks about neoliberal authoritarianism, ungovernmentality, and solidarities in Chap. 9.

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CHAPTER 2

Captured to Serve: Universities, Knowledge Economies, and State Authoritarianism

Introduction: More Than Educational Institutions

During my fieldwork in 2019–2020, I visited various universities in Russia. One of them was St Petersburg State University. This campus is located around Smolny Cathedral—a majestic blue and white Orthodox church founded by Elizaveta Petrovna, the Russian empress, in the 1740s. The university faculties of Sociology, Political Science, and International Relations occupy similar-looking, albeit lower, blue and white buildings that surround the cathedral and served as the residential premises of the Smolny monastery. Upon visiting, I began to notice how the imperial history of St. Petersburg and the contemporary political project of the Russian Orthodox Church are tangibly entangled in St. Petersburg State University's everyday life. The faculties' websites vividly emphasized their grandiose location and connection to Russian imperial history.

On another occasion, I visited one of the campuses of the Higher School of Economics in Moscow. It is a renovated university campus located in the industrial area of what used to be a weaving mill. The red-brick building now hosts the university. When I entered the hall, I was first welcomed by several columns covered with statistics on the university's performance. "International rankings: Top 100 in 'Economics and Econometrics,' 'Sociology,' 'Political Science and International Relations,' 'Mathematics'"; "80+ partner universities across the whole world";

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I. Gataulina, *Neoliberal Authoritarianism: An Ethnography of Russian Universities*, Central and Eastern European Perspectives on International Relations,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-89451-0_2

"Russian rankings: 1st place in 'Oriental Studies' and 'Management.'" It was as if the hall tried to affectively communicate to me, a visitor, the excellence of the university's performance. This form of communication had a neoliberal connotation: performance was explained in the language of rankings and competition inscribed into the materialities of the university space.

Another time, I visited Togliatti State University—a peripheral university located in the Volga region. There, I found myself in a different type of setting: dilapidated and gray post-Soviet university buildings. They, too, communicated ideas of excellence, yet in a different way: through the proclamation that the institution was a "pillar university", and the Victory Day congratulations on faded banners proudly hung on the university's façade. The university appeared to be entangled with yet another political project connected to the Russian state.

Universities are dualistic institutions, and they are always an "ideological battleground" (Ryder 2022: 2). On the one hand, universities are places of knowledge creation and dissemination, which are crucial for a democratic society. In universities, radical imagination, critical thinking, and the education of political agents should flourish for us to nurture democracy. Democracy does not only depend on strictly defined "political" institutions but also on other types of public spheres where civic values and political representation can be fostered—such as universities.

Universities are often celebrated as sites of critique and dissent, as the process of knowledge production allows us to question the normalized, and universities often become the drivers of contentious collective action (Dahlum and Wig 2021). This capacity for debate is vital for democracies to function, as it provides more than just a technocratic and institutional safeguard for a democratic society (Giroux 2004: xv; Ryder 2022: 173).

On the other hand, the creation of new knowledge is important not only for liberatory practices. Universities can be captured to crack down on dissent or to subsume their knowledge production into convenient ideologies. Despite our often romanticized (Meyerhoff 2019) view that a university is a cradle of critical thinking and the creation of counter-hegemonic narratives, universities have often—to a lesser or greater extent—served the interests of state, capital, and colonial powers (Wilson and Kamola 2021; Kamola 2019; Baldwin 2021) (Fig. 2.1). These are the acute topics of the established field of Critical University Studies.

Capital and state have long been penetrating universities to reproduce particular social relations, both in relation to the knowledge they produce

Fig. 2.1 Serving economy and a state. Illustration by Natalia Batrakova

and the institutional role they play: for example, by reinforcing the accumulation of resources, training the necessary workforce, producing ideology, and strengthening state coercion. Eli Meyerhoff (2019) argues that universities—along with the "Western" idea of education overall—directly reinforce modernist, colonial, capitalist, and statist norms.

Similarly, Russian universities and their history cannot specifically be called cradles of critical thinking and counter-hegemonic narratives. Most contemporary Russian universities and higher education institutions appeared during Soviet times to serve the economy and the state. This destabilizes our view of universities as essentially democratic institutions. Russian universities have become new frontiers not only of capital accumulation in the knowledge economies but also are captured by the authoritarian state, which twice undermines their democratic capacity.

In this work, I analyze universities as more than educational institutions. I look beyond specific locations (universities) and ethnographic encounters to see the manifestations of the state and global neoliberalism woven through them. The global always takes place somewhere and is made of a multiplicity of practices and relational components that can be traced in specific localities (Latour 1996: 235). As Law and Singleton (2013: 493) emphasize, "the macro is inside the micro." While analyzing universities in specific localities, I was able to look beyond each specific university. My aim was to analyze how neoliberal authoritarianism is woven through universities.

Captured by Neoliberal Modernization

Due to their abilities for "innovation," universities, with the rise of knowledge economies and neoliberal modernization, have recently been captured by global economic production and competition (Jessop et al. 2008; Poutanen 2022; Epstein et al. 2007; Alcoverro 2020; Armstrong 2001) (Fig. 2.2). "Knowledge economy" or "knowledge capitalism" is defined as the latest, post-Fordist phase of capitalism associated with the technological revolution in the 1990s (Peters 2021). In the knowledge economy, "knowledge becomes valuable due to its exchangeability for status, economic growth, and ranking" (Wulff-Wathne 2021: 5). The knowledge economy has often been presented "as neutral, objective and inevitable – an aspect of Western-driven economic modernization theory" (Peters 2021: 2): it promises "the advent of a prosperous future" for advanced capitalist economies (Alcoverro 2020: 338; see also Erkkilä and Piironen 2014).

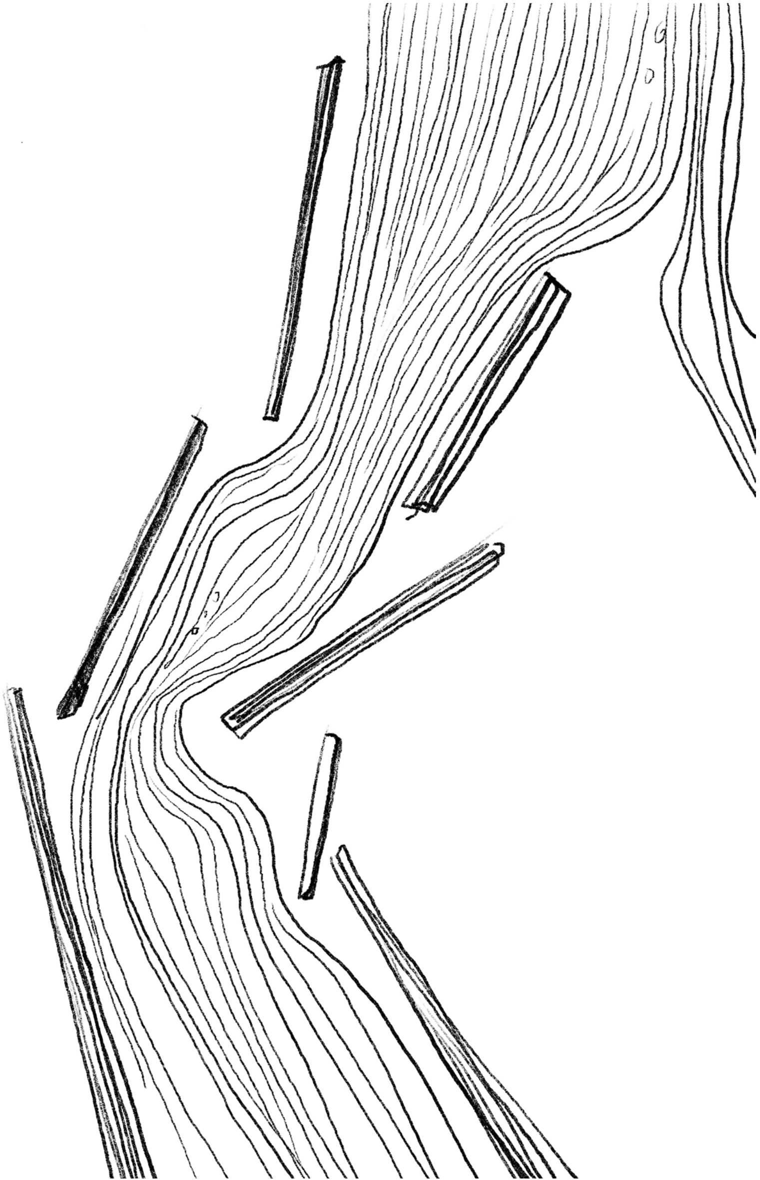

Fig. 2.2 Captured. Illustration by Natalia Batrakova

Western modernization made it possible for the idea of the knowledge economy and its implications for university reforms to claim a hegemonic status. To meet the goals of the knowledge economy, higher education institutions have been reformed worldwide (Alcoverro 2020). Academic knowledge, now closely connected to economic growth, inevitably led to global competition between universities (Peters 2021). Universities became the new frontiers of the latest capitalist intrusion and penetration.

When knowledge became seen as the engine for productivity and economic growth, it legitimized not only the capture of universities into capitalist production but also their penetration by neoliberal governance (Peters 2021; Alcoverro 2020)—an ideology and practice that "produce and distribute market-based values, identities, and modes of agency" in higher education (Giroux 2004: 8). To govern these essential institutions for modernization, neoliberal managerialism (such as New Public Management or other variations) has been—oftentimes quite forcefully—imposed on universities (Sims 2019: 22).

New Public Management was tailored in the US in the 1980s but soon spread worldwide; in Europe, it has been promoted through the Bologna Process (Lorenz 2012: 603), of which Russia, for example, became a part in 2003. New Public Management is "the neoliberal dream of the free-market economy" (Lorenz 2012: 601): the idea of a free market brings about the logic of competition to achieve optimum efficiency understood in economic terms (Dal Molin et al. 2017: 256). This new mode of governance brought about institutional stress on performance, the ethos of competitiveness, and the economic efficiency of university activities (Olssen and Peters 2005: 313).

The capitalist capture of universities worldwide has been described in terms of a crisis, or even the ruins or fall of academia (Connell 2019: 2). This crisis seems to permeate different areas of academic life; scholars raise issues about "outdated pedagogy, exploitation of young staff, distorted and even faked research, outrageous fees, outrageous pay for top managers, corporate rip-offs, corruption, sexism, racism, and mickey-mouse degrees" (ibid.). The neoliberalization of universities often leads to negative impacts on higher education and research, including the dissipation of academic freedom (Dönmez and Duman 2021: 4; Peters 2021), the precarization of academic work (Borovskaia et al. 2014; Loveday 2018), and the erosion of critical thinking due to the subjugation of the curriculum to perceived market needs (Ashwin 2020).

Some scholars attempt to describe what the institutional composition of a neoliberal university looks like or will look like in the future. Raewyn

Connell (2019: 168–169) pictures neoliberal universities as institutions similar to business entities or firms: they are owned by investors and managers who do not necessarily come from an academic background; all their service operations are outsourced; the curriculum is designed by the needs of the labor market. However, this understanding of a neoliberal university is specific rather than universal. While the image built by Connell indeed portrays features of neoliberalism now playing out in university operations, her own position in an Australian university shapes one vision of a possible dystopian future (and for some, already a present). There, a university is ingrained into one type of state and economy. But neoliberalism has produced other types of institutional effects and formations when embedded into the existing politico-economic assemblage. The states that compete in this globalized environment of knowledge economies are not the same. Global neoliberalization also changes and twists universities differently. Privatization and deregulation of universities due to their capture by knowledge economies and global competitiveness are one possible formation of how these rationalities have penetrated and changed universities as institutions. When neoliberalization happens in the presence of an authoritarian state, the composition is quite different. The entanglements between global neoliberal modernization and an authoritarian state are something that this book tries to unfold.

With the emphasis on privatization and deregulation, the role of the state usually remains obscure. However, even in liberal contexts, the state is an important actor for neoliberal modernization. As David Harvey argued (2005), institutional neoliberal frameworks and their protection (by legal coercion or by police power) are often reinforced by the state (I discussed it in more detail in Chap. 1). For example, when it comes to universities, if markets do not yet exist in these areas of life, they can be created by state action if necessary (Harvey 2005: 2).

The state is also crucial in the broader process of global modernization, where the competition among knowledge economies has often materialized in state-bounded and even nationalistic terms (Harvey 2005: 79; Kangas 2013; Akçalı 2020: 100). Even when deregulated, a university often allegedly contributes to the economic development of a particular state. Conversely, some states try to more closely regulate research and safeguard the links between industry and academia to boost the state's economic performance—the university becomes an important asset of the state, which explains the emergence of the audit culture and control (Ryder 2022: 181).

The role of the state is much more visible—and sometimes even omnipresent in our thinking, overshadowing any other political and economic

forces—in the contexts of the Global East. The authoritarian states of control, centralization, and interference in the Global East have not been shielded from global neoliberalization either, but the latter has altered their institutional composition, including university governance, differently. What the relations between global neoliberalization and an authoritarian state are, and how they have changed universities, are the main questions of this book.

Academic Authoritarian Neoliberalism

Many scholars have already shown how the neoliberalization of universities couples with undemocratic practices—in different ways. When it comes to knowledge production, neoliberalization affects our capabilities to create critical knowledge, which inevitably restricts academic freedom (Ryder 2022; Butler 2017). When we are expected, through different funding mechanisms and project culture, to produce research that can be capitalized and benefit the economy, the state, or dubious criteria of modernization and competition, it tames us and reduces the scope of intellectual dissent. The shrinking spaces for critical thinking are also endangered through performance-driven management emphasizing polished and financially profitable outcomes (cf. Brown 2015). This audit culture of academic capitalism pushes us to work on more streamlined and less "controversial" research.

The scholarship on the neoliberalization of universities is often framed around the universities themselves and the ways to ensure and protect our academic freedom against the increasing neoliberal-authoritarian practice (Ryder 2022; Butler 2017; Connell 2019). In this book, however, while I do show how this neoliberal-authoritarian practice plays out in Russian universities, I want to enlarge this discussion by taking another angle and exploring *an authoritarian state in relation to neoliberal globalization*—and the neoliberal authoritarianism that emerges out of the interaction of those two.

Previous scholarship has already demonstrated how, beyond knowledge production, neoliberalization changes universities' governing and institutional structures, which are now infiltrated by various authoritarian practices (Belina et al. 2013; McCann et al. 2020; Coşar and Ergül 2015; Dönmez and Duman 2021; Cervinkova and Rudnicki 2019). Due to neoliberal managerialism, the management structures are hierarchical and centralized; this centralized control is allegedly needed to ensure greater economic efficiency and competition (Ryder 2022: 9; Woodman 2016) (Fig. 2.3).

Fig. 2.3 Neoliberalized university. Illustration by Natalia Batrakova

This has led some scholars to talk about "academic authoritarianism": the extreme and draconic corporatization of universities where universities are not only formally but also legally organized as corporations (Kaufman-Osborn 2023). This legal type authorizes the governing boards of those universities to do what they will, concentrating decision-making power in the hands of administrators.

These discussions often align with the scholarship on authoritarian neoliberalism which I presented in Chap. 1: they indeed show how neoliberalism creates authoritarian practices. However, universities open up a new dimension in this discussion, as the authoritarian neoliberalism literature has mostly focused on capital accumulation regimes through trade and new class formations. The literature on academic authoritarian neoliberalism shows us how neoliberalization endangers undemocratic modes of governance in public (or what has previously been thought of as public) spaces.

Academic authoritarianism in these hugely privatized and deregulated contexts is an authoritarian practice in universities captured by corporatization. But what happens when the former is coupled with an already existing authoritarian practice and state? When the ideas of the knowledge economy and subsequently neoliberalized university penetrate the authoritarian state? What does it tell us about the workings of state authoritarianism, penetrative global neoliberalization, and the role and institutional composition of universities? What new insights can we gain through the study of Russian universities?

In the ensuing chapters, I will show how similar authoritarian neoliberal practices are visible in Russian universities: although materialized somewhat differently legally and institutionally, we can clearly observe the reinforcement of arbitrary administrative power over academic staff. For now, let us first look into the history of Russian universities. In the next section, following my interest in a university as a governing structure and a "more than educational institution," I specifically pay attention to the governance of Russian universities and their relation to the state and economy (the questions central to this book), leaving aside the influence of neoliberal authoritarianism upon the contents of curricula and research.

Captured by a State: Russian Universities

Since the inception of higher education in Russia during the eighteenth century, its governance has been marked by strict control and hierarchical decision-making. In 1917, Soviet Russia inherited a highly centralized

and elitist higher education system from the Russian Empire. The rapid industrialization of the early 1930s further propelled the expansion and transformation of higher education into a component of the Soviet state-controlled economy (Froumin and Kouzminov 2015). During the Soviet period, the education system developed a governing structure that largely persists today (Kuraev 2016).

The state was the primary supervisor over higher education institutions, which were called "state universities" or "state institutes" and have largely been kept until the present day across post-Soviet space. This Soviet structure was founded on several key principles: the absence of private initiatives, rigid specialization and narrow professional training, the separation of education and research (with research being conducted by the Academy of Sciences), a standardized curriculum, minimal autonomy, and mandatory job placement for graduates.

Soviet higher education supported industrialization by increasing the training of engineers and technicians. Specialized universities were overseen by specific branch ministries. By the end of the Soviet era, the standard duration of full-time study for a "specialist" degree was five years, followed by the "Candidate of Science" degree (equivalent to a PhD). At the close of the Soviet period, there were 514 higher education institutions (HEIs) in Russia, with nearly 2.825 million students enrolled.

The 1990s brought about some decentralization of state authority over higher education in the newly established federal Russian state. However, this decentralization was accompanied by drastic privatization reforms, which brought about neoliberal autocracy (Kagarlitsky 2002). The 1990s were a time of contradictions and challenges due to the overall chaos in various aspects of life during the so-called transition period: the clash between existing socialist institutional frameworks and the reigning capitalization.

Legislation from this decade continued some post-Soviet welfare principles, for example, viewing education as a public good. However, this period also saw the beginning of the marketization of higher education, with the introduction of tuition fees and private universities (Gounko and Smale 2007a: 533). Nowadays, a hybrid economy characterizes the Russian higher education system. Some study places at universities are state-funded, while others are self-funded with tuition fees.

The introduction of the tuition fees, however, allowed more people to access higher education, especially those who could not get in through the state-set enrollment limits. The government did increase the number of state-funded institutions, but the demand for higher education grew even

faster. This high demand led to a significant expansion of higher education. By 2011, there were twice as many universities as there were in 1991. Today, the number of universities in Russia is around 1000, though this number can vary depending on whether regional branches of universities are included (Froumin and Zagirova 2020).

The barbaric and uncontrolled neoliberalization of the 1990s changed when the state stepped in again. Since the 2000s, under Vladimir Putin's project of centralization, universities across the country have become subject to increasing budgetary and regulatory control by the Russian state (Platonova and Semyonov 2018). This process of centralization has often been referred to as the "vertical of power." The term is used to describe the centralization of political (federal, regional, and municipal) power in Russia under the Kremlin, where the president "is considered to be the central and final figure of authority in Russia" (Monaghan 2012: 1). The term "vertical of power" entered both political and scientific discussions: it has been used by Putin himself (Surikova 2020), by the Russian media (Mironenko 2020), and in research (e.g., Gel'man and Ryzhenkov 2011; Judah 2013: 90).

In accordance with the Law on Education of 2012, the major responsibility for higher education belongs to the federal authorities. This role is carried out by the federal Ministry of Education and Science, which is in charge of policy development for higher education. More specifically, the Ministry establishes the rules and criteria for the ongoing and final assessment of students, requirements regarding workloads, and classroom conditions mandatory for accredited higher education institutions. Another important element of the federal governing system is the Federal Supervision Service for Education and Science (*Rosobrnadzor*). It inspects the implementation of legislation in the sphere of education and the overall supervision of quality control in education, particularly the licensing, certification, and accreditation of educational institutions.

An Authoritarian State Coupled with Neoliberalization

The state is omnipresent: this is very much visible and documented. The relationship to neoliberal modernization is somewhat more obscure and usually vaguely discussed as an apolitical and value-neutral development and integration into the international space. But what kind of international space is it? While many researchers on Russia have acknowledged

the modernization attempts of the Russian state, they have mostly disconnected them from global neoliberalization and often referred to it as "authoritarian modernization," that is, "the dominant reform ideology since Vladimir Putin took up leadership," emphasizing the role of the state (Dubrovsky and Kaczmarska 2021). The neoliberal principles of such modernization, or their relation to authoritarianism, have been rarely questioned or critically reflected upon; only the capturing power of the authoritarian state has been.

This is also important in relation to the scholarship on academic authoritarian neoliberalism: Russian universities show us not only how neoliberalization produces authoritarian practice, but also what happens when neoliberalization is coupled with an already existing one. Moreover, since universities are state institutions in Russia, their analysis helps us understand the workings of neoliberal authoritarianism braided into *the state and its governance structures.*

Needless to say, global neoliberalization did not end in 1990s and did not, for some reason, passed over Russia; it just became more tamed and controlled by the state which became the main arbiter and supervisor of neoliberal change. The competitiveness in the global economy was emphasized as a key principle of building the Russian educational system since the beginning of the Putin's rule (Gounko and Smale 2007b: 79). Elena Minina (2017: 176) argues that "the global neoliberal discourse has served as the backbone for post-Soviet educational ideology." Since the 2000s under Putin's administration, competitiveness among knowledge economies had been increasingly emphasized as an attempt to "modernize" both Russian higher education (Gounko and Smale 2007b: 79) and economy as a whole that has been dominated by the extraction of natural resources (Levin et al. 2015; Balkizova 2017: 157) (Fig. 2.4).

The discourse of neoliberal reforms, such as economic efficiency and optimization, often took on the meaning of modernizing the inefficient, slow, and consumer-unfriendly public services inherited from Soviet times. Thus, neoliberal reforms did not only aim to "optimize" the economic performance of universities but also to modernize the presumably outdated and inefficient Soviet-style governing mechanisms. The temporalities of the outdated versus the progressive, or Soviet versus neoliberal, brought neoliberal policies of efficiency to the forefront under the bureaucratic control of the state.

Various reforms undertaken by the state aimed at its successful integration into neoliberal modernization and the ensuing global competition.

Fig. 2.4 Competition. Illustration by Natalia Batrakova

Most of these reforms were initiated not by the academic community or civil society but by the government. For example, the Bologna Process was criticized at the university level, but the government pushed it through via top-down implementation, at times putting pressure on the university community. I will return to the topic of neoliberal modernization through the Bologna Process and the Russian state's participation in it in Chap. 5. The state also designed a vertical stratification of universities with different statuses and roles, each group having its own role in perceiving neoliberal modernization. I discuss these attempts to ensure the state's good performance in global neoliberalization as well as to maintain the institutional coherence of the omnipresent state in Chap. 4.

The competition in this environment, taken up by the state, has successfully coupled with nationalism. Universities have been analyzed in close connection to the behavior of states and national governments in world politics. Sirke Mäkinen (2021: 14) analyzes how "publicly declared goals of enhancing the quality of education or competitiveness […] are used to justify other policies or practices," such as the global status of the Russian state.

However, global neoliberalization is not merely an external phenomenon, a "global outside" that the state tries to manage. Neoliberal rationalities have certainly permeated institutional reforms and practices, including those within universities.

First of all, it altered university funding models. In the Russian context, however, this did not mean privatization, as the state remains the main funder of both higher education and research (though funding for these comes from two different financial streams). The state provides more than half of university budgets, although universities can attract additional income through tuition fees, provisions for supplementary services for students, staff, and the general public, contracts for consultations and research activities, and grants from nongovernmental agencies.

However, the neoliberal idea of performance-based funding based on metrics did penetrate state regulations. The adoption of new budgetary legislation and the new Law on Education in 2012 signaled a transition from cost-based to performance-based allocation of funds for higher education. This especially concerned the so-called leading Russian universities, whose funding directly depends on indicators of the quality of their educational and research activities, such as the number of academic publications, the amount of nongovernmental funding, and the number of students with "outstanding abilities."

The competitive system introduced by the state led to the implementation of performance-based mechanisms for academics, contributing to feelings of insecurity. The pervasive neoliberalization also subjected academic staff to precarious conditions through the introduction of performance indicators. Until recently, staff were hired for a period of five years with easy renewal. However, there is a government-supported trend toward the implementation of "effective contracts," which are made for shorter periods and often include personal performance indicators (Kurbatova and Levin 2013). Other universities, at the same time, fell out of this race for performance and excellence and ended up in regimes of austerity. I discuss these developments in more detail in the ensuing chapters.

Governance *within* universities is also a complex entanglement of an authoritarian state and penetrative neoliberal rationalities. Universities are centralized in their governance, with operations streamlined under the rector. Rectors represent the executive authority at institutions, although their degree of authority may vary depending on the provisions within the institution's charter.

As of 2024, the appointment of rectors in Russian universities continues to follow a state-supervised process. The rectors of Moscow State University and St. Petersburg State University are appointed by the Russian president. The prime minister appoints the rectors of the nine federal universities. The heads of military academies and some specialized universities are appointed by their respective ministries. For other universities, rectors are typically elected by representatives of the staff and students, with a preliminary screening of the candidates by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education (see also Froumin and Zagirova 2020).

This is the academic "vertical of power" (Smolentseva et al. 2018; Gerashchenko 2022) integrated into the vertical of power of the state. Despite clear indications of how such vertical has been greatly influenced by neoliberal policies, there is a widespread view that this centralization can be fully explained by the inheritance of centralized governance from Soviet times (e.g., Froumin and Zagirova 2020). Other researchers similarly argue that the old Soviet control has resurfaced, even when disguised by the discourses of development and neoliberal reform (Minina 2017; Sokolov 2021; Murav'eva et al. 2019). For example, when analyzing the neoliberal criteria of quality assurance, the vagueness of which leads to arbitrary powers, it is still argued that these are a comeback of Soviet governance (Minina 2017), rather than arbitrariness already ingrained in neoliberal practice. There is a widespread belief that the Russian state and its governance (including that of universities) are immanent to authoritarianism and

isolated from the democratic world, where the governance is different. In this book, I take a different perspective. I show how neoliberalized governance has opened up possibilities for authoritarian governance to flourish. When it comes to university governance, university leadership has increased its powers over the wider academic community due to the establishment of various neoliberal mechanisms of surveillance over academic performance.

Generally, the comparison of contemporary university governance with the Soviet system frequently appears in various strands of research. Interestingly, the Soviet control and command style is discussed not only in the context of contemporary Russian governance but also in relation to neoliberal governance in liberal democracies. The Soviet higher education and research institutions, which served the state's economy, are reminiscent of the contemporary situation where universities have been captured to serve the competition of knowledge economies. "Job training" and linking higher education to economic needs under a planned economy were defining features of higher education institutions in the USSR (Kuraev 2016: 183). During the "transition" in the 1990s, Eastern European postsocialist countries were often described as authoritarian, ideologically driven, not progressive, not free, and inefficient, while "Western" neoliberal policy models were labeled with "freedom," "progress," and "democracy." However, with the rise of neoliberalization, alongside ideas of individualism and freedom, contemporary higher education systems have been characterized by "standardization," "benchmarks," and "monitoring." Ironically, these same definitions were applied to the "authoritarian" East during the Cold War (Tröhler 2013). It is argued that New Public Management in a neoliberalized university is a "return" to Soviet-style bureaucracy (McCann et al. 2020; Grönblom and Willner 2013) and shows similarities with the type of managerialism that existed in former socialist states: a governing structure directed at the affirmation of workers under indisputable managers (see, e.g., Oleksiyenko 2018: 197, or Lorenz 2012: 600).

While there are affinities between Soviet and neoliberal universities in terms of governance being authoritarian and centralized, they cannot be equated, primarily because they served different types of economies. The distribution of resources in the socialist state economy is drastically different from that of globalized neoliberal capitalism. While we can see some similarities in how universities were influenced by the economy for the sake of production, the type of economy makes a significant difference in what universities are captured to serve. The Soviet system was indeed centralized, and the legacies of this centralization surely had an impact on

strengthening authoritarianism and the vertical of control in contemporary Russian universities. At the same time, Soviet higher education and research did not have the same policies of austerity and precarity based on competitive metrics that have penetrated Russian universities under global neoliberalization. Nowadays, universities are captured to serve interests in a new way: this is academic neoliberal authoritarianism, which is supposed to serve state interests in the globalized knowledge economies and boost economic competitiveness.

What is important to note, still, are the changes following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Since the start of the invasion, Russian universities have been seen as compliant with Russian war atrocities in Ukraine after the Russian Rectors' Union signed a letter of unconditional support for the invasion and Putin personally (Russian Union of Rectors 2022). Following this letter, international (or rather, Western-based) collaborations with state universities have largely been discontinued, with calls to boycott any cooperation (Burakovsky 2022). In response, the Russian government has issued several statements and decisions cutting ties specifically with European higher education. For example, Russia decided to withdraw from the European Union's Bologna Process and return to six-year university degrees (Vorob'eva 2022). The Russian state has further censored research and science: academics condemning the war have been fired (many left the universities and the country on their own). Some degree programs critical of the regime have been closed, while "patriotic" research has received more funding and visibility (Balakhonova 2023). At the same time, universities have become places of resistance to the regime and the war. Academics signed open letters condemning the war (Brussels correspondent 2022), and students organized a nationwide anti-war movement (Syg.Ma, n.d.). Those opposing the war, however, might face disciplinary action by their institutions or legal persecution by the state.

In this book, I focus on the developments that occurred prior to the invasion of 2022 and the ruptures it produced. Surely, the compositions and the international system brought about by global neoliberalization have changed, with the rise of ethnonationalist states and the escalation of various imperial wars. However, to adequately understand the form into which the world is transforming, we need to comprehend how the workings of penetrative neoliberalization have shaped the world as it is now. Moreover, without understanding the effects that penetrative neoliberal modernization has produced, such as the erosion of labor rights, the strengthening of verticals of power, and ideologies of nationalistic competition, we cannot fully grasp the capturing and draconian authoritarianism of the Russian state at present.

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CHAPTER 3

Methodological Interlude: An Ethnographic Gaze for Neoliberal Authoritarianism

Before delving into the following chapters, which provide a detailed analysis of neoliberal authoritarianism through the lens of Russian universities, a brief methodological interlude is necessary. This book is an ethnography of penetrative global neoliberalism, state reproduction, and neoliberal authoritarianism—examined through knowledge economies and universities. By ethnography, I mean a close examination of the institutional and everyday practices of global neoliberalism and the authoritarian state, which are performed, reinforced, and mutate in the process of their becoming. Instead of viewing neoliberalism and authoritarianism as stable abstractions, the ethnographic gaze focuses on their mutations and lived realities (Fig. 3.1).

I do not intend to claim that this is an exhaustive or definitive way to understand ethnography. This way of labeling something as "ethnography" can be quite contested, especially from the perspective of traditional anthropological ethnography. However, I still believe that learning from the best ethnography has to offer—attention to everyday and unstable realities that are always in a process of becoming—and applying it to different research questions that extend beyond direct human connections and the cultures they produce can tremendously enrich our research practice.

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I. Gataulina, *Neoliberal Authoritarianism: An Ethnography of Russian Universities*, Central and Eastern European Perspectives on International Relations,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-89451-0_3

Fig. 3.1 Ethnographic gaze. Illustration by Natalia Batrakova

Previously, scholars who appreciated the research design and ethics of ethnography talked about "ethnographic sensibilities"—paying close attention to everyday practices, questioning the familiar, and being open to ethnographic surprises (Herzog and Zacka 2019; see also Baker and McGuirk 2017). My understanding of ethnography is somewhat similar to this and has been greatly inspired by the works of Anna Tsing and her ethnographies of global connections (Tsing 2005) and global capitalist supply chains amidst the precarity of living among environmental degradation (Tsing 2015).

An ethnographic gaze into the workings of neoliberal authoritarianism allows me to move beyond seeing it as an abstract, stable category and instead focus on the lived realities of different institutional regulations of both global neoliberalism and state authoritarianism. By "lived realities" of neoliberal authoritarianism, I mean not only physical locations and the cultures they create through human interactions but also various regulations, somewhat "faceless" institutional arrangements, and legislation as places where neoliberal authoritarianism resides.

I aim to trace how neoliberal policies and authoritarian state governance become diffused into the imposed regulations and everyday life of Russian universities. What happens to "neoliberalism" when it ceases to be a coherently proclaimed political and economic agenda and starts to live in the regulations and realities it produces? What is an authoritarian practice when it is not openly proclaimed through vicious policies of bans and violence but rather through more subtle institutional arrangements of control? These are the lived realities that amplify themselves through the travel of ideas and practices, and the diffusion of regulations and institutional arrangements (cf. Gago 2017).

The idea of an ethnographic gaze here aligns with my understanding of global neoliberalism and state authoritarianism, which are always in the process of becoming, moving, reproducing, and mutating. Understanding (global) neoliberalism as a series of different effects that have diffused and now shape various spheres of life and understanding state authoritarianism as a set of performed practices (as discussed in Chap. 1; Higgins and Larner 2017; Brenner and Theodore 2002; Glasius 2018) require a close analysis of those practices in the process of their emergence and change.

The ethnographic gaze allows us to let go of the "universals" (what neoliberalism and authoritarianism might mean) and to start, again and again, in specific situations, "in the middle of things" (Tsing 2005: 1–2)—by observing actually existing neoliberalisms and the lived realities of the

enforcement and reproduction of an (authoritarian) state. In this book, I trace both political decisions and how they landed on the ground and what effects they produced. This is a story of neoliberal authoritarianism in the process of its becoming.

In this regard, I am less interested in the production of specific places under neoliberal authoritarianism. Instead, I am interested in what specific places (particularly Russian universities in this study) can tell us about the deterritorialized but institutionalized workings of neoliberal authoritarianism. Here, my ethnographic gaze is somewhat similar to the concept of non-local ethnography as described by Feldman (2011). In this context, ethnography refers to processes happening beyond specific territories and places. “The particularities of a place diminish,” and the focus shifts to processes that are similar despite those differences (Feldman 2011: 390). While the traditional understanding of ethnography requires immersion into the geographical context and the lives of people, largely through participant observation, this might not be the best approach for all research puzzles. In contrast to conventional ethnographic research designs and questions, the “field” of neoliberal authoritarianism is composed of dispersed geographical locations, variously positioned people, and diverse policy models, which hardly manifest in one particular setting.

Understanding neoliberal authoritarianism requires looking beyond direct human relations and the “cultures” they produce. While “people historically have been linked through direct social connections, characterized by their tangibility, corporeality, and locality” (Feldman 2011: 379), ethnographic research of neoliberal authoritarianism needs to go beyond the immediate connections between sites and, instead, rigorously dissect the institutional, spatial, temporal, and affective workings of these systems of control. Nowadays, direct connections between people are interrupted by material agents, institutional frameworks, territories, technologies, and infrastructures (cf. Feldman 2011: 379). As Feldman specifies (2011: 376–377), there have already been calls for methodologies that are able to expose the material conditions of capitalist reproduction or the workings of states which “lack geographic and institutional fixity” and “are not immediately available to personal, subjective experience.” In this research, neoliberal authoritarianism materializes through connections among such spatially distributed nodes as universities, state legislation, global neoliberal policies, and infrastructures of knowledge production.

This close look into the operations of the state and global neoliberalism did not always mean being out there “in the field.” The field was often a

process of spending hours at my computer, digging through different regulations and legislation on how universities are governed and how (academic) labor is regulated; looking for public interviews speculating about different decisions made by the state or the rectors; analyzing marketing strategies on university websites; and reading news about attacks on academic freedom. At the same time, I traveled to universities, observed the material environments, conducted interviews (mostly online during the COVID-19 pandemic), and tuned into conferences and webinars about (university) governance. This was a way to notice how state authoritarianism and global neoliberalism manifest in academic life.

The ethnographic gaze invited me to move frequently between different sites—both physical locations where I traveled and more abstract bureaucratic "places" within regulations, funding mechanisms, and employment contracts. I moved from peripheral university campuses to the celebration of the Bologna Process, to resistant academic projects outside universities, and to websites and policy documents of the Russian state departments. As Silvia Gherardi specifies (2019: 742–743), "I am interested in data that move as we move in doing fieldwork as a joint 'becoming-with-data' in the intra-action of what can be lived and sensed by researchers."

My relationship with the field is complex. I had been part of the field before, as I did my undergraduate studies in Russian universities, completed a master's degree in a Finnish–Russian double degree program, and am now employed by a Finnish university. I am conducting research about contexts in which I grew up, lived, studied, and worked. Having studied at two Russian universities and one Finnish university, and having been part of the students' and labor unions both in Russia and Finland, became my embodied knowledge of the field of higher education, which affected the way I collected and analyzed the data. My experience studying at two Russian universities of different statuses—Ulyanovsk State University and St. Petersburg State University—informed my analysis of the complex geography and power dynamics within the field.

Research participants also related to my experience, which shaped our communication. For example, when talking to Alexey from Petrozavodsk State University, I noticed how he perceived my experience studying at a peripheral Russian university in Ulyanovsk as something that enriched my understanding of the field and the dynamics at his own institution, Petrozavodsk State University—also on the Russian periphery. This is an embodied knowledge of the periphery of neoliberal modernization and

the authoritarian state, which, at the same time, bears the brunt of the institutional and dispossessive burdens of these oppressive powers. At the end of our interview, I asked Alexey:

Iuliia: That's all of my questions. Maybe you have something to add, what seems important to add?
Alexey: Where have you graduated from?
Iuliia: I completed my undergraduate studies in Ulyanovsk, at Ulyanovsk State University, in International Relations. And then I entered St. Petersburg State University and completed a double degree program [with Tampere University].
Alexey: Okay, okay. Well, it seems that that's all [from me] as well. I asked this question to get to know that you studied not only in the [Russian] universities located in the "capitals"[1] and not only in foreign universities. You imagine what is happening and what it looks like [in the peripheral universities]. (Alexey, June 15, 2020)

It is also important to note that my knowledge of the field extends beyond my experiences at universities. I also lived through the authoritarian changes in the country and experienced how the spaces for dissent, difference, and self-organization became scarcer. In 2011, I was in my first year of university. In December, there were parliamentary elections, and Putin's "United Russia" Party secured the majority of parliamentary seats, despite documented fraud. The protests against the falsified elections, usually concentrated in Moscow, spread to various regions. That was my first political demonstration, in Ulyanovsk, at the age of 17. At that time, I believed, under the Moscow-centricity that also penetrates the mind and thinking, that any significant changes would need to be led by the Moscow opposition. We in the peripheries were merely supporting the movement initiated and executed in the capital.

At the age of 20, I moved to St. Petersburg for my master's studies and became active in various political circles. I volunteered with feminist and LGBT organizations and participated in numerous democratic gatherings. The political life in St. Petersburg was vibrant, with frequent demonstrations. However, each year, the state's grip intensified. Legislation

[1] Alexey referred to "stolichnye universiteti" which in the Russian context implies universities located in the current and former capitals of Moscow and St Petersburg.

suppressing dissent became more draconian, and police violence more brutal. Over time, fear began to permeate my actions; the prospect of facing the police with batons on the streets and then being unlawfully detained in poor conditions was daunting. All of these experiences enriched my understanding of control and political culture in Russia, as well as the political discourses of both the state and its opposition.

The data concerning the university's governance and the state's relation to the global rise of knowledge economies were collected from 2019 to 2021. The data specifically portray accounts from the Higher School of Economics, St Petersburg State University, European University in Saint Petersburg, Ulyanovsk State University, Petrozavodsk State University, Tyumen State University, and Free University. These universities were differentially located across the Russian state's territory and had different statuses (I will discuss the statuses of universities in Chap. 4). I visited the Higher School of Economics in St. Petersburg in October and December 2019; Togliatti State University and Ulyanovsk State University in July 2020; and the European University in St. Petersburg in October–November 2021 (I visited the latter during a visiting fellowship). Beyond studying at Ulyanovsk State University and Saint Petersburg State University, I took two courses at the Free University in 2020–2021.

I conducted 27 interviews with students, academic, and administrative staff from Russian and other European universities. I began accessing the field and conducting interviews through my personal networks at St. Petersburg State University and Ulyanovsk State University, then used a snowballing technique to expand these networks. I paid attention to the representation of different subject positions within universities: students (9 interviews), researchers and teachers (12), and administrative staff and management (6). Five of the ethnographic interviews were accompanied by a creative methodological exercise of mapping their university journey.

I conducted participant observation at more than 30 events, both offline and online (during the COVID-19 restrictions), dedicated to university politics and governance. I observed events in different institutional locations, such as the 10th International Conference on Higher Education (Higher School of Economics, Moscow, October 2019), a set of events entitled "How Higher Education is Changing in Europe" (St. Petersburg), webinars on "University Management" (European University in St. Petersburg), the Slow Academy conference (Helsinki), and the international conference at Ulyanovsk State University. Further details on the fieldwork are provided in the Appendix.

The research data included a variety of online sources. I analyzed the material about the Bologna Process anniversary held in June 2019 in the city of Bologna, Italy, which was rigorously documented online by the organizers. The research material included video recordings of presentations at the anniversary, a photo gallery, and textual material from the official website. I also scrutinized media publications on university politics and governance. These ranged from publications in newspapers (e.g., BBC, Kommersant, DOXA) to smaller opinion pieces from active members of the Russian academic community on their public social media channels. I analyzed 15 editions of *Troitsky Variant*—an independent newspaper about science and higher education in Russia, which I received by postal subscription in 2021 while residing in St. Petersburg.

Some publications referenced in the upcoming chapters should be treated as data rather than as contributions to my theoretical approach (some of them would directly conflict with the theoretical approach I presented in Chap. 1). These publications provide information about different policies and approaches in the field of higher education. Moreover, publications in the Russian academic journals often serve as a good source for collecting opinion pieces, confirming factual information shared by interviewees, or tracing specific changes within Russian higher education and research. I also analyzed 11 interviews with academics collected and published online by the research group "History of University Culture" at the Higher School of Economics (Higher School of Economics n.d.), which provided a good background on discussions around academic identities, the role of the university, and the reforms within Russian higher education.

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CHAPTER 4

Managing Global Competition: University Status

Introduction

It is October 2019. I am attending the International Conference on Higher Education, held at the Higher School of Economics in Moscow. There, I notice the repeated references to the governmental "Project 5-100" and the universities participating in this project. The speakers talk about the abundance of resources that the universities in this project enjoy, and to me, they start to seem like a high-society academic club. I am determined to investigate how this group of universities came to be and what it can possibly tell us about the distribution of resources within the contemporary Russian academic political economy.

One month later, I am talking with an administrative staff member, Darya, from Petrozavodsk State University. I am trying to dig deeper and understand how different university "clubs" came to be, including Project 5-100. "No, no, I do not know much about Project 5-100. We do not belong there. We are a pillar university; this is a completely different thing. It suits us better as a regional university." Pillar? What is this new university status—and how many are there? I ask Darya how the university became "a pillar university." "Well, there was an application process. The university submitted it to some governmental agency. We had to explain about the university and how it fits into this group. And we got it."

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I. Gataulina, *Neoliberal Authoritarianism: An Ethnography of Russian Universities*, Central and Eastern European Perspectives on International Relations,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-89451-0_4

Needless to say, the references to these newly established different statuses and groups among the Russian universities caught my attention. Besides having semantically interesting titles, these projects were also potentially signaling new forms of governance and state–university relations. The state seemed omnipresent: as if the universities had to follow the paths created for them by the state and uphold a specific status. At that point, I was interested in the power of an (authoritarian) state to divide the universities into specific groups and orchestrate their activities (Fig. 4.1).

Indeed, the state divided Russian universities into several groups—a vertical stratification and a complex institutional composition of different statuses and roles enforced by legislation. This process started in 2006, redesigning the previous system of state universities, which were usually classified according to the content of their teaching and research programs (classical universities, polytechnics, pedagogical, medical, or agrarian universities). The new institutional composition strived to define universities according to their institutional, rather than academic, role. These new roles have been heavily influenced by the connection of universities to either the state or the international "market" of higher education.

The governmental matrix of university statuses in Russia singles out two national universities with special status as unique science and educational institutions within the Russian state—Moscow State University and St. Petersburg State University. Ten federal universities were founded after the merger of regional universities, and their official role was directly connected to the territorial integrity and stability of the Russian state: "to become the drivers of development and change in the ten federal geopolitically strategic areas of the Russian Federation" (Kukarenko and Zashikhina 2017: 30). Another group included national research universities whose role was identified in relation to the global neoliberalization of higher education: to integrate Russian universities into the international competitive processes of knowledge production. "Project 5-100" had a similar vision; however, it was more tactically designed in relation to international rankings: the name of the program refers to the attempt to get at least five universities into the top 100 in three international rankings (Quacquarelli Symonds, Times Higher Education, and Academic Ranking of World Universities). The establishment of these types of universities was a major move toward the reintegration of research and higher education. The last group consisted of regional pillar universities with the envisioned goal of contributing to regional economic development (Froumin and Zagirova 2020).

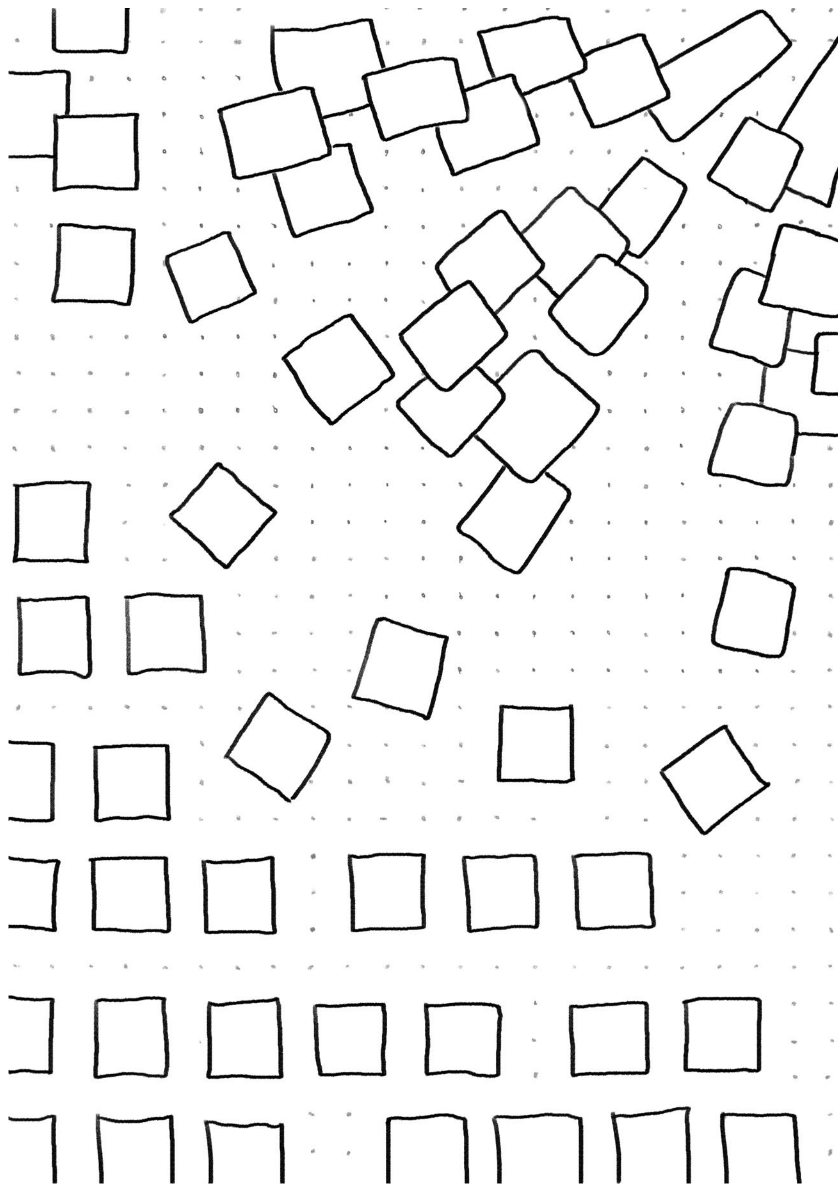

Fig. 4.1 Stratification. Illustration by Natalia Batrakova

One way to interpret these developments is through the lens of an authoritarian state: a state that interferes in the governance of academic institutions and directly designs their roles. It can be argued that such a stratified system for Russian universities maintains the predictability of university activities under the authoritarian control of the state. I once discussed this "divide and control" mode of governance with a professor at the Higher School of Economics: this institutional matrix aims to exclude anything exceptional and abnormal, making it easier for the state to govern the institutions. The bulk of universities across the state operate according to predictable patterns. This predictability creates the governmental norm for universities' roles and behaviors, but also minimizes the agency of the university community. When agency is suppressed, the quality of university performance is somewhat average, one aim of which, according to this professor, is to support authoritarian governance.

It is also possible to argue that such stratification of Russian universities into fixed groups further reproduces territorial inequality and regional economic disparities within Russia. The number of leading universities in Moscow and St. Petersburg is the highest in Russia, while, for example, there are no "world-class" universities in the North Caucasus and only one "leading" university in the Far Eastern and Southern Federal Districts (Vatlina and Evdokimov 2022: 64). Since the state directs funding toward institutions that are able to participate in international academic competition, the leading universities located in the capital regions accumulate even more resources.

In this light, it is also important to note that such a carefully designed institutional matrix can be seen as a way to manage the vast territory of the state and make it institutionally coherent—a real task for the Russian state, which comprises a geographically vast area of colonized indigenous lands and various administrative state units. Thomas Graham (2010: 67) argues that such modernization of almost all spheres of social and economic life was envisioned by Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev back in the 2010s to ensure Russia's "survival and territorial integrity" and role as a "great power." The position of federal universities in the geopolitically strategic areas of the state confirms the workings of such territorial governance (Fig. 4.2).

Naturally, we can see that this new institutional matrix of universities was carefully designed and backed by state funding mechanisms to make the universities adhere to the goals of the state. The universities were now upholding specific activities that the state envisioned as necessary for its

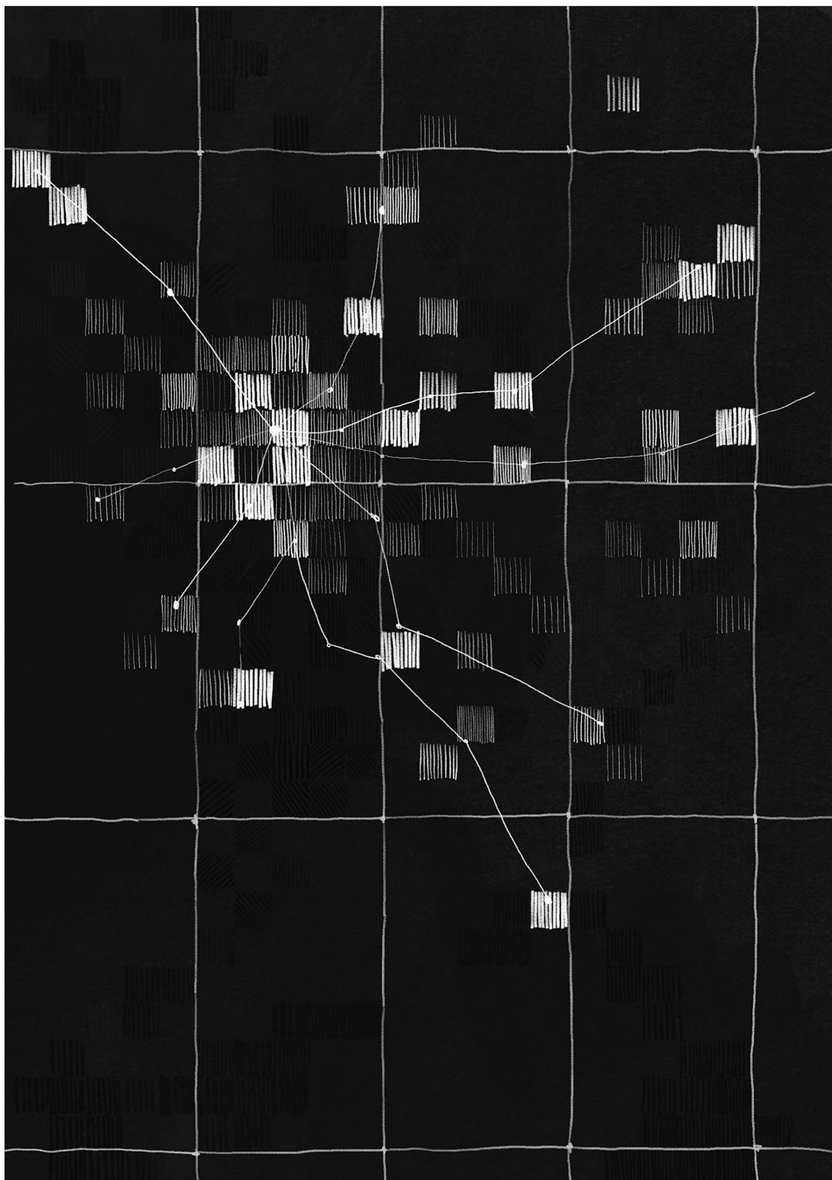

Fig. 4.2 State territorial integrity. Illustration by Natalia Batrakova

development: mainly, economic growth and technological innovations. This is hardly anything new. While the discussion on the contemporary neoliberalization of universities emphasizes the closer ties between (capitalist) economies and the role of universities in this regard, this "university working for the state economy" logic is reminiscent of administrative practices from the Soviet Union, where universities were essential for Soviet technological modernization and labor training. I discussed it in more detail in Chap. 2. The reform change in contemporary Russia has resulted in a more nuanced and crafted network of universities with different institutional statuses within the state.

But it is precisely this new, more nuanced and differentiated institutional composition of Russian universities that allows us to look beyond the omnipresent (Russian) state in our methodological gaze and notice the workings of global neoliberalization in its various forms. As I argue, the newly designed roles for the universities were an attempt by the state to manage the conditions and participate in the global processes of neoliberal modernization based on the rationality of competitiveness.

Previous research has already shown how the growing competitiveness made universities think of their status, branding, and reputation. Universities increasingly develop their unique brands "to differentiate themselves from other universities with which they are presumably competing" (Drori et al. 2015: 99). Stratification and status competition have become prevalent dynamics among universities worldwide (Blanco and Metcalfe 2020), which attempt to construct their legitimacy and prestige through the use of quality emblems or institutional websites. The branding aims to build the reputation of a university understood in terms of "excellence," "world-class," and "innovation" (Aula and Tienari 2011). Branding has become more than marketing and identity-creation tools: nowadays, it is also a political game of increasing the universities' status (Aula et al. 2015).

The Russian state has played a crucial role in building university statuses, changing the compositions of authoritarian governance by adhering to the neoliberal rationalities of competitiveness. The roles attributed to different groups of universities show how they are divided to respond to the processes of global neoliberalization: for example, federal and pillar universities are assigned the role of national and regional economic development, while national research universities are intended to compete internationally. The (authoritarian) state attempts to manage the conditions of global neoliberalization and competition—and, consequently,

impose this logic of neoliberal governance and competitiveness on the universities themselves.

Different research has shown that various states, whether authoritarian or not, take an active role in managing international competitiveness. Performance-based funding systems are often introduced to stimulate universities' research outputs in global competition within knowledge economies (Hicks 2012). High-performing institutions are rewarded, while lesser-performing universities are economically incentivized to improve (i.e., allocating resources based on performance targets). Performance-based funding mechanisms deepen the structural inequalities within the university sector and "recast national higher education systems as competitive institutional meritocracies" (Mateos-González and Boliver 2019: 145). These structural inequalities in the university sector also contribute to the reinforcement of regional inequalities within the Moscow-centered Russian state.

In order to more closely illuminate the different relations between the state and global neoliberalization, I analyze two state projects mentioned above: Project 5-100 and the status of pillar universities.

In Search of Greatness in the Global Competitive Environment: Project 5-100

In order to show how the search for excellence in the contemporary competitive field of science is connected to the search for greatness in world politics, and how neoliberal ideas of competitiveness contributed to the neo-imperial visions of the state to restore Russia's status as a great power, I analyze one state initiative: Project 5-100.

Project 5-100 initially started to take shape in May 2012 in accordance with Presidential Decree of the Russian Federation No. 599, "On Measures to Realize State Policy in the Sphere of Education and Science." There were several of these presidential decrees under Putin's third presidency, often referred to as the May Decrees. These decrees were a somewhat comprehensive plan for Russia's transformation under neoliberal globalization, simultaneously aiming at increasing state capacity in the Russian authoritarian regime (see, e.g., Ross et al. 2022). The president and the personalized regulations considerably shaped the Russian university system: according to Gel'man (2021: 1094), the personal patronage of Putin enabled the project to seek and maintain its funding. Project 5–100 was

launched in 2013 and had been driven by the Ministry of Higher Education and Science until it came to an end in 2020.

The main aim of the project was declared as "maximizing the competitive position of a group of leading Russian universities in the global market of educational services and research programs" (5–100… n.d.). The name of the program refers to the attempt to get at least five universities into the top 100 in three international rankings: Quacquarelli Symonds, Times Higher Education, and Academic Ranking of World Universities. For this project, 21 universities were chosen to participate (15 universities in 2013 and an additional 6 universities in 2015) (Froumin and Zagirova 2020).

The emergence of university rankings is closely connected to the ideology of competition, actualized by the economic incentives attached to the production of academic knowledge. In order to position themselves more favorably in the competitive higher education "market" and research institutions, universities strive to acquire and maintain a status of excellence: rankings have become the mechanism to produce and compete for such status globally (Brankovic et al. 2018). The rankings are not only technocratic but also a (geo)political tool: the competition for ranking positions is a political and even geopolitical struggle in the global higher education to ensure the university's or state's status (Kauppi and Erkkilä 2011; Hazelkorn 2018). The reference model for evaluating the performance of universities across the world became the American top universities, which fails to acknowledge the contextualized academic realities and demands for higher education in different places (Erkkilä 2016: 178). Sirke Mäkinen (2021) analyzed Russia's participation in the global university rankings and concludes that the meanings of "success" in them are intertwined with a nationalist and conservative agenda. Participation in global neoliberalization and modernization, even in the field of higher education, is often understood in state-bounded nationalistic terms.

Project 5-100 illustrates how the global neoliberal imperatives in the field of higher education were initially adopted by the Russian state, not by the universities. By making a visible reference to the global trends of such excellence initiatives and the competitive environment of contemporary science, Project 5-100 argued for the leading role of the government in designing this project:

> Excellence initiatives, which are similar to the Russian Academic Excellence Project 5–100, are now among the in-vogue imperatives of many governments. Their aim is to better the system of higher education and raise the position of their national universities in the global rankings. (5–100… n.d.)

The nationalistic imaginaries were present throughout the promotional materials of this project. I closely went through its webpage and foundational documents: the project and the scientific excellence it presumably propagates are overwhelmingly narrated in nationalistic terms. The homepage (5–100… n.d.) exclaimed "World-Class Russian Education!". This becomes even more visible in the project promotion video (5–100… n.d.): instead of images of universities or any other signifiers of "science" or "higher education," the video starts by showing the Kremlin and its surroundings on a summer day, territorializing the project and the search for excellence within "Russia," which is narrowly equated with the political center and centralized state apparatus. Excellence is first and foremost pursued for the state, rather than for science and research, although the video then proceeds with short summaries about each university chosen for the project (Fig. 4.3).

The entanglements between neoliberalism and nationalism have long been observed in different scholarships. For example, Anni Kangas (2013: 572) argued that "the discourse of nation [can] function as a mechanism furthering the expansion of a neoliberal market civilization" and that this involves "challenging the contradiction between (economic) nationalism and neoliberalism." In (Russian) universities, the discourses of nation and neoliberalism are entangled to mutual advantage. Higher education and research are understood within national imaginaries of "Russia," although the aim is also to enhance its status outside by becoming "world-class" in the international arena. Such imaginaries of excellence are more tightly connected to the idea of a state's status; the idea of research and higher education becomes a vehicle in the attempt to restore the state's prestige and "greatness." Promoting universities' participation in international academic competition aims at positioning the Russian state favorably among other states.

Excellence is affective not only through its nationalistic imaginaries but also through its visual and verbal language of greatness and prestige. I scrolled through the promotional materials of the project further. The symbol of Project 5–100 portrays the hand-written number "5" in red ink, reminiscent of the highest school grade. The website is filled with the language of triumph, glory, and praise:

> The Russian system of higher professional education, which *boasts* universities with centuries-old traditions – as well as reflecting the *pride* of their own

Fig. 4.3 Excelling "Russia." Illustration by Natalia Batrakova

> *formidable* academic reputations – now faces an *arduous* task: how to keep up with the current pace of international development while not undermining its own *excellent* academic *antecedents*. (5–100… n.d., my emphases)

Neoliberal modernization of the higher education system is even compared to the space race: "The launch of Project 5–100 sent a new satellite into orbit to assist in the process of revamping Russian higher education and making it more contemporary." The space metaphor connects to the ideas of progress, human exploration, and the grandeur of the project, while also attempting to evoke historical memory of the Sputnik satellite, which symbolized the excellence of Soviet science during the Cold War. The promotional video narrates how 50 universities "fought" for their place in the project, with only 21 succeeding. This narrative positions competition at the center of the project, equating excellence with victories for only a few.

The state has undertaken not only affective but also material efforts in pursuit of this excellence. The 21 universities selected for the project received additional funds to implement changes in their research activities, enabling them to enter international rankings. The funding was substantial: annually, universities in the project received 9–13 billion rubles (120–175 million euros in 2015) (Guskov et al. 2017: 6). The 21 universities were divided into three subgroups, with exact funding depending on each university's position within those subgroups (Trubnikova 2020: 73). The state funding was distributed by another governing body—the Council that supervised Project 5–100. The official description of this process illustrates how universities were incentivized to focus on activities that the state expected from them:

> The universities participating in the project report on how their "excellence programs" are faring to the International Council and the Russian Ministry of Education and Science. Subsidies are given to the universities whose action plans (roadmaps) have been successful. Also, in order to get these subsidies, the university has to demonstrate the ability to garner co-financing funds from non-budgetary sources. [...] The Council goes over the universities' reports, suggests how much money is needed to follow through on everything, and then communicates what it thinks ought to be done to the Russian Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation in terms of continued support of the project's selected universities. (5–100… n.d.)

When the idea of excellence in the international competitive environment is bolstered by the affective imaginaries of state performance, it becomes reminiscent of the "great power" rhetoric.

Excellence, of course, is easier to narrate affectively than to produce. Despite the state's efforts to intervene in academic knowledge production and stimulate research excellence, the universities' activities were mostly declarative in this regard. "The rectors agreed [to participate in the project]. It was not clear what would happen in a few years and what results should be accomplished, but the money is already being given now," shared one of the professors from a Project 5-100 university.

The declaration of the pursuit of excellence became a game that university rectors were ready to play to secure additional funding and status for their institutions. The practice of reporting allowed rectors to obtain and maintain state funds through Project 5–100. One of the interviewed research participants mentioned how reporting is a "technical" procedure that might have little to do with the actual content of the work:

> In the end, we know how to do reporting, everyone knows. The main goal is to get money. How to spend [*osvoit'*] it and how to report is just a technical issue. Well, that's how we've always lived. (Artem, February 14, 2020)

Ekaterina Trubnikova (2020: 72) suggested that some universities merely "imitated" spending resources on enhancing science, research, and education. Some even signed contracts with consulting firms involved in creating these international rankings (Chirikov 2022), which became one of the strategies to meet the required criteria of Project 5–100. According to some sources (and the rumors I heard during the fieldwork), the project included corruption schemes (Trubnikova 2020).

State supervision of the project also enhanced authoritarian governance over state universities. The universities in Project 5–100, while receiving financial and status privileges, became even more accountable to the Ministry of Higher Education and Science, further stripping them of their institutional autonomy. To participate in the project, many universities changed their charters, strengthening the rector's position while eliminating the power of the Academic Council. This reduced university autonomy and academic freedom, consolidating the vertical power structure and the power of university administrations. Moreover, Natalia Forrat (2016) argued that different support programs for leading universities have coincided with the desire to prevent young people's political mobilization and opposition: additional financial resources from the state commit universities to suppressing anti-regime demonstrations.

Helping Regional Economies: Pillar Universities

In this section, I turn my gaze to a group of higher education institutions across the Russian territory that have come to be known as "pillar universities." Pillar universities represent yet another status of Russian universities, actualized by the state in its project of classifying higher education institutions, often across the periphery. By analyzing how state regulations and university activities enabled this status, I attempt to show further entanglements of global neoliberalization with state authoritarian governance.

The pillar university project was initiated in May 2015 by the Ministry of Education and Science (Zmiyak et al. 2020: 572) and was announced by Minister Dmitry Livanov himself (Ovchynnikova 2018: 41). The creation of pillar universities became the second phase of reforming higher education in Russia. The first phase focused on creating a network of federal universities, which by 2015 was almost complete, with ten new federal universities established (Ovchynnikova 2018: 41). The creation of pillar universities became one program within the National Project "Education"; the Ministry created the Council for Implementation of the Pillar Universities Development Program (Ministry of Science and Higher Education of Russia n.d.-a). Thus, pillar universities were subject to the centralized authority of the Russian government (Fig. 4.4).

While the Project 5–100 group aimed to succeed in international rankings and accumulate academic and national prestige, pillar universities were created with a different goal: to improve the quality of education across Russian regions and make higher education responsive to the needs of the regional economies (Zmiyak et al. 2020: 572). Pillar universities have been referred to as "regional flagships actively involved in the regional economy" (Zmiyak et al. 2020: 572).

Pillar status has been applied to 33 universities across the Russian state. These universities were excluded from the competition for "excellence" in research and were instead envisioned by the state to support the regional economy (Ministry of Science and Higher Education of Russia n.d.-a). The role of these universities has been guided by neoliberal rationalities, connecting higher education to the needs of the regional labor market and economic development (Ashwin 2020; Dönmez and Duman 2021: 4). The state project of neoliberal modernization aimed to increase the competitiveness and attractiveness of universities to students and regional partners in the higher education market. Initially, the program assumed a merger of several regional universities into one pillar university, creating an "intellectual city-forming enterprise" (Ovchynnikova 2018: 42). Following

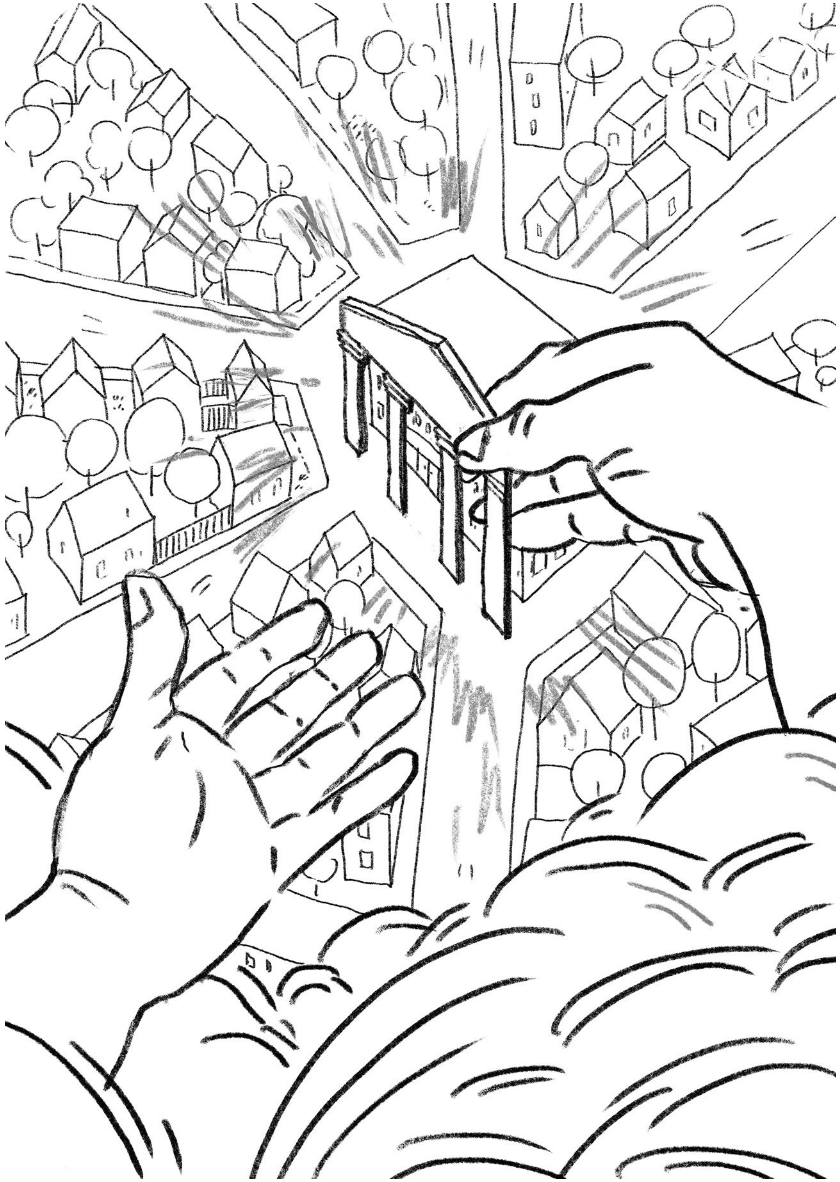

Fig. 4.4 Imposing status. Illustration by Natalia Batrakova

the logic of economies of scale, the larger university was expected to increase its inter-regional competitiveness and attractiveness to students, becoming more "effective" as an economic entity in its own right (Ovchynnikova 2018). This is the neoliberal rationality of upscaling: to become a more competitive actor in the field, one is expected to enlarge the scale of the enterprise (in this case, a university). However, this initial design was not implemented. During my fieldwork, I noticed that existing universities in the regions had acquired pillar university status without mergers.

In their design, pillar universities were supposed to support regional development and the economy in three ways: by educating a quality labor force for the region; conducting research important for regional socioeconomic development; and developing research activities "as the most important source of the knowledge-driven economy" (Zmiyak et al. 2020: 572). Solving the problems of socioeconomic development in the Russian regions was seen as the main goal of the project by the government, which set the universities' lines of action (Ministry of Science and Higher Education of Russia n.d.-b). As Dmitry Afanasf'ev, a Vice-Minister of Higher Education and Science, commented in 2018:

> The goal of the project is to integrate universities into the regional agenda and ensure their active participation in solving the problems of socioeconomic development of the regions of the Russian Federation. (Ministry of Science and Higher Education of Russia n.d.-b)

In this new role set by the state, a university is not only seen as an institution that accumulates and transmits knowledge and educates students, but also creates a favorable environment for regional development and minimizes the drain of young people from peripheral regions to the center (Ovchynnikova 2018: 43). A pillar university was expected to become a development hub, connecting the best students and graduates within the region, developing a network of professional connections with business enterprises, and becoming a center for generating "new knowledge, products, and entrepreneurial initiatives" (Ovchynnikova 2018: 49). The pillar universities were thus designed to play a crucial role in increasing the competitiveness of the Russian economy through science and innovation. By connecting to regional economic development, the universities were expected to serve the state's interests in modernizing Russian higher education institutions.

Control over universities' activities and the managed competition by the state were further enabled by additional federal funding to the institutions that "won" the status of a pillar university. Overall, the federal government allocated 5.3 billion rubles (74.6 million euros in December 2019) of additional funding to those acquiring the status of a pillar university (Ministry of Science and Higher Education of Russia n.d.-b). From the beginning, the project of pillar universities was formulated as a competition between universities, both for the status and for the additional funding. Pillar universities were referred to as "winners of the competitive selection of educational institutions of higher education for financial state support" (Ministry of Science and Higher Education of Russia n.d.-a). Moreover, pillar universities were classified into three groups according to their level of "effectiveness," which was related to the amount they received in additional state subsidies:

> The decision regarding the distribution of financial resources is one of the control mechanisms for the implementation of the National Project "Education." The distribution of universities into three groups provides for the subsequent provision of state support to universities, differentiated by the amount of subsidy allocated by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation. (Ministry of Science and Higher Education of Russia n.d.-a)

The idea of the pillar university is hardly a unique invention of the Russian government. Pillar universities were created based on the idea of the "triple helix," which refers to the interaction of the government, business, and universities in the knowledge economy (Zmiyak et al. 2020: 575). According to the logic of the triple helix, which became one of the manifestations of universities' neoliberalization, universities become important actors in developing regional economies and should "leverage the emerging knowledge economy in the regions" (Drucker and Goldstein 2007: 20; see also Smith 2007 and Etzkowitz 2008). Such economic development programs with universities might include university–industry partnerships, technology transfer programs, and curricula aimed at meeting the needs of local knowledge-based industries (Drucker and Goldstein 2007: 21). In this light, the status of pillar universities was part of the state's project of neoliberal modernization of higher education institutions. This modernization was envisioned to secure centralized control over universities' activities in the state's attempts to enhance the competitiveness of the Russian economy (Fig. 4.5).

Fig. 4.5 The triple helix. Illustration by Natalia Batrakova

During my fieldwork, I paid specific attention to three pillar universities: Ulyanovsk State University, Petrozavodsk State University, and Togliatti State University. The presence of this new status was visible in the material and digital environments of these universities. Upon approaching the main campuses or entering the halls, one was greeted by various banners and reminders of the universities' pillar status. When browsing the universities' webpages, one necessarily noticed these mentions again. My knowledge about the current state of different peripheral universities, now pronounced as pillar, was greatly informed by my presence in these environments during research trips and my undergraduate studies in Ulyanovsk, as well as various discussions with staff members and students from these universities. Below, I specifically draw from my conversations with Artem, Alexey, and Daria from Petrozavodsk State University; Yulia from Ulyanovsk State University; and Katya, a graduate from Pskov State University.

Pillar status was actively used by university administrations to increase the attractiveness of their institutions to students and partners in the higher education market. For example, on the website of Petrozavodsk State University, acquiring pillar university status was referred to as winning a competition: "Petrozavodsk State University became one of the winners of the competition for the creation of pillar universities" (Petrozavodsk State University n.d.).

Many people in the field connected the status of a pillar university with the creation of a brand. Yulia from Ulyanovsk directly mentioned how pillar university status is "a brand." Darya from Petrozavodsk, besides funding, also mostly referred to the "status" that a pillar university receives. Alexey from Petrozavodsk shared the opinion that upon acquiring pillar university status, "the authority of the university has grown here in Karelia[1] over the past three years."

Indeed, universities used this status quite extensively in their branding campaigns. Ulyanovsk State University, for example, referred to this status during its admission campaign. In 2020, when a new campaign started, I saw several banners attracting students to apply to Ulyanovsk State University: "A pillar university of the region!" exclaimed the banner near the university entrance. When browsing the website of Petrozavodsk State

[1] Petrozavodsk is the capital of the Republic of Karelia in northwestern Russia. Accordingly, Alexey mentions how Petrozavodsk State University has increased its authority in Karelia—the administrative and cultural region where the university is located.

University, I noticed several mentions of the university being "pillar." The homepage portrayed a big banner announcing the university as "the pillar university of the Republic of Karelia" at the very top. The official logo of the university now includes a line saying "a pillar university." Even the hyperlink connecting to the digest of the university reads "Digest of PetrSU – the pillar university of Karelia." Pillar university status has been extensively used by the university administration as a status-producing mechanism to increase the university's attractiveness on the higher education market and assist regional development.

At the same time, besides being a branding tool, many academics referred to the status of a pillar university as something empty—lacking material and qualitative effects on university activities. Academic workers often raised concerns about the lack of material resources at universities and the poor working conditions, which do not seem to improve under the new modernization projects. I myself experienced these affective paradoxes between the proclaimed status and the visible shortages of material resources at universities. When visiting Togliatti State University in 2019, I observed a large banner near the entrance of the university campus proclaiming it as a pillar university of the region. Looking back to 2019, I remember my confusion: I saw quite old, Soviet-looking buildings with seemingly no renovations in years (Fig. 4.6). During my fieldwork, I often heard how peripheral universities lacked resources: how technological equipment is limited or how built environments are not renovated. "The buildings are in a terrible state. Obviously, you are not thinking about creativity when the ceiling falls on you," says Katya, a graduate of Pskov State University.

Different academic workers I talked to in the field made quite ironic remarks about how the status does not seem to build anything except the "empty attractiveness" of a university. For example, Artem from Petrozavodsk expressed his opinion that a regional university is always a pillar university, as it is often the only university in the region providing a wide range of degree programs. Why should a university then even compete for this status?

> This story [about pillar universities] is very funny. Well, how can it not be a pillar university when it is the only one in the republic [*here, Artem means the Republic of Karelia*]? (Artem, February 14, 2020)

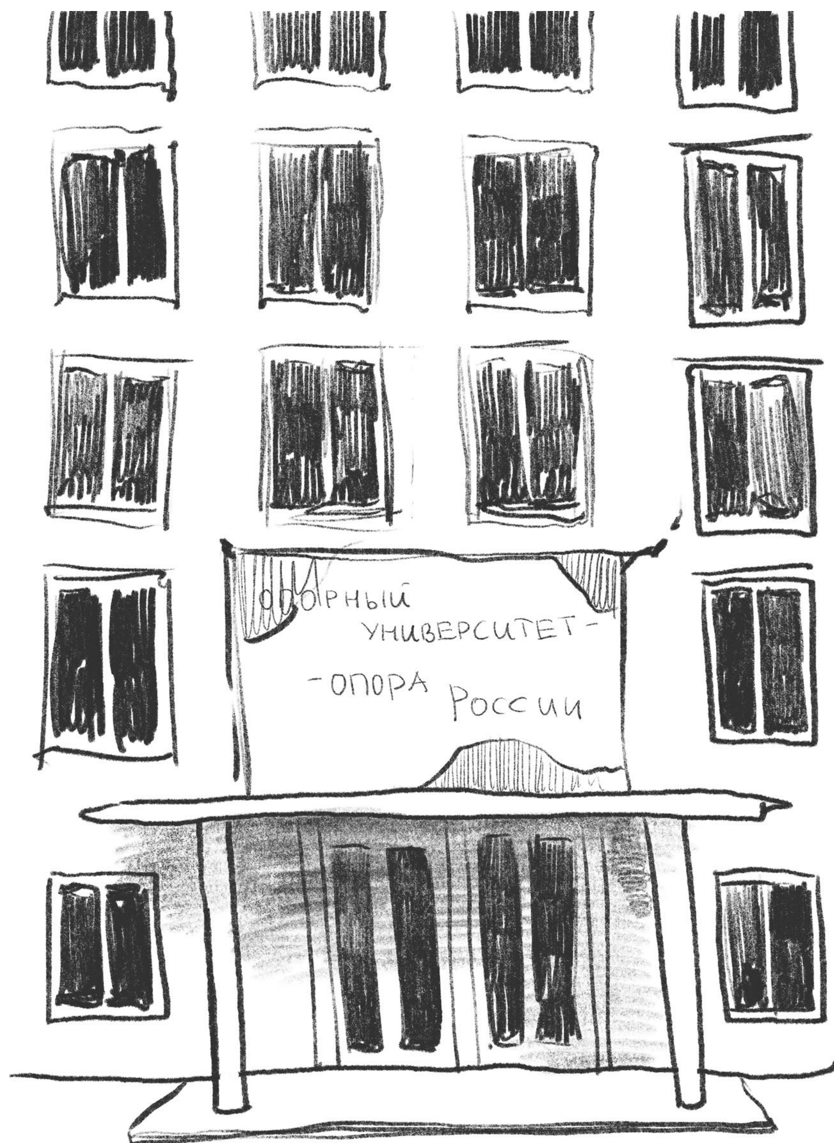

Fig. 4.6 The pillar university. Illustration by Natalia Batrakova

Artem continues:

> It doesn't give students anything. In any case, if I continued to work now, to give lectures and so on, nothing would have changed in my activities as a teacher and in the activities of students. Maybe it gave something to someone somewhere, in the form of a bonus to the rector as the rector of a pillar university or a better car to the garage. (Artem, February 14, 2020)

Artem expresses his skepticism about the usefulness of such a status for the everyday lives of university teachers and students. New regulations and the distribution of funding are seen as a power play where all the benefits remain "at the top," for example, at the rector's disposal, while nothing changes in the activities of teachers and students. His view again highlights the subjective gap within the university as an organization: between academic staff and students on one hand, and the university leadership where resources are presumably accumulated on the other.

Alexey, a colleague of Artem from Petrozavodsk, also talks about "pillar university" being a signifier of "emptiness": "Many people perceive a 'pillar university' as a kind of mantra that means very little." Thus, in the eyes of some academics, such status does not change the state of affairs; it is an innovation that promises to make things better but does not necessarily do so. Artem was sure that the status is used for reporting and prestige, which in this case means building up the attractiveness of the institution (either in the eyes of the state to secure federal resources or in the eyes of students) in the higher education market:

> What this status is other than reporting and status as such, I honestly don't know. I can talk about visible effects. The visible effects are zero. Except for a banner that says "PetrSU is a pillar university" and where people can take pictures. (Artem, February 14, 2020)

Academics fail to see the substance of this status, leading them to make ironic remarks about these new innovative, yet ambiguous state regulations in higher education. As Alexey recalls:

> When this ranking of universities was introduced, ordinary universities, pillar universities, research universities, federal universities, super-universities of St Petersburg and Moscow, for a long time we could not understand ourselves what "pillar" means: we are leaning on someone's pillar, or someone is leaning on us. (Alexey, June 15, 2020)

Being skeptical about the state's efforts to orchestrate the processes of neoliberal modernization, the academic workers still attempted to re-imagine what this new university role might mean—beyond the neoliberal rationality of competitiveness and the state's interference. Helping local economies was truly a concern for many in the field: the increasing gap between "rich" Moscow and "poor" peripheries has been a point of resistance in Putin's Russia (Tóth-Czifra 2021).

This became evident to me when I was in contact with different university employees from Petrozavodsk State University. Petrozavodsk is the capital of the Republic of Karelia in the Russian North-West. When I asked Alexey from Petrozavodsk State University what a pillar university is, his first definition stated that a pillar university is primarily formed around a "regional dimension." According to Darya, a pillar university is also characterized primarily by its work in developing the regional economy through cooperation with local authorities and businesses. What else is there for the residents of a region that suffers from post-Soviet de-industrialization if the university remains

> […] the largest city-forming enterprise in Petrozavodsk. If you count the students, teachers, and administration, then not a single factory, of which there are three and a half left, can be compared with the university. So, in this sense, yes, we are also "pillar." (Alexey, June 15, 2020)

Here, Alexey speaks of the economic value of the university within the region. Moreover, his bitter remark about disappearing regional industry ("not a single factory of which there are three and a half left") reveals concern about declining regional economic development. A similar concern was raised by Darya:

> Now we are actively concluding agreements with various enterprises, organizations, institutions, I don't know, even museums, in order to cooperate within the framework of these agreements, to somehow help the region's economy. (Darya, November 22, 2019)

Interestingly, territorial and economic disparities have been actualized precisely through the centralized authoritarian state governance over Russian territories, where the state redistributes resources unequally. The historical political and economic control of Moscow over the regions of Russia has been referred to as "internal colonization" (Etkind 2011). The

status of pillar universities, initially envisioned by the state to strengthen centralized control over regional universities, has taken the form of resistance against the consequences of such control by academic workers.

In 2023–2024, when I was finalizing my research, pillar universities as a government project were increasingly a thing of the past. However, the connection between universities and the national economy through competitive funding schemes continues. In 2022, the government announced a new competitive program of modernization for universities, "Priority 2030." Its aim is

> to form a broad group of universities that will become leaders in the creation of new scientific knowledge, technologies, and developments for implementation in the Russian economy and social sphere. (Prioritet 2030, n.d.)

Conclusion: Managing the International Neoliberal Competition

Project 5–100 illustrates the state's efforts to engage in the global competitive environment of scientific excellence, which has come to be understood in state-centric and nationalistic terms. Among the numerous institutional entities of universities, the state chose a specific group to produce controllable excellence and elevate the status of national science. Through Project 5–100, the state aimed to promote world-class research to restore Russia's status in global science (see also Fedotov and Vasetskaya 2016: 61; Mäkinen 2021).

Project 5–100 has not only enabled more effective state governance over these institutions but also created an infrastructure for participating in global scientific competition to promote national greatness. Neoliberal ideas of international competition between universities have become entwined with the goal of restoring Russia's great power status.

This nationalistic understanding of scientific excellence, coupled with the global environment of neoliberal competitiveness, can be interpreted as neo-imperial aspirations of the Russian state to reclaim its status as a great power. Therefore, I argue that the neo-imperial ambitions of the Russian state have been driven not only by its internal ideologies (as has been recently discussed) but should also be understood in relation to the international competitive environment fostered by global neoliberalization. The rationality of global competitiveness, understood in state-centered and nationalistic terms, contributes to the neo-imperial behaviors of states.

Pillar universities, in turn, were designated to aid Russian regional economic development by strengthening ties with local industries and businesses and producing a “quality labor force” for local labor markets. Following neoliberal rationality, the Russian state mimicked the global practice of limiting the role of universities to primarily serve the state’s economic development.

In order to manage the state's participation in the global competitive environment, the Russian government, when designing these groups of universities, applied the logic of competitiveness to the Russian universities themselves, but in an interesting way: universities are competing, but only within their own group. This has even been referred to as “stratification” with predetermined roles, as described in 2019 by Yaroslav Kuzminov, then rector of the Higher School of Economics:

> We have stratification [of universities] in Russia today. There are Moscow State University and St. Petersburg State University. There are federal universities. There are national research universities. There is a group of “5–100.” There are pillar universities. Certain benefits and rights are attached to each status, and each group is closed to new members. One of my colleagues, a young rector of a leading classical university, showed me the performance indicators of his university, which are higher than that of half of the National Research Universities, and asked: “How can I become a National Research University?” I didn’t know what to answer him. The competition for receiving the status of a national research university has passed, whether a new one will be announced is unknown. (Mironova 2019)

As Russian universities have been grouped according to their statuses, roles, and resources, they do not need to compete with each other across groups. From the state's perspective, it is convenient to assign some universities to compete “globally,” while others are incentivized and encouraged to serve regional economic development. The governance mechanism of state-assigned official statuses enables the state to exercise more control over the multiplicity of higher education institutions across Russian territory, thus managing the state’s spatiality.

The state actively participates in and manages the conditions of the global competitive environment prompted by neoliberal globalization. Competition materializes not only through the direct competition of universities in the “market.” Instead, the state exercises its bureaucratic and institutional power over Russian universities, shaping their participation in global neoliberal competition—both scientific and economic—while interpreting the outcomes of this competition in nationalistic terms.

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CHAPTER 5

Securitizing the Penetrative Neoliberalization: The Bologna Process

Introduction

The role of the state in managing globalized neoliberal modernization is visible not only through the reinforced institutional power over universities' activities and the newly designed matrix of university statuses and roles, as discussed in Chap. 4. The state's power in relation to neoliberal modernization also becomes evident through the political projects of internationalizing higher education. While in other chapters I primarily trace the institutional diffusion of globalized neoliberal reforms within the Russian higher education system, in this chapter, I focus on the direct encounters and global connections between penetrative neoliberal modernization and the (authoritarian) state.

Specifically, I focus on the Bologna Process, which can be considered "one of the main models for internationalizing higher education" (Figueroa 2010: 247) and has been referred to by a representative of the Russian expert community as "[t]he largest and most ambitious international education project in the history of humankind" (Kortunov 2019). Therefore, the Bologna Process is more than a set of reforms in the field of higher education; it is a political project that unfolds the relations between globalized neoliberal modernization and the Russian state—especially since the decision to join the Bologna Process was made by the

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I. Gataulina, *Neoliberal Authoritarianism: An Ethnography of Russian Universities*, Central and Eastern European Perspectives on International Relations,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-89451-0_5

Russian state in its goal to catch up with neoliberal modernization, contrary to the opposition of the academic communities.

By analyzing how the Bologna Process was adopted by the European Union and the Russian state to secure their leading positions in global competition, I demonstrate how the process became a site of power struggles. These struggles contributed to the securitized authoritarian state behavior with the expansion of the neoliberal project of the Bologna Process (Fig. 5.1). The main idea of this chapter is to illustrate the relations between the authoritarian state and the penetrative globalized processes of neoliberal modernization, manifested in Eurocentric terms.

Creating the Bologna Process: A Eurocentric Project of Neoliberal Modernization

The Bologna Process is a platform for pan-European cooperation in the field of higher education. The official framework of the Bologna Process was launched in 1999 when the Ministries of Education of 29 European states signed the Bologna Declaration—a nonbinding intergovernmental agreement at the Ministerial Conference in Bologna (Ministerial Conference Bologna 1999 n.d.). The Bologna Process continued multiple political events, discourses, and political decisions that aimed to integrate European states and create international European cooperation following the Second World War. The harmonized European Higher Education Area (EHEA) was formed in parallel with the enlargement of the European Union, and therefore with broader forces of economic, political, and social cooperation within Europe (Scott 2012: 1) (Fig. 5.2). Thus, unsurprisingly, the Bologna Process, initiated by EU institutions, was imagined as a *European* project first and foremost; however, it has materialized as a globalized project of neoliberal modernization in higher education, which I explore throughout this chapter.

The Bologna Process is many things. Beyond the harmonization of higher education systems, it is connected to other political and economic formations and acquires new actualizations. To trace the workings of globalized neoliberal modernization in academia, I specifically examined how the Bologna Process has been referred to as a neoliberal project in previous higher education scholarship (Hummel 2009; Kaya 2015; Evans 2018). One of the imaginaries behind the creation of the Bologna Process was the idea of increasing the competitiveness of European economies.

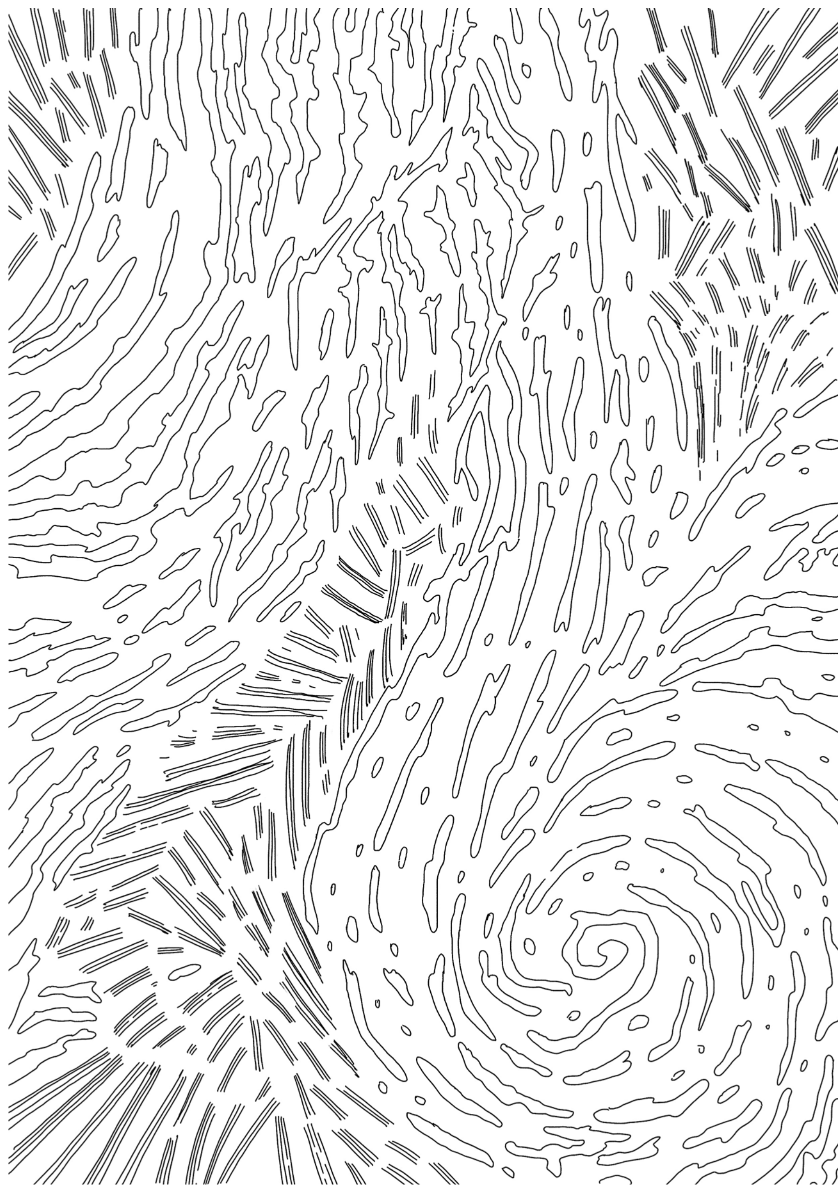

Fig. 5.1 Securitizing. Illustration by Natalia Batrakova

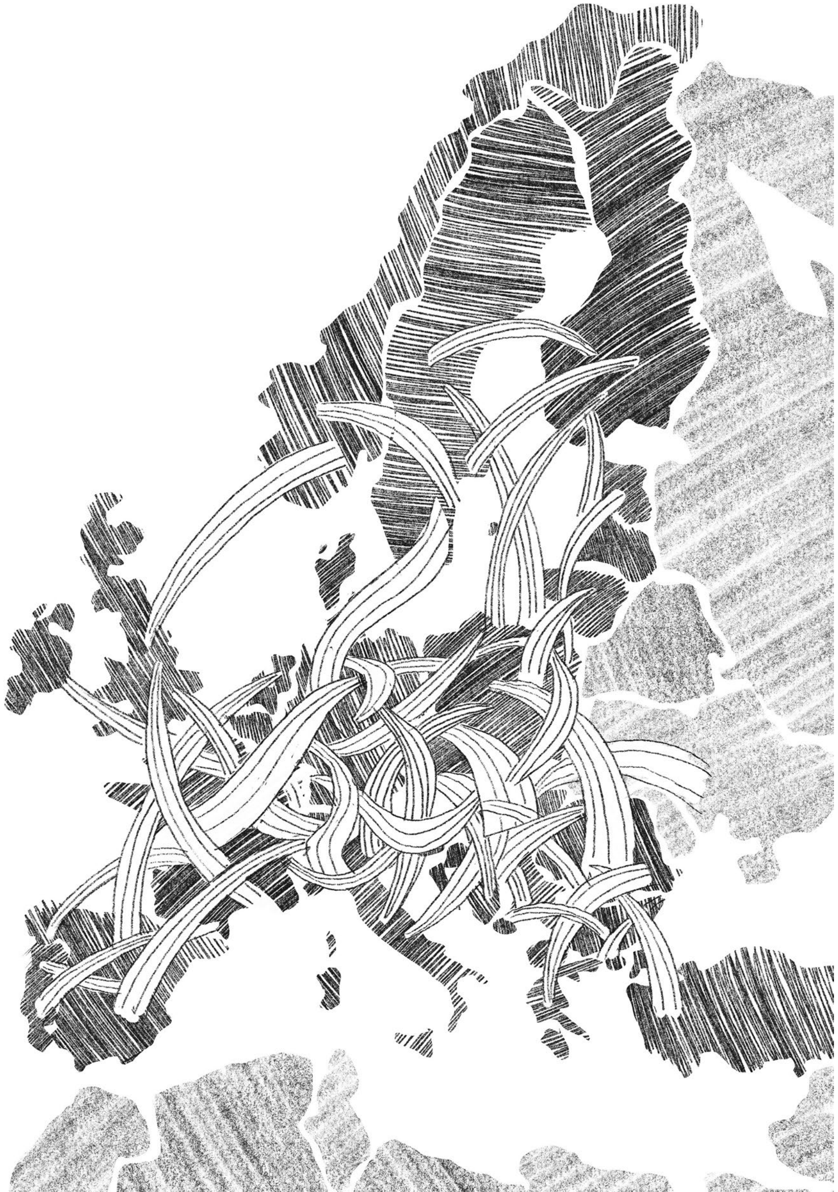

Fig. 5.2 Mobility. Illustration by Natalia Batrakova

The states that joined the Bologna Process were expected to make economic gains by aligning higher education with the needs of the labor market: "For all these countries, the main goal is to increase staff and students' mobility and to facilitate employability" (European Higher Education Area and Bologna Process n.d.).

The Bologna Process was designed to change university teaching according to the requirements of neoliberal New Public Management (Štech 2011). Study structures were to be adapted to more flexible and market-oriented profiles. The harmonized credit system of studies was intended to lead to the standardization of degrees across Europe and, subsequently, the mobility of the labor force between national markets. Higher education was subjected to external quality assurance controls. All these reforms envisioned a new role for standardized and commodified higher education as "an international educational currency that can be exchanged on the (European) qualifications market" (Brøgger 2019: 175). The harmonization of higher education across European states was supposed to increase the mobility of the labor force across national borders, strengthening a common economic area of the European Union and the Eurozone, and increasing employability (Bacevic 2014). Higher education became extensively commodified and marketized under the new policies of the Bologna Process (Štech 2011).

The idea of competitiveness in the Bologna Process was strongly territorialized around the category of "Europe." In the global competition of knowledge economies, the European Union aspired to become the most competitive one in the world (Poutanen 2022: 3; see also Jessop et al. 2008), and the Bologna Process was envisioned as a set of reforms on this path. When signing the Bologna Declaration, "29 countries expressed their willingness to commit to enhancing the competitiveness of the European Higher Education Area" (Ministerial conference Bologna 1999 n.d.), that is, the leading position of Europe in the world (Fejes 2008: 526). This leading position was to be ensured by adapting national economic systems (and universities, since they play an essential role in knowledge economies) to the challenges of an uncertain and constantly changing future. Those threats to the leading (economic) position could be handled "by fostering subjectivities (citizens) who are flexible, mobile and adaptable" (ibid.). Therefore, the Bologna Process became imagined as an aspiration for Europe to keep its leading position in global competition through neoliberal reforms in higher education.

The connection of the Bologna Process to efforts at sustaining Europe's "leading position" allows us to characterize it as a hegemonic and Eurocentric project. The hegemony of the project is enabled through the

process of standardization and harmonization of higher education (e.g., credits, degrees, and qualification frameworks) and has allowed the Bologna Process to gain power internationally and spread its influence around its member states and beyond (Brøgger 2019). These standards of university education are not international per se but became international through the process of "interlocking" standards (Brøgger 2019: 175): adopting one standard implies adopting all accompanying standards within the reform, which has enabled the circulation of the Bologna Process standards in new contexts. The hegemonic composition of the European Bologna Process is, thus, accomplished through soft governance and the states' consent to adhere to "best practices" in higher education neoliberal modernization (Figueroa 2010: 255).

This consent to the Bologna Process infrastructure has produced compliant subjects when policymakers and university administration have tried to convince assessors of "Bologna compatibility" of their institutions. Pauline Ravinet (2008: 354) suggests that "it is no longer possible to create national higher education policies that are anti-Bologna" which Berit Karseth and Tone Dyrdal Solbrekke (2016: 216) refer to as the "Bologna game." As a hegemonic project, the Bologna Process was influential across the world beyond its member states: the Bologna Process has produced global ruptures since the model has been hugely influential around the world (see, e.g., Zmas 2015). The neoliberal reforms of higher education under the European Bologna Process traveled across contexts and temporarily composed the Bologna Process as a hegemonic project.

"Bologna compatibility" raises the issue of the project's Eurocentricity. Francis Espinoza Figueroa (2010: 248) argues that the Eurocentricity of the Bologna Process is rooted in "narrativizing history" within Europe as the creator of progress understood solely in terms of capitalist culture. Therefore, the "European Bologna language" hardly recognizes any other contexts and worldviews of development; instead, the Bologna Process is presented as "a force for good" which implies the civilizing discourse (Figueroa 2010: 255).

The Bologna Process Anniversary: Celebrating and Reimagining a Eurocentric Project

In order to detail the recomposition of the Bologna Process as a hegemonic, Eurocentric project, I analyzed a specific event: the Bologna Process anniversary. This event took place on June 24–25, 2019, in the city of Bologna. The anniversary was planned as a big and festive event titled "Bologna Process beyond 2020: Fundamental values of EHEA." It

was a celebration followed by a conference dedicated to the 20th anniversary of the signing of the Bologna Declaration, which started the Bologna Process and created the EHEA in 1999. The celebration and the conference gathered both government officials and academics to discuss the priorities and challenges in contemporary higher education and pan-European cooperation in order to set the agenda of cooperation in the new decade of the 2020s. The Bologna Process anniversary was framed around the goals "to identify important future challenges for universities and their role in society" (Bologna Process Anniversary n.d.). The event set the critical and broad task of identifying the role of the universities in society and the role of the Bologna Process within that. The conference included a policy-making dimension as it was seen as "an agenda-setting contribution to the design of the Bologna Process in the decades to come" (ibid.). The event's global geography was emphasized: "Over a thousand participants from over seventy countries" participated in the event (ibid.). The mass character of the event in terms of participation and its agenda-setting goals suggests that the anniversary recomposed some of the hegemonic and Eurocentric features of the Bologna Process. This meant strengthening its temporal ("in the decades to come") and topological ("over seventy countries") hegemonic composition.

The city and university of Bologna were sites where the heterogeneous components were brought together in the event. A lot of effort was put into promoting the event: the website, conference proceedings, a promotion video, video recordings of the event, and a photo gallery. This, in turn, prompts attention to their visual and auditive aspects. Besides my virtual attendance at the event, I conducted interviews with three participants; it helped me understand the place and role of this event as a site where the Bologna Process gets recomposed as a Eurocentric formation. One of the participants, Pavel Sorokin, who was a keynote speaker at one of the roundtables and works as a senior research fellow at the Institute of Education, Higher School of Economics (Moscow, Russia), stressed that this anniversary invited academics to design the agenda for the development of the Bologna Process—a power he said that was previously anchored almost exclusively to "bureaucrats."

Since this event has been widely promoted and thoroughly documented online, its presence in the digital space allowed me, as a researcher, to become a part of it while trying to interpret its publicly accessible materials. The digital components of the Bologna Process anniversary event connected me, a somewhat outsider, to the Bologna Process in a relational

manner. The assemblage expanded further and included me in these spatial relations; without the digital accessibility of the Bologna Process anniversary, I might not have been included in this event, since other events had been proven difficult to get into (Fig. 5.3).[1]

I started my exploration of the event by going to its official website. While the city of Bologna was the physical location of the anniversary, I, as a researcher, was able to experience my own version of the Bologna Process anniversary by scrolling the webpages and looking at all the recorded presentations. I was able to visualize the festive part of the celebration by looking at the photos and by reading publications from the event. It was my field: unable to travel to Bologna myself, I browsed the website, read the proceedings, listened to the presentations, looked at photos, watched videos, and, thus, had a possibility to experience the event. Certain experiences were definitely lacking: I missed the embodied experiences of being physically in Bologna on hot days in June surrounded by medieval Italian architecture and a spirit of academic celebration. But for me—and for other people who visited the website over these couple of years after the event—the website connected us online. It assured me as an outsider about the significance of the event as it was disseminated beyond the attendees. The website expanded the immediate territorial reach of the event: it can be seen as a digital "hub" of elements that make up the Bologna Process anniversary in the digital space.

The Bologna Process as a Eurocentric project was visibly recomposed in various public materials around the anniversary. The Bologna Process started in 1999 as a part of a wider European integration process: in the context of the rising Euroscepticism (see, e.g., Call and Jolly 2020), the organizers of the 2019 event specified that "it is hard to imagine that such an initiative would be taken and as widely followed today, under the present international conditions" (Bologna Process beyond 2020 n.d.).

It is not coincidental that the physical location of the Bologna Process anniversary event played an important role. The website marks the event of signing the Bologna Declaration in Bologna in 1999 as the beginning of the Bologna Process and "the great movement it started" (Bologna Process beyond 2020 n.d.). In the promotional video of the event, the

[1] I also tried to participate in one of the BFUG meetings but was informed that they were open only for the members of official delegations and the accredited press.

Fig. 5.3 Connecting to the celebration online. Illustration by Natalia Batrakova

connection to the "beginning"[2] of the Bologna Process is made again: while the screen shows "1999" and "29 countries signed the Bologna Process declaration," the voice narrates about the hard and efficient work behind the Bologna Process that made its future possible. Scenes of the old city of Bologna return the viewer again to the important spatial location where the Bologna Process "began." The city of Bologna itself plays a role in reinforcing this Eurocentric project: gathering in this specific location contributed to intensifying relations between the past, the present, and the future of the Bologna Process, through the temporal-spatial matrix of its existence. Returning to the city 20 years after the signing of the Bologna Declaration in order to think of the future of this project produces a series of meanings. The anniversary of the Bologna Process strengthens the temporal connections between the past and the future, striving to transcend time. In this narrative, the Bologna Process is actualized as ahistorical, existing throughout times, and universal; the European Bologna Process becomes a universal point of reference in time and place.

The framework of celebration also contributed to recomposing the Eurocentric project: Figueroa (2010: 248) argues how Eurocentric strategies include the idea of "congratulating itself for progress." Framing the event as a celebration intensified its affective force: a celebration is presumed to affect participants with feelings of joy and pleasure as well as to communicate the value, significance, or magnitude of a particular occasion (Fig. 5.4). The proceedings of the event reproduce the importance of the Bologna Process as a political endeavor—a movement that is "a precious legacy" and, thus, needs to be "cherished and honored":

> There was every reason to celebrate this great initiative [the Bologna Process] and the movement it started. […] [T]he European Higher Education Area is a precious legacy, to be cherished and honored, an accomplishment of the past as well as a promise for the future; which finely characterizes what higher education itself should be and should do. (Bologna Process beyond 2020 n.d.)

The framing of the event as a celebration intensified the idea of the success of the Bologna Process. Stefania Giannini, Deputy Director-General for Education at UNESCO, in her welcoming address at the anniversary

[2] The Bologna Declaration was indeed an important event within the Bologna Process; but as one of many. The Bologna Declaration as its *essential* "beginning" is constructed within political discourses around the Bologna Process.

Fig. 5.4 Celebration. Illustration by Natalia Batrakova

proclaimed how the Bologna Process "promoted a remarkable transformation" and became "an achievement of higher education area" (Stefania Giannini 2019). While talking with a participant after the event, I noticed how this discourse of success was reproduced again.

> Actually, I took part last June in this Bologna 20th anniversary, a conference in Bologna, Italy. And I think that the Bologna Process has really been a success story, within the European Union. (Julia, October 8, 2019)

The atmosphere of celebration was reinforced by the promotion materials. For example, the promotion video (Bologna Process Anniversary 2019 2019) published before the event complemented the affective experience of celebration through music, images, and discourses. One of the first elements that viewers encounter in the video is its music. Music has the ability to create an affective experience and influence the perception of contextual information (Swift 2012). The background track in the promotion video is an orchestral theme, which, according to the producer, is "[e]pic & smoothly anthemic large orchestral theme with choir" (Galaxies Collide n.d.). Together with a smooth timbre of a male voice, the audio component of this video shapes an atmosphere of solemnity and festivity, thus, reinforcing the affect of celebration.

Inquiring what exactly was being celebrated at the event allowed me to analyze the mechanisms of recomposing the Bologna Process as a Eurocentric project. During the event, some participants strongly identified the Bologna Process with "European values" and "Europeanness" itself. For example, the representative of the Council of Europe specified that the institutional autonomy of universities as a key principle of the Bologna Process strengthens democracy, which is "a part of what we are as Europeans" (Roundtable—Session 1 2019).

The Eurocentricity of the Bologna Process was strengthened in the event by making temporal connections between the past, present, and future and constructing the process within a discourse of continuity of the European academic tradition. The promotional video shows changing visuals of university studies from contemporary to medieval Europe. The images of contemporary students and professors are followed by images of medieval bas-reliefs portraying students in class at the university in Bologna. Next in the video, students, teachers, and researchers become central characters shaping the university "because they are the sparks that light the fire of knowledge"—exactly as they have done since universities

began to exist in Europe "when a university was born from a passion for reality and its mystery." The images change again; toward the end, the viewer sees the urban spaces of "modernity" that shape the affective image of a "progressive" future which we are led into, as the university community and "ambassadors of knowledge" by "breathing the audacity of the beginning." The narrative of the video intensifies these temporal connections by building a discourse of continuity of European university history and strongly positioning the Bologna Process on this imperishable continuum.

The materialities shaping the event strongly anchored the Bologna Process with a specific understanding of Europeanness. This was quite visible during the official ceremony of the celebration on the first day of the event, June 24, 2019. The celebration included the procession of invited participants around the old town of Bologna. The festive atmosphere was created by special clothing—participants were invited to wear academic gowns during the procession and festive dinner afterward (Fig. 5.5). The participants were expected to bring their own academic attire or to borrow gowns from the University of Bologna:

> [Colleague's name] and I, we borrowed the gowns from the University of Bologna […] because in [our country] only a university president is allowed to wear a gown. But I had my own doctoral hat, and [the colleague] had too. At the University of Bologna, I think, the professors have this kind of very old tradition, so the professors have their own gowns. (Julia, October 8, 2019)

The symbolism of such academic clothing together with the materiality of baroque architecture in the city of Bologna yields a specific interpretation of the European academic history rooted in the image of "Western" modernity and excluding other "Europes" (see e.g., Boatcă 2013). Moreover, hierarchical subject positions become intertwined with the assemblage: it is visible how a title in the university hierarchy (rector or professor) becomes forceful through the materialities of academic regalia worn on one's body. Presumably, the force of these material-semiotic components was strengthened by the embodied experiences of joy shaped by the format of a celebration, as shared by one of the participants afterward:

Fig. 5.5 A walk through Bologna. Illustration by Natalia Batrakova

> Wearing these gowns, we walked [around] Bologna, University of Bologna, very old buildings. In the middle of the city, so in the old town of the city of Bologna. The procession, it was not so long, maybe, 500 meters, but it was very warm, hot. But because we were wearing these gowns and these hats, it was very nice; it was festive. [...] There was this walk and there was the main event; it was very nice. Choir singing. Excellent program. (Julia, October 8, 2019)

The city and university of Bologna affected participants in the celebration: the situatedness of the event in these locations anchors the Bologna Process anniversary in a specific reading of Europeanness through the material surroundings of Italian medieval, renaissance, and baroque architecture. The University of Bologna affects the participants by being in the material surroundings of "old Europe".

The materials of the anniversary celebration educate that "University of Bologna, founded in 1088, is the oldest university in Western Europe," thus, making the connection to the long-standing academic history in Western Europe. Arguably, the organizers of the event might have been leaning on the historical and even "civilizing" context of the city and the university and tried to connect the Bologna Process within a specific understanding of modernity.

While the Eurocentricity of the Bologna Process is strengthened by territorializing it with a specific understanding of European academic history, the Bologna Process is simultaneously imagined "globally." The event's promotional slogan "Bologna Process goes global" expands the spatial connections of this project. What is Eurocentric here is that a project territorialized as "European" integrative higher education cooperation is discursively represented as capable of providing a "universal" political agenda and "setting the example" to other political, social, and economic contexts. The universalizing aim of the European project to travel to other contexts in a framework of "best practices" has been emphasized in the previous scholarship: Figueroa (2008: 74–75) claims the Bologna Process became a normative power to re-construct Chilian and Mexican higher education systems and to synchronize higher education reforms with the European Union. The coloniality of the Bologna Process was also recognized in the context of African higher education (Olutayo and Obasi 2009; Charlier and Croché 2011).

At the event, different voices were heard that resisted the coloniality and Eurocentricity of this project and sought to imagine the Bologna

Process differently: as a project for an equal partnership across various contexts. Such resistances show how the composition of the Bologna Process is not monolithic; like all hegemonic assemblages, it is always characterized by the processes of decomposing and change. Some participants underlined that the Bologna Process was imagined as a pan-European project and should be valued "for an open and inclusive education: from Poland to Kazakhstan, Iceland and Armenia" (Sijbolt Noorda—Plenary Session 2019). Their voices serve as a reminder that European higher education histories could be imagined differently.

Besides "European values," another aspect was celebrated within the Bologna Process, namely, the leading position of European higher education in the global competition among knowledge economies. The Eurocentricity of the project is imagined together with the role of the Bologna Process in the global competition. It became visible, first, in the descriptions of the University of Bologna as a location for the event.

I showed above how the University was framed as the oldest university in Western Europe, positioning the Bologna Process within the history of European higher education. However, the University of Bologna as a location for the event is also discussed with reference to its leading position within the matrix of global competition. The University, in this narrative, is doing well in global university rankings, securing competitive international funding, and making connections with the labor market—all familiar characteristics of the neoliberalization of universities (see, e.g., Brankovic et al. 2018; Hicks 2012; Erkkilä 2016: 178). The university's unique position appropriate for the Bologna Process celebration is enabled by its long history and tradition within European higher education as well as its successful performance in the global competition.

> With regard to the international reputation, the University of Bologna is top ranked in the most recognized world and national university rankings (QS, Shanghai, Times Higher Education, Censis Guide and the Sole 24Ore rankings). It has been successfully evaluated and thus funded by the Italian Ministry of Education for excellent research activities within its Departments. It is the second Italian University in terms of funds received by the European Commission under the Research and Innovation Programme Horizon2020. It is one of the main Universities in Italy partnering with local and national companies and getting funds for industrial research. (Organizers and Partners n.d.)

The agenda and content of the Bologna anniversary conference signal the contested discussion about presumed processes of neoliberalization. One

of the panels, "Careers and skills for the labor market of the future," directly discussed the connection of higher education with the labor market needs. The neoliberal discourse of economic gains of higher education also cut across other dimensions of the Bologna Process discussed in the panels. However, resistance to the marketization of higher education was noticeably heard from some participants. For example, critics emphasized that commodification of higher education undermines the critical role of universities in society: when academic education and research become more affirmative of the status quo in societies, it creates challenges for questioning and critical thinking. While some participants acknowledge that there could be both public and private higher education institutions, the responsibility for higher education has to lie with the public authorities (Roundtable—Session 1 2019). Others mentioned the need to resist the activities of government officials and politicians, who promote their interests of economic growth through "investing" in those fields that have the potential to lead to direct profitability, while some participants underlined the importance of critical thinking in humanities in educating for future societies, not for jobs (Q&A on keynote speeches—Session 3 2019).

The comments here resonate with the previous critical scholarship, which argues that higher education should first and foremost carry the value of transformative (rather than commodified) knowledge that helps the students to change "their sense of who they are, what the world is and what they can do in the world" (Ashwin 2020: 66). To do this, Michael Peters (2021) suggests thinking about knowledge socialism. Instead of knowledge capitalism that "focuses on the economics of knowledge, emphasizing human capital development, intellectual property regimes, and efficiency and profit maximization, knowledge socialism shifts the emphasis toward recognition that knowledge and its value are ultimately rooted in social relations" (Peters 2021: 5). Thus, the conference proceedings indeed show the presence of neoliberal imaginaries of higher education in the Bologna Process, but not the exclusive dominance of the neoliberal project over possible alternatives.

The territorialization of higher education cooperation within the European Union was visible through the new project titled European Universities Initiatives. Discussed during the anniversary, this initiative can be seen as a continuity of the Bologna Process. The political initiative was born in 2017 at the EU summit where participants outlined a vision for education and culture in its December 2017 Conclusions, which underlined

> strengthening strategic partnerships across the EU between higher education institutions and encouraging the emergence by 2024 of some twenty 'European Universities', consisting in bottom-up networks of universities across the EU which will enable students to obtain a degree by combining studies in several EU countries and contribute to the international competitiveness of European universities. (European Universities initiative n.d.)

This 2017 "European" project of higher education cooperation is further entangled with neoliberal imaginaries as its aim is also to ensure "the international competitiveness of European universities." The initiative is another step toward ensuring the leading position of the EU in the global competition of knowledge economies. One participant in the Bologna Process anniversary interpreted the European Universities Initiative as an important next step within the Bologna Process development:

Iuliia: But is [European Universities Initiative] connected to Bologna, or […] would it be another step…?

Julia: It is kind of the next step after the Bologna because you can collaborate and have a European university; you can have common courses or, you can define common curricula, and what are the common learning outcomes, and there's student mobility. So, you have learned that way of working during the Bologna, […], [the Bologna Process] was kind of the pre-project to this project. (Julia, October 8, 2019)

The Bologna Process underlines the transcendence of this Eurocentric project through time and space, that is, creating the deterritorialized idea of its universality throughout different periods and contexts. At the same time, the Bologna Process is reterritorialized within Europe by making connections to the history of European higher education and, thus, recomposing a Eurocentric project. What was the role of the Russian state and academic community in this Eurocentric project of neoliberal modernization in higher education? And what can it tell us about the pervasive nature of neoliberal globalization?

Catching Up with Neoliberal Modernization: The Bologna Process and the Russian State

To understand the relationship between the Bologna Process, the Russian state, and its academic community, the Bologna Process should be viewed as a penetrative globalized project of neoliberal modernization extending beyond the European Union. Previous research has indicated how the Bologna Process, in its aspirations to "go global," has traveled to different contexts. However, the project has been "domesticated" (Alasuutari 2009) by local elites and academic communities (Zmas 2015; Eta and Vubo 2016; Onursal-Beşgül 2017). For example, Karseth and Solbrekke (2016: 215) show how "supra/transnational policy initiatives like the EU and the Bologna Process are understood and handled differently by national states." Russia's search for competitiveness played out in attempts to globalize its higher education through the Bologna Process.

Russia joined the Bologna Process in 2003 and fulfilled the formal criteria to join the EHEA in 2010 (Deriglazova 2019: 344). In Russia, joining the Bologna Process was a political and technocratic project tightly controlled by the state (Gänzle et al. 2009; Deriglazova 2019: 346; Romashov et al. 2021). The Ministry of Education became the main "proponent" of joining the Bologna Process (Gänzle et al. 2009: 536) implying the political decision to join the Bologna Process and the authoritarian control of the Ministry over the university activities.

The Bologna Process met with a lot of resistance from the academic community. Some feared that the Bologna Process would increase the inequality between Russian higher education institutions: only the "leading" universities would benefit from participating in the competition for international students and funding (Forrat 2016), while less prestigious universities would be left to face their challenges on their own. Some parts of the academic community resisted the standardization and unification of educational processes, fearing it would make higher education "functional" (in terms of its increased instrumental value to economic interests) rather than "fundamental" (meaning critical or basic research) and turn universities into simple "service providers" without further civic responsibilities (Dobren'kova 2008).

Moreover, the Bologna Process was seen as an alien, Western innovation, which would ruin the Russian "fundamental" science and education (Dobren'kova 2008: 47). The academic community as well as wider social groups often shared the vision that the Bologna Process was "imposed"

on Russian higher education from outside (Deriglazova 2019: 344). Participation in the Bologna Process was indeed proposed by the European Union and was shaped around the ideas of European values and civilization; such Eurocentricity was felt as "imposed" and, thus, resisted. The (Euro)*centricity* of the Bologna Process was sometimes brought up in conversations during my fieldwork in 2020. Yulia from Ulyanovsk State University commented that "in Russia, a master's thesis is not the same as a master's thesis in the *normal* Bologna system" (my emphasis), implying that there is an ideal of the Bologna Process originating from Europe. Therefore, academic communities shared discourses of resistance toward the universalism of European/Western models and toward neoliberal trends in higher education, which, at that time, summed up in the processes of standardization and marketization under the Bologna Process.

Putin's personal support for joining the Bologna Process and cooperation within the field of higher education was identified as a decisive component in resolving tensions between the Ministry's pro-Western aspirations and resistance from the academic community. In a text describing Russia's path to the Bologna Process, the director-general of the Russian International Affairs Council Andrey Kortunov emphasizes President Putin's "unequivocal support":

> On November 10, 2003, President Vladimir Putin drew a line under the discussions of the advantages and disadvantages of Russia joining the Bologna Process, as he described the accession as a significant, serious step in Russia's integration in the global space. (Kortunov 2019)

In this presidential-authoritarian context, the discourse of "Russia's integration" into the "global space"—and the processes of neoliberal modernization—shaped the decision to join the Bologna Process. Politically, being part of the Bologna Process in the early 2000s signified the attempt by the Russian state to construct political belonging to Europe (Gänzle et al. 2009: 536) and the civilizational understanding of Eurocentric, yet globalized, neoliberal modernization. Joining the Bologna Process was understood as a part of broader liberal reforms in Russia in the 1990s and 2000s aimed at "Russia's return to the family of civilized European nations" (Andronova and Lapteva 2020: 464). The Bologna Process allowed the Russian state to participate in international policy formation in higher education together with other European countries (Deriglazova

2019: 344). In the 2000s, rejection of the European project would have marginalized Russia to the periphery of Europe (Medvedev 2008: 231). Yet, Russia's decision to join the "global space" through the Bologna Process showed frictions from its inception: Russia's aspirations to great power status, sovereignty, and regaining its lost position in world politics paradoxically led to its endorsement of the Eurocentric Bologna Process.

Thus, the decision to join the Bologna Process was political and made strategically by the Russian government (Deriglazova 2019: 334). Joining the Bologna Process carried the political aspirations of Russia's ruling regime; participation of the academic community in this decision was minimal (Deriglazova 2019: 346), implying that it was not intended to correspond to their needs. The authoritarian decision to join the Bologna Process to satisfy the political interests of the elites and to increase the state's competitiveness and status has also been discussed in the context of Turkey: there, universities were simply left to adjust to the educational models of the Bologna Process (Coşar and Ergül 2015).

The Russian state imagined it could use the Bologna Process to gain status in world politics by increasing its competitiveness. Russia could be characterized as a "competition state" (Fougner 2006): international competition became a central objective of state policies under global neoliberal governance. In his address to the government on November 10, 2003 (President of Russia 2003), Putin communicated his attendance at the EU–Russia summit and the decisions made. Russia's participation in the Bologna Process summit was discussed in a broader context of creating the "common economic space" between Russia and the EU as well as military and civil space exploration. The political aspirations of the Russian state, thus, included a wider spectrum of policies aimed at inclusion into the "global space" to increase the state's competitiveness and acquire the status of great power. The Bologna Process, in this regard, was mentioned as an important step in expanding the boundaries of the labor market.

The discourses of government officials in Russia indicated how the Bologna Process was framed as a Russian national project of modernizing higher education (Gazaliev and Pak 2009; Silichev 2009). Keeping up with progress through modernization of higher education in the global higher education market was envisioned as "Russia's European choice" (Hopf 2008), which meant synchronizing with globally competitive Europe (cf. Figueroa 2008: 74–75).

Increasing the status of Russian higher education and its global competitiveness were identified as "strategic" goals to ensure the national

interests of Russia (Kamynina and Grudzinskiy 2017: 29), which arguably were formulated around increasing the status of Russia in general. The state used the Bologna Process to integrate into the new global system of knowledge economies and to comply with its requirements (cf. Kaya 2015: 130), keeping in mind that Russia has never had a good "status" in the knowledge economies since the production structure has been largely dominated by extraction of natural resources (see, e.g., Levin et al. 2015). By comparison, in Turkey, "Europeanization" meant the increased marketization and transfer of neoliberal practices to synchronize Turkey with the global competition of knowledge economies (Kaya 2015: 129).

Russia's search for status through participation in the Bologna Process, however, shows frictions. As early as the mid-2000s, Medvedev (2008: 299) argued how territorialization of EU integration policies (including the Bologna Process) around the European values created tensions in Russia: the state has already started to contrast itself with the "European other" in its attempts to integrate to the global space. Russia's new identity as a "great power" was on the rise, and it was formed in opposition to the "West," including the European Union (Medvedev 2008: 299). The EU's politics of Europeanization, including the Eurocentric project of the Bologna Process, also made Russia imperialized within Europe (Medvedev 2008: 231). Russian state's securitization in its attempts to be perceived as a great power gradually collided and caused friction with the Eurocentric "educational" and "civilizing" discourses within the Bologna Process (Medvedev 2008: 231; Figueroa 2010: 255).

Securitizing the State: Breaking Up with the Bologna Process

Despite the decision to endorse the Eurocentric Bologna Process, Russian higher education has been reshaped under Putin's rule, resisting globalized projects of neoliberal modernization while securitizing and nationalizing higher education (Fig. 5.6). As early as 2010, Leonid Grebnev, professor at Moscow State Legal Academy, juxtaposed the Bologna Process with the need to create a "Russian civic identity." A quotation from his article demonstrates the tensions with the Eurocentric nature of the Bologna Process.

> It seems that this "line" of the Bologna Process [creating a European identity] should not have any strong influence on the development of the

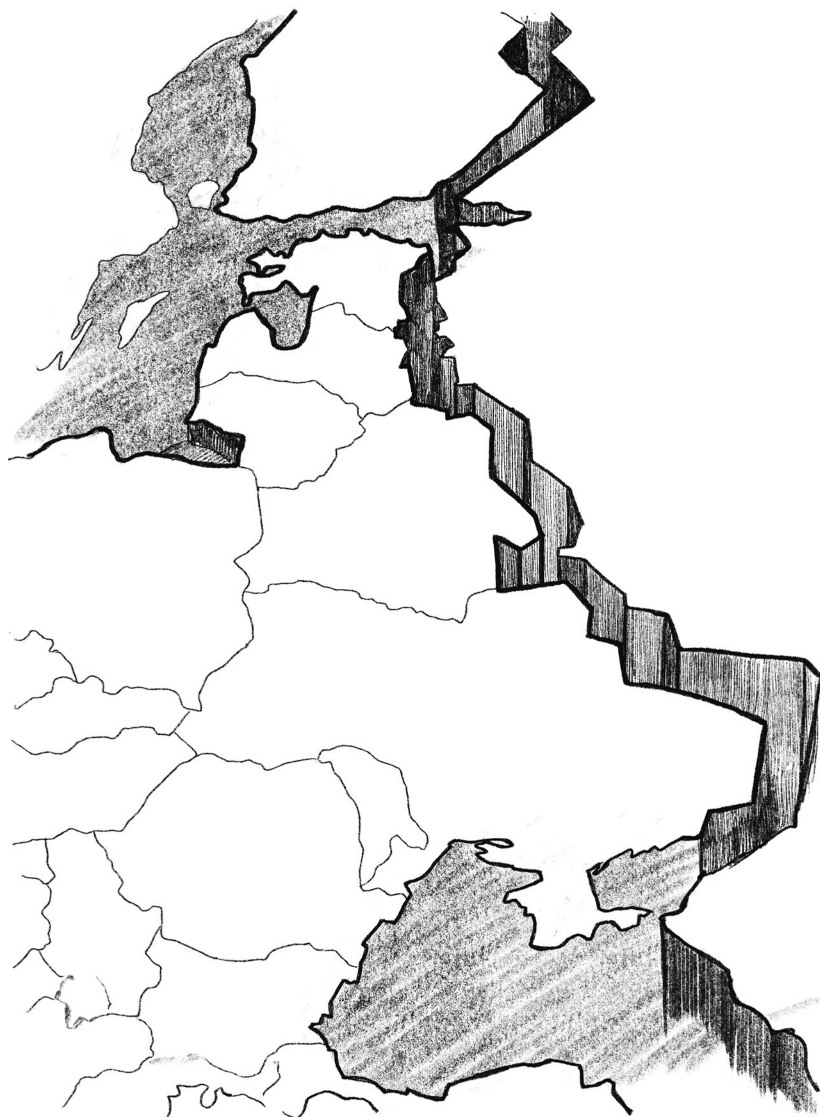

Fig. 5.6 Breaking. Illustration by Natalia Batrakova

> "fourth generation" of [Federal State] Standards in Russia. After the disappearance of the USSR, the legal successor of which was the Russian Federation, the problem of the formation of Russian civic identity arose in our country. Twenty years after this event, the problem remains unresolved in full. (Grebnev 2011: 33–34)

The search for Russian identity was intensified by imagining the "West" as a security threat and by state attempts to nationalize higher education. Russia's uniqueness in higher education has been gradually securitized: the ideas of state security and the presence of security organs have gradually displaced the focus from the international projects.

The internationalized university has been securitized through the interplay of different socio-material elements. For example, Artem from Petrozavodsk State University indicates that in 2014 the Ministry of Science and Higher Education issued a series of formal and informal directives (*prikazy*) to university administrations that pressured the latter to cease cooperation with the European partners in higher education, including within the framework of academic mobility established under the Bologna Process. The end of cooperation was directly formulated around the geopolitical and imperialistic aspirations of the Russian state. In the quotation below, Artem specifies how directives sent en masse to the rectors of universities around Russia became a securitizing component. In this ministerial letter, the annexation of Crimea was strongly connected to the idea of "Russianness"; opposing the annexation was treated as "anti-Russianness," thus, undermining the status and security of the Russian state. Participation in globalized projects of neoliberal modernization such as the Bologna Process began to crumble under the processes of securitization, reterritorialization, and imperialistic geopolitical endeavors.

> Then, at some point […] well, relatively speaking, it was right after the Crimea, in any case. It was probably the fall of 2014. Because the sanctions were already [in place]. […]. I went to a conference in Brussels. […] And just a few days before that, someone simply sent it through the mailing list. Look, what a wonderful document, they say. And there is a document stating something like "Guys, from tomorrow…" – to all rectors of universities – "…let's stop all these visits of the European Commission delegations because they have an anti-Russian position, which means they are against the annexation of Crimea, they are talking about [it as an] annexation. So, let's, then, minimize all contacts completely. And that means, let's switch to our other positive agenda," and so on. (Artem, February 14, 2020)

Since 2014, various directives were aimed at securitizing globalized contacts, arguably in order to “ensure sovereignty.” In 2019, there was an unsuccessful attempt to pass a directive that tried to severely control any academic connections with foreign academics: any events with foreigners held at a university were to be documented and the results reported to the Ministry. The text of the proposed directive was provided in *Troitsky Variant* (issue 285, 13.08.2019)—an independent newspaper about science and higher education in Russia.

> It is indicated [in the directive] that the head of the organization must notify the Ministry five days before the meeting [with foreigners], indicating, among other things, all Russian participants in the meeting. At the same time, employees of the organization can participate in meetings only according to a pre-compiled list. […] All meetings with foreigners are carried out by employees in numbering at least two people. Employees are allowed to meet with foreigners during working and non-working hours and outside the organizations but are subject to obtaining permission from the head of the organization. In all cases, after the meeting, the head of the organization must send to the Ministry a report on the meeting, certified by a round seal. (Fradkov 2019)

While this particular directive caused massive outrage in the academic community and was not passed, in interviews, some academics during my fieldwork still mentioned the existence of internal instructions at universities on how to communicate with foreigners.

The presence of security organs ensures the compliance of employees with new regulations. In an interview with Nadya, a researcher and an administrative employee in the field of international cooperation at one of the federal universities in Russia, she mentioned how in recent years control over “the international” has been strengthened: there is a Security Department at the university where, according to Nadya, the representatives of the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) regulate international connections within the university. This securitization of the international by hidden control mechanisms is in the power of the FSB—one of the most powerful repressive institutions within contemporary Russia (Illarionov 2009). Mechanisms are not stated openly; rather, different rumors circulate at the university concerning what seems acceptable or not. The rumors are affective: they create uncertainty and fear among academic workers. Nadya said that securitization had intensified along with the strengthening of authoritarian rule in Russia.

> [International cooperation] used to be freer. It was necessary to approve the international guests, but it was required simply to notify. Then four pages became required. Then it became a pile of papers, which must be submitted a month before the event in order to agree on all the details: the route, accompanying people, and so on. (fieldwork diary, June 8, 2022)

The securitization of the Russian state and higher education was also sustained by financial resources. New national funding programs were introduced to substitute for the funding received from cooperation with European universities and organizations within the Bologna Process (Deriglazova 2019: 344). Crucially, while breaking up with Bologna and nationalizing higher education, the state still upheld the idea of global competitiveness (e.g., Project 5–100, see Chap. 4), but simultaneously attempted for it to be secured on the state's terms and funding. Artem saw the introduction of these new national programs as a way to make the universities more dependent on and compliant with the federal government. He made the following ironic remarks:

> Forget about foreigners, we don't need them. We have the federal budget, we have budget transfers. [...] That is, at some point, everyone began abruptly – and in the field of education too – to switch to federal money. Yes, it allows them [the federal government] to make us do what they want, but at least it gives us money. (Artem, February 14, 2020)

Breaking up with Bologna and nationalizing higher education also took the form of attempts to territorialize academic mobility within Russia—instead of promoting the international mobility envisioned at the Bologna Process. Below, Sergey, a bachelor's student from Ulyanovsk State University back in 2020, indicates how the shrinking international opportunities and peripheral location of Ulyanovsk made him look for opportunities within the country. Both international and national experiences are arguably aimed at increasing one's symbolic capital for future employment: in Sergey's opinion, domestic opportunities are as valuable as traveling abroad for professional and personal growth.

> As far as I know, there is an exchange opportunity for students, but obviously, not everyone uses it. [...] However, there is an opportunity to participate in events within the country. (Sergey, February 11, 2021)

Students' aspirations to get the *corporeal* experience of the "international" ("going and seeing places") lead to their search for lacunas in these crumbling opportunities for international mobility through the state's efforts to territorialize higher education within the Russian borders. In these aspirations, however, internationalization again takes on partly neoliberal connotations as it is envisioned as an asset for personal development and accumulation of international experience for career development. During my fieldwork, I met Lina, back then a bachelor's student at St. Petersburg State University. Lina had an interest in finding international opportunities and started her own project where she helped other students and young people who could not afford international mobility experience to search and apply for financial support.

By looking into those different academic subjectivities who try to operate in the academic environment penetrated by the ideas of neoliberal modernization and the state authoritarian securitization, one can notice alternative academic lifeworlds. In my fieldwork, I found that the peripheral universities often become intercultural hubs within the city that envision internationalization otherwise. For example, I observed the international activities of the Antoine de Saint-Exupery Center, the most internationally oriented department at Ulyanovsk State University. The goal of the Center is "friendship and development of human relations," as emphasized by its director, Svetlana Vorobyeva (fieldwork diary, June 10, 2020). Specifically, I observed the Center's long-standing cooperation with the French theater director Bob Dantonel and their mutual work on theater plays together with students in 2010s and early 2020s; the plays were shown at the city theaters. The Center enabled international cooperation within the university and made the university an intercultural hub within the city.

Despite the dominance of neoliberal, neo-imperial, and simultaneously securitized imaginaries of internationalization at (Russian) universities actualized by the global neoliberalization and the Russian state, the conception of intercultural dialogue among academic workers is also prominent. Such projects might provide opportunities to subvert the workings of neoliberal modernization and authoritarian securitization of universities. Fazal Rizvi (2017: 10) invites us to think of what would acknowledge the interconnectedness of a contemporary world, including in higher education, but go beyond the neoliberal imaginary of competitiveness and zero-sum game as it is now. Rizvi argues that cultural issues used to be at the heart of education and that this has deteriorated in recent years.

Interestingly enough, peripheral universities in Russia sometimes become intracultural hubs within their city providing a different imaginary to both the neoliberal formation of the Bologna Process and the state's securitized authoritarianism.

With time, the higher education system has been securitized breaking up with the Eurocentric project of the Bologna Process completely. Russia's invasion of Ukraine intensified the discourses of geopolitical and geoeconomic national interests: on May 24, 2022, the Minister of Higher Education and Science, Valery Fal'kov proclaimed that Russia discontinues its membership in the Bologna Process:

> The future belongs to our own unique education system, which should be based on the interests of the national economy and the maximum space of opportunities for each student. (Vorob'eva 2022)

However, breaking up with the globalized project of neoliberal modernization did not mean breaking up with neoliberal rationality. Rather, this neoliberal project continued to be implemented on the Russian state's terms: the neoliberal rationality of competitiveness and efficiency persisted in universities through institutional enforcement by the Russian state. In the next chapters, I show how neoliberal institutional reforms in Russian universities, some of which were direct results of the Bologna Process, have continued to shape the realities of Russian academics and prompted the authoritarian-neoliberal governance of control and dispossession. Authoritarianism is not only a reaction to penetrative neoliberal modernization (as discussed in Chap. 1); neoliberal rationality itself produces the practice of the authoritarian state.

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CHAPTER 6

Rhythms of Dispossession: Proletarianized Teaching

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I discussed the compositions of the Bologna Process as a neoliberal project. In this chapter, I show that despite the gradual securitization of the Russian state and breaking with this international project of neoliberal modernization, neoliberal effects continued to exist, having penetrated Russian universities and the state as an effect of reigning global neoliberalization. While the Russian state tried to securitize itself against the Eurocentricity of such projects, neoliberal rationality as a mode of (state) governance has leaked into institutional practice and diffused into the everyday life of university teachers.

The penetration of neoliberal reforms into institutional state governmental practice is especially important to note. Countless times, I have received feedback on my work: "But what happened with neoliberalism after the invasion of Ukraine and the breaking of ties with Russian-European cooperation, for example, the Bologna Process?" In other words, what happened during the Russian state's prolonged discourse of undermining the Western-centric liberal project? It is assumed that neoliberalism is territorialized within the "European" space; or if it does escape such territorialization and lands in Russia, it can only happen through direct cooperation. By resisting Western liberal hegemony in numerous ways (discursively, ideologically, and militaristically), the Russian state

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I. Gataulina, *Neoliberal Authoritarianism: An Ethnography of Russian Universities*, Central and Eastern European Perspectives on International Relations,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-89451-0_6

presumably has something else to suggest. However, a closer look at the actual practices of governance suggests many affinities. If we closely analyze the reproduction of state governance, we can see how neoliberal effects have diffused into the institutional everyday. Neoliberalism is more than discursive rationality: it is a practice reinforced in everyday operations through institutional arrangements and regulations. The rationality of neoliberal modernization that the Russian state tried to uphold and catch up with has become diffused into the everyday operations of Russian universities. Therefore, despite the reigning geopolitical and ideological conflict between the Russian and Western states, the practice and rationality of governance have some affinities. The next two chapters aim to portray this mode of governance: neoliberal rationality coupled with attempts to reproduce the authoritarian state (Fig. 6.1).

In this chapter, I specifically zoom into the realm of university teaching and learning. I trace the neoliberal effects the Bologna Process has produced in Russian higher education. I am particularly interested in how the idea and practice of accelerated speed of production, usually ascribed to capitalist ideology (Glezos 2012), play out in the practice of an authoritarian state (Fig. 6.2). Specifically, I analyze how the hourly regulations for specific teaching activities have been changed to make academic workers perform their teaching duties at a faster pace, mainly to save costs. This corresponds to research findings from other contexts. As Oili-Helena Ylijoki and Hans Mäntylä argue for Finnish universities under the logic of efficiency: "There are more and more externally imposed obligations, which have to be met in a shorter and shorter time span" (Ylijoki and Mäntylä 2003: 60). Gritt Nielsen and Laura Louise Sarauw (2022) also analyze the accelerated speed of students' performance under the Bologna Process.

I suggest that the accelerated speed of academic production contributes to various types of dispossessions—over means of production, professional expertise, and fair wages—experienced by academics. Moreover, when this neoliberal rationality of effective speed is coupled with the authoritarian supervision of the state, it contributes to the reproduction of the state at a cheaper and faster pace. I return to this issue at the end of the chapter.

For my analysis in this chapter, I draw from the concept of affecto-rhythmic order. It relates to how rhythms and affects of "optimized labor"

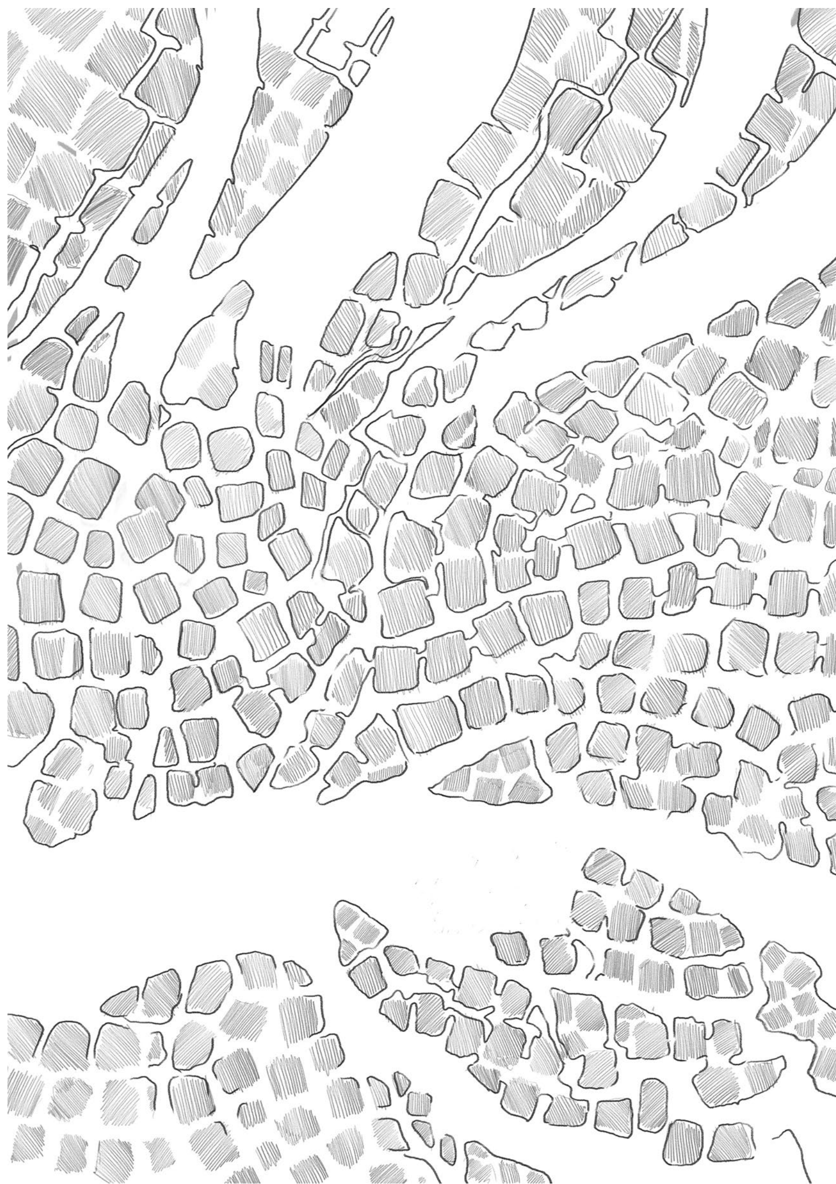

Fig. 6.1 Affinities in governance. Illustration by Natalia Batrakova

Fig. 6.2 Acceleration. Illustration by Natalia Batrakova

interrelate in the flow of organizational practice. I borrow the concept from the work of Saija Katila et al. (2020), where they analyze the accelerated speed created at start-up incubators and how members of the working community learn to embody the rhythms and affective attunement of organizational practice. In such incubators, emergent businesses are encouraged to work at a faster pace through rapidly changing exercises, the upbeat voice and music during workshops, or a visible clock that counts down the time left until the end of the exercise. These semiotic-material components generate specific rhythms and affects of organizational practice.

Although Katila et al. developed the concept of affecto-rhythmic order for a different context, I argue that it can be beneficial to investigate the affects and rhythms of academic labor in Russian universities. I analyze how various elements—the reforms under the Bologna Process, curriculum changes, the policies of optimization by the Russian state, the regulatory power of Federal State Standards of higher education, and private companies advertising digital solutions to synchronize with state regulations—create a composition of a new affecto-rhythmic order in Russian universities. This order then synchronizes the bodily responses of people in different universities across Russia: the embodiment of this authoritarian-neoliberal rhythm becomes collective (Fig. 6.3).

In this chapter, I discuss the policies of optimization that the Russian state actualized in efforts to impose a more effective and cost-efficient rhythm of university activities. These policies included the implementation of a new curriculum in Russian universities under the Bologna Process: the idea of "independent learners" instrumentalized the optimization of teaching. The new curriculum was orchestrated by the Federal State Standards—a state managerial device to ensure that different Russian universities across the country synchronized with the state bureaucratic rhythm of optimization. In this chapter, I also look inside the universities and analyze how teaching is organized at an accelerated pace, which leads to the de-professionalization of academic workers. In the end, I draw conclusions on how neoliberal rationality and the attempts to reproduce the state at cheaper and faster rhythms contribute to different types of dispossessions.

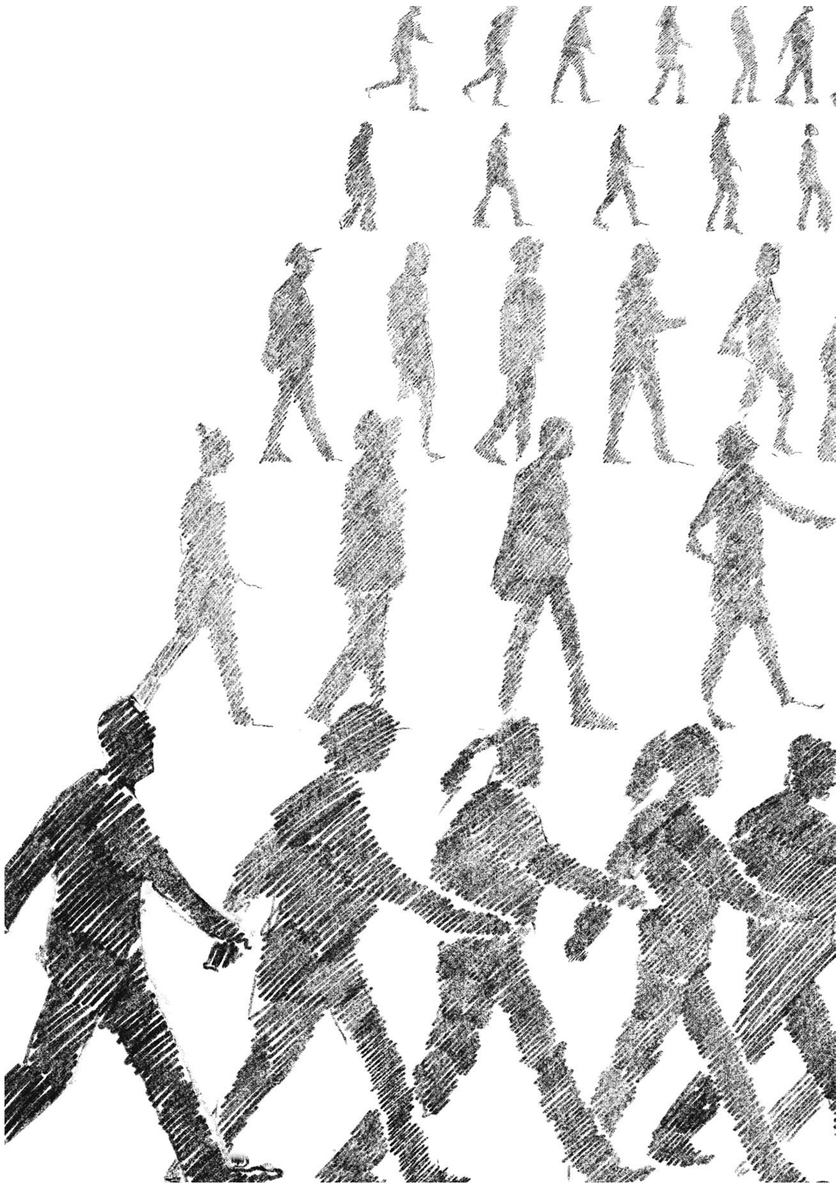

Fig. 6.3 Rhythms. Illustration by Natalia Batrakova

Optimization Policies

The new affecto-rhythmic order of academic labor in Russian universities has been actualized through Russian government reforms to "optimize" higher education. The process of optimization started in the 2010s with a wide range of reforms, which were framed as a tool to increase the efficiency of Russian universities and optimize their funding (Krasinskaya 2016: 73). The optimization involved stratification of universities (see Chap. 4) and attributing federal funding on the basis of the principle of competition among universities for a specific status.

The optimization policies have penetrated Russian university governance from global neoliberalization. The idea of economic efficiency brought about by New Public Management has led to changes in university funding models across different contexts. Due to the decline in state funding, the focus shifted to finding more economically efficient ways for universities to perform their activities and minimize their costs in delivering their "services" (Jayasuriya et al. 2020: 43).

The process of optimization in Russia included the elimination of "ineffective" (Vedomosti 2012) universities and subsequent mergers: both between universities in the region and of departments and degree programs within universities. Optimization has also included the introduction of performance-based pay for academic employees, which I discuss in Chap. 7.

Competition among Russian universities for federal funding through the search for "efficiency" has led to shortages of material resources within universities. The rector of the Zabaykalsky State University pointed out in his public interview in 2017 that regional universities particularly lacked sufficient funding to carry out their activities:

> Today, large regional universities, such as ours, are having a hard time surviving. The funding that we receive is aimed at the main item of expenditure: the salaries of employees, teachers, and taxes. We have ceased to develop the material and technical base, to carry out serious and high-quality repairs of the premises. If the situation does not begin to change in the near future, then the development prospects of regional universities are quite pessimistic. (Akkreditaciya v obrazovanii 2017)

The universities, in other words, have been left to "survive" with the available material resources. In this chapter, I demonstrate that in this struggle

for survival in an austere environment, academic labor has been subject to cost-saving mechanisms. Under the policies of optimization, the workload of academic employees is reshaped to continue the university's activities in a "cost-efficient" manner. In previous research, Tatyana Yamschikova et al. (2017: 181) pointed out that costs are mostly cut in the domain of teaching where manipulation with worked and paid hours is the most visible. Roman Abramov et al. (2016) have also suggested that teaching becomes the most marginalized activity subsumed by the managerial mechanisms of cost-efficiency; thus, university teachers become the most vocal opponents of neoliberal reforms (Abramov et al. 2016: 67). My analysis shows that the state's attempts to optimize academic labor have accelerated the speed of academic performance under the new regulations.

The Bologna Process became the point of reference for neoliberal reforms in Russian higher education and, thus, one of the reasons for producing the new affecto-rhythmic order in Russian universities. As Bernd Belina (2013: 740) argues: "The usual practice of legitimizing the national reforms by pointing to 'Bologna' is a case of strategic framing and 'scale jumping' since the Bologna Declaration does not actually include reference to many of the aforementioned national 'reforms'." In other words, even though the Bologna Process itself carried neoliberal imaginaries when introduced to the Russian higher education, it has also been instrumental in legitimizing other neoliberal reforms, serving as a grand point of reference. The status of the global, and especially, Eurocentric global, can play a powerful role in political formations.

The optimization of higher education was directly connected to Russian state aspirations of "modernization" through belonging to the European educational space and the Bologna Process (Fedotova and Chigisheva 2010; Krasinskaya 2016: 74). In 2005, the Russian Ministry of Education issued a decree specifying the measures for a transition of the Russian higher education to the Bologna Process (KonsultantPlyus n.d.). The decree then led to the implementation of the Federal Program for Educational Development (Russian government n.d.). The documents promised to increase state support for higher education. However, as Olena Aydarova (2014: 70) suggests, the role of the state also changed: from the "provider" of higher education to its "observer and inspector"—the authoritarian state coupled with the neoliberal rationality. Higher education was proclaimed to follow market-based approaches when cost-efficiency became the main measure of success of reforms and of

higher education in general. Competitiveness of the Russian economy was declared as the main driver for educational development and modernization; participating in the Bologna Process was estimated as one of the main tools to achieve those goals (Aydarova 2014: 70). Below, I trace how the Bologna Process became an important point of reference in the neoliberal reform of the university curriculum and, subsequently, entwined with the optimization of academic labor and surveillance and control over university activities by the state.

The Bologna Process and the Neoliberalized Curriculum

To tell the story of the changes in academic labor—the emergence of a new affecto-rhythmic order, I turn to my interviews with Yulia, a university teacher from Ulyanovsk. Her story becomes an entry point to the accelerate speed of academic production in neoliberal authoritarianism and the dispossession it generates. From there, I show the connections between the Bologna Process and the optimization policies of the Russian state.

Yulia is a social scientist who has been working in higher education in Ulyanovsk since 2004. Yulia's work experience includes both educational and administrative duties. In 2019, she left Ulyanovsk State University due to what she refers to as "unfavorable working conditions" and started to work in a research organization: "a wonderful place," she says, when comparing its working conditions and tasks to a state university like Ulyanovsk.

I have known Yulia since when I was studying at Ulyanovsk State University. Our shared experience and, I guess, Yulia's interest in teaching and supervising led to her eagerness and responsiveness during our communication, which also tells us about her subject position as an academic: it was clear that Yulia valued teaching and supervising in academic work. Our connection also provided me with many insights into how the university works when it comes to academic labor: while many pieces of data came from elsewhere, Yulia tried to explain to me in our conversations how things work (sometimes, of course, producing very emotional accounts which drew my attention to affects that a new rhythmic order had produced). Yulia became a key informant on other pieces of data, mostly publications and conversations in Russian academic journals.

Our communication made me realize that Yulia often works with students outside formal working hours, late in the evening. It seemed that

she made it her priority to communicate with students and the wider academic community, even if it meant performing unpaid labor.

When we were agreeing on our interview, I designated some topics that I was very interested to discuss. I openly stated that I do not have a prewritten list of questions, but I would like to navigate our discussions through some topics and would be interested in anything Yulia deemed important to share in this regard. I specifically mentioned the Bologna Process, the changing role of a contemporary university and the connection between higher education and the broader framework of political economy. I guess Yulia, to some extent, thought of some stories in advance: she talked quite extensively during the interview, bringing in her own analysis. However, the first time she mentioned the Bologna Process—only after a couple of minutes of talking—was in the context of how many degree programs ceased to exist in the social sciences and humanities: "Well, then, with the transition to the Bologna Process, the losses, by the way, continued."

Indeed, the Bologna Process, in the Russian context, is oftentimes narrated in terms of the restructuring of degree programs: dropping the "specialist" degree and establishing bachelor's and master's programs at universities (Telegina and Schwengel 2012; Luchinskaya and Ovchynnikova 2011). In relation to these narrations, Yulia's account shows how this harmonization of degree structures based on the Bologna Process was experienced as a reduction in the number of degree programs, as "losses" when the transition to two-cycle higher education consisting of bachelor's and master's programs was made. These changes also led to changes in academic working conditions and learning practices at the university. Yulia's account of the transition to the Bologna Process at Ulyanovsk State University emphasizes these changes:

> That is, the transition to a bachelor's degree had a very strong impact on the teaching staff of the university because the number of contact teaching hours [per program] decreased. The bachelor's model assumes a larger number of hours for independent work of students, but, at the same time, there is such a graph as the personal interaction between a teacher and a student […]. That is, the interaction takes place in groups of 1 to 5. As you understand, in Russia we did not reach this last moment but reduced the hours [for contact teaching]. […] The number of hours allocated for coursework is reduced, but there is no supervision work [added]. (Yulia, June 14, 2020)

Here, from the beginning, Yulia makes a direct connection between the changes in higher education according to the Bologna Process, the reduction in contact teaching hours in the curriculum, and the consequent conditions of academic labor. The policies of Bologna Process harmonization have affected the working conditions and contractual relations of academic staff. This quotation provides an entry point for analyzing the connection between the implementation of the Bologna Process in Russian universities, the wider neoliberal reforms in Russian higher education, and the affecto-rhythmic order of academic labor.

Previous scholarship on curricula changes under the Bologna Process in other European contexts resonates with Yulia's claims. Scholars studying a wider European context have indeed argued that the Bologna Process suggests a new "curriculum policy" (Karseth and Solbrekke 2016: 216). Johanna Annala et al. (2016: 171) also argue that the Bologna Process has initiated "some major curriculum transformations" globally. According to Berit Karseth and Tone Dyrdal Solbrekke (2016: 218), the EU does not have a centralized concept of curriculum. However, some Bologna Process proceedings stated some clear expectations of curriculum reforms. For example, the Leuven/Louvain-La-Neuve Communiqué

> pointed out the importance of empowering individual learners and new approaches to teaching and learning and demonstrated that the ministers expect a curriculum focused more clearly on the learner and the development of flexible and more individually tailored education paths and a projective orientation toward the interests of employers and the global world. (Karseth and Solbrekke 2016: 218)

The Leuven/Louvain-La-Neuve Communiqué, thus, provided a point of reference for the changes in curriculum across the EHEA: it is expected that a new model of curriculum would be focused on "individual learners," tailoring university teaching to independent learning.

The university curricula are increasingly reformulated to meet labor market needs in the quest to make universities more responsive to the demands of entrepreneurship and economic growth. Generally, the purpose of higher education increasingly revolves around economic considerations (Ashwin 2020: 65). The meanings of higher education change: it is more and more conceived as "job training" instead of seeing it as a public good or a process of forming culture (Dönmez and Duman 2021: 4). The discourse of "employability" became powerful in regulating the education

policies and relationships between universities, markets, and the state (Bacevic 2014); ensuring the employability of students consequently became a marker for quality university teaching (Wald and Harland 2019).

The change in the curriculum to prioritize individual learning led to changes in teaching practices and the role of a teacher as a whole; Yulia pointed this out in the quotation above when she discussed how including more hours for students to work independently in the curriculum has reshaped the working conditions of academic staff. A similar argument is made by Karseth and Solbrekke (2016: 216) who argue that the Bologna Process, along with curriculum changes, "to some extent, regulate[d] the daily teaching and learning practices in higher education institutions." The changing role of a teacher under Bologna Process has been reflected upon in the Russian academic community: Aleksandr Yashin and Maria Strukova, two academics from Ural Federal University, published an article "Regulating and distributing academic workload: A practitioner's view," an opinion piece with some policy analysis and recommendations. As Yashin and Strukova discuss, in this new ideology of students as individual learners,

> [t]he Bologna Process involves a systemic change in the pedagogical activity itself and the function of the teacher: from traditional didactic, that is, information-controlling, to organizational-managerial and consultative-coordinating. Thus, a teacher should turn from a translator of knowledge and a controller of its assimilation into an organizer of the process of forming competencies and a consultant to students on the most effective way to do this process. Following this logic, the very ideology of creating educational programs and curricula in universities should have changed – and, above all, in the direction of reducing the share of classroom work per teacher with a simultaneous increase in the share of their work outside the classroom, which must be devoted to individual work with students. (Yashin and Strukova 2015: 102)

The authors, again, underline the idea of students' independent learning and, accordingly, the new ideology behind the teacher's role and curriculum work: a teacher is no longer a transmitter of knowledge, but rather a consultant who organizes the educational process and guides the students. The changes under the Bologna Process in Russian universities *should have led*, as proclaimed by the authors, to the reduction of classroom hours and the increase of "individual work with students" in the format of supervision. However, when the changes within the curriculum under the

Bologna Process got entwined with the state-led reforms of optimization, this redistribution of hours has been instrumentalized by the Russian state to develop faster-working academic subjects, as I discuss below.

Synchronizing Rhythms [1]: State Standards and the Curriculum in Russia

In Russian universities, the curriculum directly affects the working conditions of the teachers: the workload of academic teaching staff is calculated in close connection with the curriculum plan (Gavrilets and Medvedeva 2007: 40). Therefore, changes within the curriculum under the Bologna Process influenced the working conditions of university teachers, as Yulia's quotation at the beginning of this chapter referred to. In Russia, the curriculum plan is designed by the Ministry of Higher Education and Science and imposed on the state universities in the form of Federal State Standards. During my fieldwork, I discussed curricula with Artem from the Petrozavodsk State University:

Iuliia: I would like to clarify about the curriculum. Do I understand correctly that it is centralized, you can't step anywhere from it, and the curriculum is, in principle, the same for different universities?

Artem: The curriculum as such is less important. There is an existing [Federal] State Standard, and we cannot go anywhere from this. (Artem, June 29, 2020)

As demonstrated in the brief quoted exchange, the university curriculum is "less important" as there is a more powerful component at play that shapes it—the Federal State Standards. The regulatory power of the Federal State Standards was also mentioned in other interviews: for example, Vladimir from St Petersburg State University told me that universities "can't get away from it," and all their teaching and learning activities are subjected to the standards designed by the Ministry. Moreover, the universities have to demonstrate their compliance—synchronization—with the Federal State Standards in a format of accreditation (Kiselev 2016): "a massive event," as recalled by Darya from Petrozavodsk State University, when, for almost a year, the work of the higher education institution is subjected to the process of harmonizing all its documentation with the

Federal State Standards. Darya referred to "a truck of documents" that is prepared by the university employees before the check-ups by the state agency which allows the prolongation of the state accreditation.

The Federal State Educational Standards are a set of requirements that are mandatory for the implementation of basic educational programs at all levels of education in Russia including higher education. The Federal State Standards are applied to all higher education institutions with state accreditation. According to the official definition, the standards provide the "unity of the educational space in Russia" and continuity of the main educational programs from primary to higher education level. Each standard sets the requirements for the structure of the main educational programs; the conditions for their implementation, including personnel, financial, logistical, and other; and their learning outcomes (Portal… n.d.).

The Federal State Standards specify the degree programs certified by the Ministry and the "specialization" that a student would receive after completing a degree program. The structure of university degree programs is also determined, which connects the Federal State Standards to the curriculum design and, consequently, to the workload of university teachers. The Federal State Standards shape the teaching and learning practices within universities—they take the form of binding documents, which influence the individual work plan and, consequently, the workload of university employees. They were extensively mentioned in my data—discussed by research participants as well as in publications in Russian academic journals. Thus, the Federal State Standards play an important role in state control of the activities of universities (i.e., assuring "the unity of the educational space in Russia") and attempting to synchronize the performance of universities within Russia.

This authoritarian control in the form of Federal State Standards on Russian universities also differentiates universities based on their status (see Chap. 4). Most Russian universities have to follow the Federal State Standards. The major exceptions within this system of governance are Project 5–100 (Grebnev 2011: 33), discussed in Chap. 5, and Moscow State University and St Petersburg State University which enjoy more freedom regarding their own curriculum according to the Federal Law (Rossijskaya Gazeta 2009). Artem from Petrozavodsk State University reflects on the governing power of the Federal State Standards over the curriculum specifically at peripheral universities:

> We don't have such a concept as a free choice of courses. I don't know, maybe somewhere in some universities, like St Petersburg State University, Moscow State University, yes – it's a different story, where everything is different in general. This is where it might be. I don't talk about them. But I am more than sure that in the vast majority of classical, regional, pillar, persistent [*opornye*, *upornye* – Artem's play on words in Russian] and other universities everyone lives according to the state standard. [...] It is a *state* standard, and *that's what the state standard is for*: it is written there that in 4 years there should be these compulsory disciplines, arranged by semesters in a clear sequence and nothing else. (Artem, June 26, 2020; my emphases)

The way in which Artem relates to the power of the state is visible by the end of the quotation: "It is a state standard, and that's what the state standard is for," says Artem, illustrating how, through the force of the Federal State Standards, university teaching is subjected to strict regulation by the state.

The differences in university statuses also affect the way the universities are orchestrated by the state in optimization reforms: since the majority of Russian universities fall under the requirements of the Federal State Standards, changes in the curriculum affect the regional (peripheral) universities—universities which are excluded from the leading role in the neoliberal modernization—to a greater extent. During my fieldwork, concerns about unpaid labor were voiced by the interviewees working in the peripheral universities. Thus, the new affecto-rhythmic order of optimized labor is strengthened in the regional (peripheral) universities.

The Federal State Standards is an integral part producing the authoritarian staticity of the Russian state by preserving the institutional and territorial coherence and preventing anything abnormal in the academic behavior. The uniqueness of particular institutions and their research and educational activities are regarded as uncontrollable, thus, potentially dangerous to the stability of the vertical of power and are subjected to sanctions. A former professor declared that this happened with the European University in St Petersburg (fieldwork diary, April 16, 2021), which is a nonstate university[1] (rare in Russia) with a very good reputation in research

[1] The European University in St Petersburg has the official status of a "non-state university," which separates it from the vast majority of higher education institutions in Russia. The status of a non-state university implies that it has been founded by the commercial organizations, civil organizations, or private individuals and funded through these organizations and tuition fees. State universities are founded by the state and financed (partially) through the

and education across the country. In 2008, the European University was closed due to inconsistencies with fire inspection requirements: the academic community interpreted it as an attempt to complicate the operations of the university which had produced some "critical" knowledge (Dubrovsky 2017). The university reopened; however, again in 2017, the government revoked the institution's educational license (BBC News 2017). Rumor then had it that state officials and the management of the European University made some informal agreements to restore its educational license and accreditation in 2018 (fieldwork diary, April 16, 2021; October 21, 2021).

In order to regain its right to conduct educational and research activities, the European University had to more rigorously comply with the Ministry's requirements, which included reconstructing the curriculum according to the Federal State Standards. Thus, the European University has quite significantly changed its postgraduate education: the former, more "Westernized," PhD format has turned into the classical Russian *aspirantura*: the three-year cycle of higher education with a designed curriculum replaced the research-oriented doctoral degree (Bordovsky 2014). Olesya, a researcher from the European University, discussed the transformation process as follows:

> It's such a complex story that I myself don't fully understand how it works yet. […] Earlier, before the license was revoked, the university had PhD programs. And it was designed, as far as I understand, like European PhD programs: there were foreign internships, and the students were writing the thesis in English, and all that. After that, the university closed and then reopened in a new format of a graduate school. […] After the university received the accreditation, it was still unclear whether we were now supposed to write in Russian, or English, and in general, how it will all look like. Last year was also not so clear. But now there is an understanding that this will be a "normal" Russian graduate school. […] We have courses, they also appeared in the curriculum this way: there is [the state] curriculum [according to the Federal State Standards], and the university must comply with it, because it now has a state accreditation. […] And also the way it used to be before the closing of the PhD, that the students choose the courses them-

federal budget. Despite its status, the European University has been visibly connected to the state apparatus. The founder and a member of the Board of Trustees is Alexei Kudrin who held various positions in the Russian government over the years (e.g., Chairman of the Accounts Chamber in 2018–2022, Deputy Prime Minister in 2000–2004 and 2007–2011, and Minister of Finance of the Russian Federation in 2000–2011).

> selves, is now gone. One can, of course, choose courses and go to any, this is the student's choice, but there are courses that you must definitely take. (Olesya, November 12, 2021)

Here, Olesya explains the changes in the design of new programs after the university reopened with state accreditation: the uniqueness of the European University curriculum has been eliminated and subjugated to the standardized Ministry's regulations, which turned the former PhD programs into the "normalized" Russian *aspirantura*. The word "accreditation" was repeated by Olesya many times in the interview indicating the state's regulatory power in the process of European University's transformation. Thus, while the European University in St Petersburg had been previously considered a unique institution in Russian higher education and research, it has been gradually "normalized" under the power of the authoritarian state which strives for staticity and preventing abnormality. This meant turning the university into a more manageable and controllable entity. Seen from the vertical of power, uniqueness and academic freedom contradict state control over higher education institutions, which tells us about the rising authoritarian power of the state.

However, the Federal State Standards signal to us not only about the authoritarian power of the state but also about the penetration of neoliberal rationality. The power of the Federal State Standards intertwined with the changes in Russian higher education under the Bologna Process, illustrating the connection between state authoritarian governance over Russian universities and the neoliberal imaginaries of the new curriculum under the Bologna Process. The Federal State Standards specify the subjects a student needs to pass in each degree program, the type of examination, and the number of hours allocated for each subject (divided into contact teaching and independent learning) (Portal… n.d.). When Russian universities started to work according to the new "third" generation of Federal State Standards in 2011, almost all of the changes were associated with implementing the Bologna Process (Grebnev 2011: 29). Individualism recurred throughout new Federal State Standards which emphasized the idea of students as individual learners in the knowledge economy (Aydarova 2014: 70).

The university curriculum, teaching, and learning activities were indeed affected by the implementation of the Bologna Process. What seems peculiar to the Russian case was how the transition was a unilateral decision by the Russian government without—and sometimes, in opposition to—the

wider academic community (see, e.g., Telegina and Schwengel 2012; Tomusk 2007). Thus, the new curriculum and requirements for the market-based approach to higher education were solely designed by the Ministry without the participation of the academic communities. This is reflected in my data when Alexey, for example, mentions that "when … the transition to this two-cycle system was carried out, in fact, we were not really asked; we were just told this as a given." The way the decision about the changes in degree programs under the Bologna Process was made signals the authoritarian power of the state over Russian universities. This is especially important to note as the authoritarian institutional structure of cohesion preceded the processes of neoliberalization,[2] in contrast to the scholarship of authoritarian neoliberalism which argues that authoritarianism is the outcome of neoliberalization.

The research participants frequently mentioned that the actual transition to the Bologna Process, that is, "harmonization," was made in quantitative rather than qualitative terms. As universities received the new regulations for degree programs from the Ministry, the change was oftentimes done quite instrumentally without any proper pedagogical or ideological shift that would allow teaching and learning of new academic subjects—"individual learners." Rather, degree programs were adjusted to independent learning by quantitatively redistributing the workload, that is, providing more hours in the curriculum for individual learning and reducing the contact teaching.

Through the curriculum plan, which directly influences the workload of university teachers, the state and its regulations heavily interfere with academic work by determining not only the degree content but also the conditions of academic labor. The Bologna Process with its neoliberal emphasis on the "individual learner" provided an additional tool for the state to exert control over academic workers that composed a proletarianized affecto-rhythmic order of academic labor. Federal State Standards became the mechanism that allowed the state to synchronize the changes in the curriculum in universities across Russia.

Next, I analyze how the workload is distributed in practice and how the Bologna Process affected the manipulation of hours through the Federal

[2] The Federal State Educational Standards, although having appeared in 2003 in the post-Soviet Russia, are reminiscent of the Soviet centralized institutional governance of higher education institutions which was insured through the centralized curricula designed by the state. This ensured the same training of specialists throughout the country.

State Standards. I focus on the peripheral universities—those universities that are governed exclusively by the Federal State Standards. It is important to keep in mind that the Federal State Standards and the curriculum plan are two interrelated sets of governing documents that the research participants sometimes refer to interchangeably, as the former is directly translated into the latter.

Optimized Labor: Losses

The entry point to the analysis of "optimized" academic labor under the transition to the Bologna Process was something Yulia said in our first interview; when she first mentioned the Bologna Process, she immediately connected it to "losses." By losses, she referred to layoffs of university teachers and the dissolution of degree programs. Alexey from Petrozavodsk State University told me during our interview, with a sad ironic smile, how he was "a gravedigger, a leader of the funeral team" of the department that existed before the "optimization" and the "harmonization" under the Bologna Process.

The previous Soviet and post-Soviet model of a five-year specialist degree was reformatted into a four-year bachelor's degree under the transition to the Bologna Process. Quantitatively, it meant one year less of learning for the students and, consequently, one year less of teaching for the teaching staff. As one program now required less teaching, some courses were supposed to be reduced from the curriculum. When the transition to the Bologna Process led to the reduction of hours for contact teaching, it inevitably also led to "losses": termination/reduction of degree programs and courses in the process of "harmonization" translated into human losses when many academic employees lost their jobs. These layoffs of academic staff were taken up in the interviews, for example, by Alexey and Yulia. In fact, in 2012–2016, the Russian universities dismissed 25% of all academic workers, in total 81,000 people (Balatskiy 2017: 65).

Alexey from Petrozavodsk State University tells the story of how their degree program underwent the transition to two-cycle education under the Bologna Process and how university employees faced a choice: to focus on the quality of the newly established degree programs or to prevent such losses.

> And the first thing we did [in transition to the two-cycle system] was to reformat the specialist degree program with the preparation for the bache-

> lor's degree program, keeping in mind that we were to develop also a master's program, which we launched later in 2010. [...] That is, we tried to keep this [the master's program] in mind and not try to stuff into the bachelor's degree everything that we have in the specialist degree. Well, it is true that many did exactly this: they simply cut off extra hours as if with scissors under the slogan "We need to save personnel, we need to save people, we need to save courses." (Alexey, June 15, 2020)

The transition to the new system was mostly quantitative: reduction by one year from a five-year specialist program to a four-year bachelor's program in 240 ECTS of student's workload (Aydarova 2014: 71). In his interview with me, Alexey narrated how they made the transition in Petrozavodsk: he stressed that his department did this in a "qualitative" rather than simply "quantitative" manner. The new regulations for degree programs communicated unilaterally by the Ministry made university employees adjust to the rhythmic order of authoritarian decisions and face a choice of either reducing the quality of the programs or the number of teaching staff.

Another result of such authoritarian-neoliberal restructuring of the teaching programs that emerges from the discussion with Alexey is framed around the working conditions of university teachers. In order to "save" people who taught the courses that were to be cut, for example, to protect the academic employees from layoffs, the university community tried to "save" courses even though it would contradict the flow of the degree program: this is what Alexey refers to when he says "we need to save personnel, we need to save people, we need to save courses." This fear of job losses because of the structural changes under the Bologna Process underlined the importance of solidarity within the academic community. These solidarities, albeit somewhat compromising the content of degree programs, were produced by the emerging affecto-rhythmic order of "optimized" labor: university staff sabotaged the principles behind the Bologna Process in order to "save" people. It shows how in the process of transition to the Bologna Process, the components of reforms seemed to be out of sync: the authoritarian-managerial attempts by the state to optimize teaching in Russian universities got entangled with the academic subjectivities of solidarity. Their asynchronous interplay produced rhythmic friction (Fig. 6.4).

Preventing job losses at the expense of designing the new degree programs compatible with the Bologna principles became an act of resistance by the academic employees against both the Bologna Process and Russian Ministry's directives. The role of academic agency in shaping how the

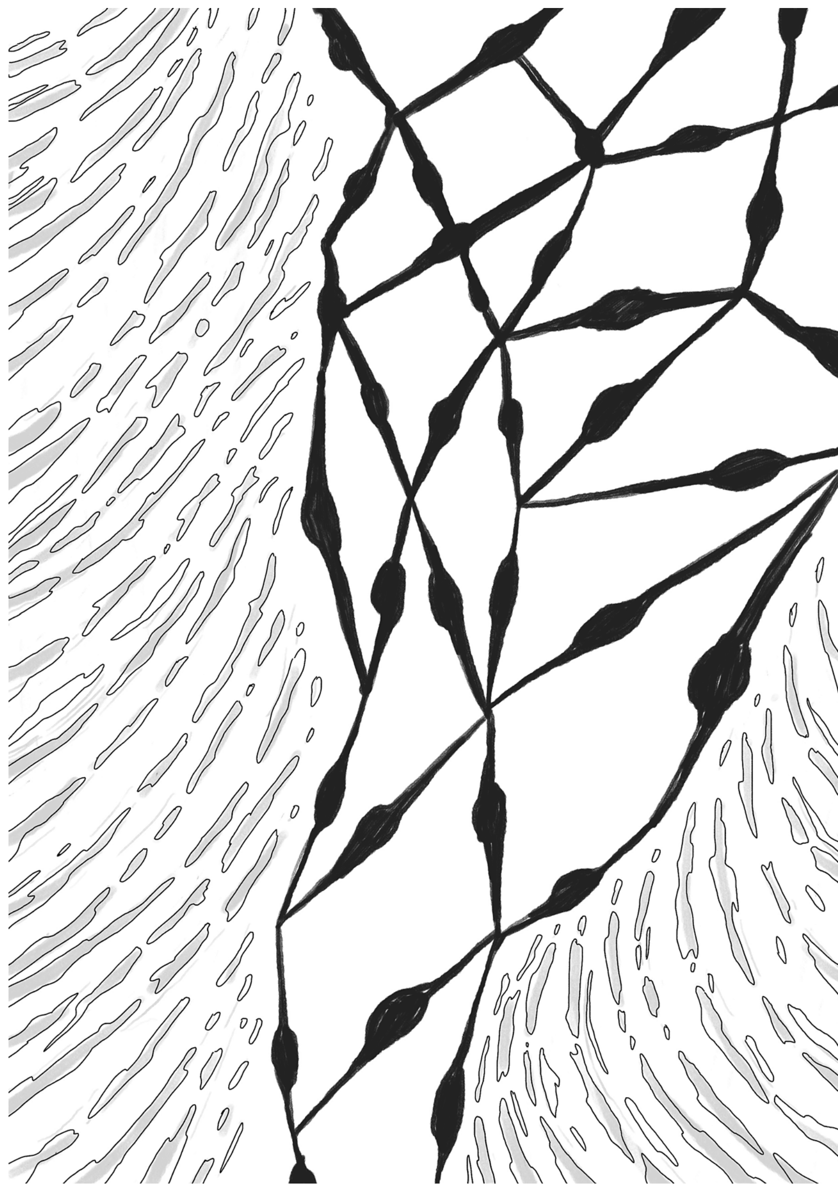

Fig. 6.4 Solidarity. Illustration by Natalia Batrakova

curriculum changes under the Bologna Process would be implemented has been noted in previous research: Katja Brøgger (2014), using Derrida's concept of hauntology, discusses how academics have agency negotiating and contesting the presumably hegemonic power of the Bologna Process. The bureaucratic machine of authoritarian-neoliberal governance attempted to make academic labor more efficient, but academic workers destabilized it.

The losses, nevertheless, affected the composition of teaching within Russian universities. The teacher/student ratio was planned to decrease from 1:10.5 in 2014 to 1:12 in 2018 on average within the framework of optimization policies (Yamschikova et al. 2017: 173). Alexey described how his teaching at Petrozavodsk State University fell under a 1:12 ratio in 2020: the increased number of students per teacher becomes the first point of reference affecting the everyday of Alexey's work:

Iuliia: Can you say that this optimization process affected your position? Departments merged? Or…? How has it affected your work?

Alexey: It definitely did. On the one hand… Well, you know, yes, we have per capita funding. When I started working, the calculated ratio of students and teachers was one to seven or one to eight. But now it is one to twelve. This means in practice a real increase in contact teaching. That is, compared to the mid-90s, I now have contact teaching, "voice load" as we call it, two times more than it was back then. (Alexey, June 15, 2020)

The teacher/student ratio is not even across universities in Russia: the resourceful "leading" universities have the capacity to provide more favorable working conditions. The Higher School of Economics or St Petersburg State University entertains a teacher/student ratio of 1:4 (Yamschikova et al. 2017: 173). Additional material resources available to the "leading universities" which were positioned at the forefront of neoliberal modernization allow for a more harmonious composition of teaching and learning. Neoliberal reforms lead to the inequalities, that is, in the institutional and regional terms. However, these inequalities are further orchestrated by the state by coupling the neoliberal rationality of competitiveness with the state's attempts to succeed in the globalized neoliberal modernization.

Accelerating Pace

The Bologna Process, when implemented in Russian universities, coincided with a heavily state-regulated higher education system. One of the forms which state regulation takes is Federal State Standards, which have changed according to the Bologna principles. Yulia mentioned how "a larger number of hours for independent work of students" relates to a new ideology of higher education in the Bologna Process and the changes within the curriculum in a Russian university. Yulia continues that while contact teaching ("coursework") hours have indeed been reduced, no more hours in the teachers' workplan have been added for supervision, and no other pedagogical or material transformation has been undertaken to support the individual learning of students (see also Aydarova 2014: 71).

Within the universities, these changes have led to changes in hourly regulation of teaching and learning: a decrease in contact teaching and supervision hours and an increase in hours in the curriculum for the student's independent work. The teachers are not compensated for the consultations and supervision of students' independent work that they still have to complete as part of their work duties (see also Grigorash 2016: 5). Course content might stay exactly the same in the curriculum and the diploma except that the amount of contact teaching is reduced while the number of hours dedicated to "independent learning" is increased strikingly for several years. Since the "third generation" Federal State Standards that implemented these changes, the Ministry has since passed another three "generations of standards."[3] Each new generation allocated fewer contact hours to a course or supervision activities. When academic workers are expected to perform the same activities under tighter schedules, the speed of their work is accelerated—to an "optimized" rhythm of neoliberal academic production and authoritarian reproduction of the state (Fig. 6.5).

During our interview, Yulia shared with me how contact teaching was reduced and independent student learning increased in practice in the degree program she was teaching at Ulyanovsk State University. Independent student work was surely a part of the curriculum even before

[3] The frequent interchangeability of Federal State Standards was remarked in different interviews and sometimes referred to as "mess" or "leapfrog" (Alexey) through which the Ministry "mocked" (Yulia) the academic community: each new "generation" of Standards not only decreases the hours for each specific activity, requiring academic subjects to work faster but all the university documentation regarding the degree programs has to be rewritten according to the new set of Standards (Darya).

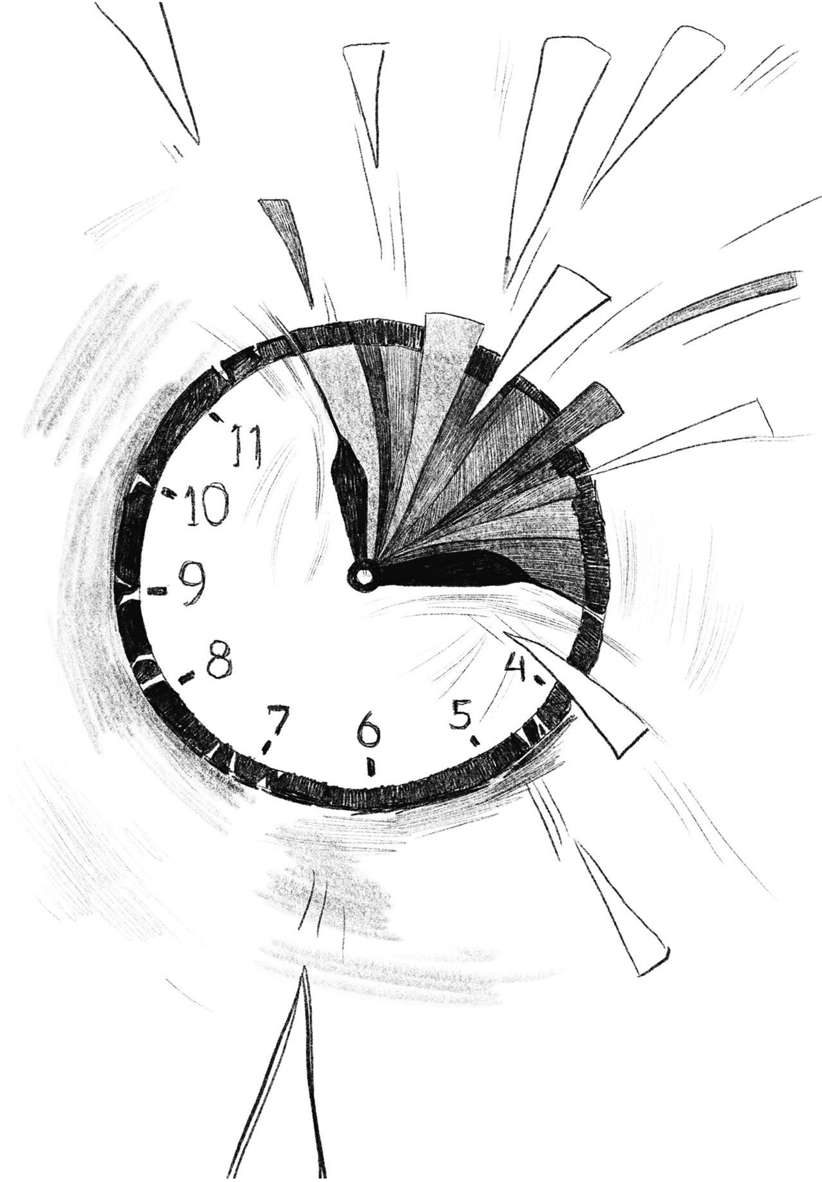

Fig. 6.5 Speeding up. Illustration by Natalia Batrakova

the changes but consisted of a smaller part of the student's workload than contact teaching. After the Federal State Standards were changed to implement the Bologna Process, the curriculum often just "flipped" the students' workload, interchanging the number of hours for contact teaching and students' independent work, as Yulia recalls in her interview.

> If you look at this "redistribution" of hours as a whole, it doesn't seem to be very noticeable. For example, a one-year course is 72 hours, and these 72 hours were used to be your contact teaching, with seminars, and so on. Independent work of students was, let's say, 36 hours. At the moment, 36 hours is your contact teaching along with seminars, and 72 hours is the independent work of students. Independent work of students is not paid; the course and its workload remain in the diploma exactly the same as it was, but the teacher's salary decreased by half [for this specific course]. (Yulia, June 14, 2020)

Such flipping hides the changes from an outside observer: Yulia underlines how a course—and a degree program in general—looks very "solid" on paper while drastic changes actually happened in teaching and learning activities. This attempt to make changes invisible to the outside viewer, especially to students, is why such "redistribution" of hours has been called manipulation by the academic workers (Yamschikova et al. 2017: 181). The new "optimized" composition of the degree program is silenced to the outside, but noticeable to the educators on the inside who are supposed to implement it.

Similar dynamics are evident in the curricula that I analyzed: working hours have been redistributed so that the amount of student independent work has been increased on paper. I analyzed the curriculum plan of the bachelor's degree program in International Relations and Foreign Policy at Ulyanovsk State University. While looking at the curricula for 2017–2018 (Ulyanovsk State University 2017) and 2019–2020 (Ulyanovsk State University 2019), I noticed a variation in courses required for obtaining the university degree as well as the workloads for these courses. This was very noticeable for some courses: "Theory of IR" in 2017–2018 required 180 hours of work, and in 2019–2020 it became 216 hours. The extra 36 hours were added by increasing the amount of independent student work (from 72 to 108 hours).

Another change within the accelerated rhythm of teaching and learning is the reduction in hours for the same type of teaching activity (see also

Yamschikova et al. 2017: 174). This became especially visible in the supervision of students' individual projects that fall outside the course content. Below I analyze how the timing requirements for each specific activity have been decreasing: an activity might stay completely the same (e.g., supervision of a student's project within an academic year). However, the requirements for how much time a teacher should spend on this activity might be reduced. According to the interviewees, the most drastic reduction is in time allocated for supervising students' term papers.

Supervising students' term papers [*kursovaya rabota*] is one of the main teaching activities in Russian universities. Those term papers are basically a piece of research conducted by a student throughout an academic year. Usually, they start as literature reviews on a specific topic chosen by a student or suggested by a department. Throughout the cycle of bachelor's or master's studies, term papers become more complex and, ideally, should lead to the final project—a bachelor's or master's thesis, although this continuation is not obligatory. The aim of a term paper is to deepen the knowledge of a particular subject and to master the skills of independent research. For example, the Ulyanovsk University's guidelines for writing a bachelor's term paper (Ulyanovsk State University 2016) state that "in modern conditions of the development of a market economy, university graduates must be prepared for independent professional activities." Thus, term papers are individual student projects that could be undertaken in the format of writing scientific research or developing one's own professional product connecting it to the theoretical discussions, as in the Ulyanovsk University guidelines (Ulyanovsk State University 2016) or the Higher School of Economics guidelines (Term Papers n.d.). The students are supposed to learn essential skills of independent research work during these projects, which are an important part of higher education.

The hours allocated to supervising term papers have been steadily and drastically decreasing. At Ulyanovsk State University, supervising a term paper in 2022–2023 was allocated one hour of work per student in the workplan compared to 16 hours in the 2000s (see also Yamschikova et al. 2017: 179). The new realities of supervision were referred to by Yulia as "unrealistic," signaling how such an accelerated rhythm created by the authoritarian-neoliberal state regulations becomes hard to sustain. Again, the bigger "leading" universities can entertain working at a slower pace: for example, the Higher School of Economics in 2022–2023 allocates three hours per year for term paper supervision (Higher School of Economics n.d.).

The power of university administration to establish their own regulations and distribution of funding within the university becomes a part of the composition. I was left wondering how the centralization of power still leaves such openings and untransparent flexibilities; how tightened control corresponds to unregulated lacunas; and how the regulations cannot always be publicly documented and follow the rule of law, but rather happen within gray areas of personal decisions, connections, and interests. Some scholars partly addressed this issue by analyzing the state governance in Russia when a highly centralized and controlled state system intentionally co-exists with untransparent mechanisms of decision-making (Gel'man 2022). Moreover, differences in the working conditions illustrate the dynamics between the statuses of centers and peripheries produced by the difference in material provision and how the affecto-rhythmic order of optimized academic labor is emerging from the peripheries. These inequalities are produced by the attempts of an authoritarian state to do well in the neoliberal modernization.

The individual working plan of university teachers was revised according to the new regulations: one teacher was now supposed to spend fewer hours on supervision (making the supervision process faster and, thus, more efficient) and the courses required less contact teaching (keeping in mind that the content of the course stayed the same). The "freed" hours from the individual working plans of university teachers were filled in an "efficient" manner. As a teacher was expected to spend fewer hours per course, they were expected to teach more courses, and this increased the teaching workload:

> One teaches more classes now. But why is that? Because this system of supervision, which I have already mentioned, does not work. For us, the university teachers, with such a reduction in hours, including for term papers, the workload has increased dramatically. The teacher has an average of 3–4 classes per day in order to fill in the working hours. And it will be contact teaching. That is, earlier, in order to comply with a wage rate, one could have two classes a day, but there was also supervision. Now there are no hours for organizing students' practical work, no consultations about term papers, about theses; all of this is decreasing. And accordingly, it is contact teaching that increases. That is, a teacher has four classes, and the fourth class ends around 16:30–17; this is a full-time working day, including Saturdays, because we have a six-day work week. Thus, nowadays, such a concept as a library day is practically nonexistent. There is no such day that

> a teacher can devote to preparing a course, checking term papers, or something else. (Yulia, June 14, 2020)

Yamschikova et al. (2017: 174) argue how such changes in Russian universities—the increase of courses per teacher without compensation for students' supervision they have to perform in practice—led to a "chronic overload" of academic employees, which, according to my interview with Artem, does not leave time for research activities. Yamschikova et al. (2017: 182) go on to describe how students' independent work has become a cornerstone of reforms in the curriculum in Russian universities; however, it does require more supervision and guidance—and most importantly, this needs to be accounted for in the teaching work plan. "One teaches more classes now," as Yulia specifies above, seems to confirm these earlier findings, and signals the accelerated rhythm of academic performance: the rhythm that leads to the affective experiences of "chronic overload" (Fig. 6.6).

The policies of "optimization" by the Russian state together with the globalized project of neoliberal modernization materialized within the Bologna Process orchestrated the accelerated rhythm of academic performance in Russian universities. The previous scholarship portrays a clear connection between Russia joining the Bologna Process and the deterioration in working conditions for university staff. For example, in their above-mentioned policy discussion, Yashin and Strukova argue that the Bologna Process has directly increased workload for academics:

> In line with the orientation toward "optimization" of the activities of higher education in Russia, [under the Bologna Process] there has been a reduction in contact teaching hours per course without a noticeable increase in the time allocated for monitoring students' independent work, for work outside the classroom. As a result, the contact teaching load of teachers increases through an increase in the number of courses they teach. (Yashin and Strukova 2015: 102)

However, there are tensions about what the "effective" academic performance might actually mean. Interestingly, Yashin and Strukova continue analyzing the changes in academic labor under the Bologna Process but suggest their own understanding of "effectiveness":

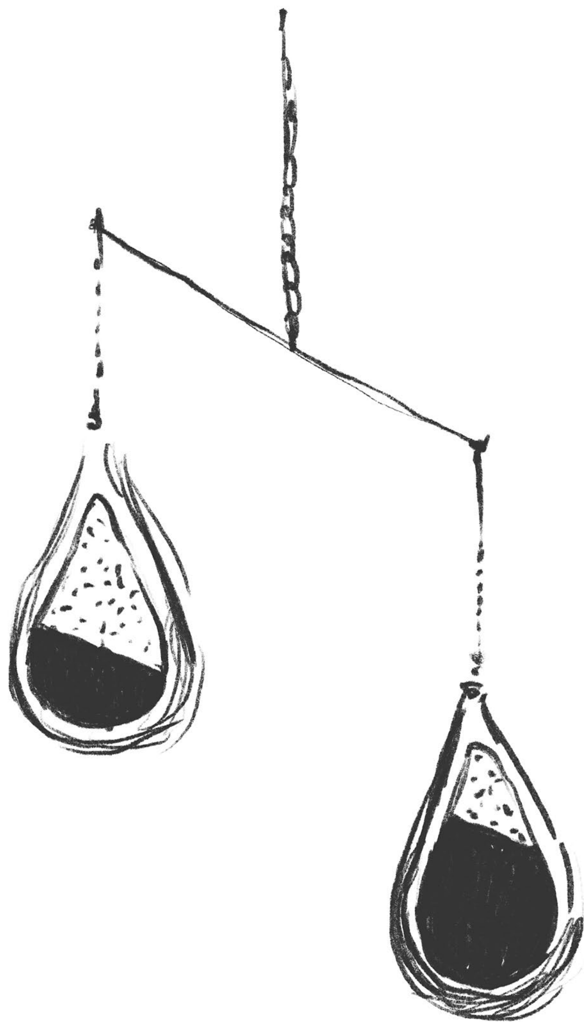

Fig. 6.6 Changing workload. Illustration by Natalia Batrakova

> A modern effective teacher of higher education, in addition to fulfilling the teaching load, needs to be engaged in research activities. […] If a teacher is also involved in applied research work, there is also supposed to be interaction with consumers of these scientific and applied products. However, it must be admitted that the situation described above is in many respects ideal and rarely occurs in real practice in the work of Russian universities. And there is only one reason for this – the overload of the teacher with educational and especially classroom workload. (Yashin and Strukova 2015: 100–101)

In short, Yashin and Strukova, as members of the Russian academic community, suggest that the overload in contact teaching prevents the emergence of "modern" and "effective" academic workers in Russian universities. Interestingly, the overload arose from an attempt to optimize the efficiency of academic workers in the first place. The academic community disputes this optimization, trying to counteract the state's reforms, but doing it also through the idea of efficiency. Yashin and Strukova argue that in order to be in sync with the development of global—neoliberalized—academia (to be a "modern" academic), one needs to have time for research, that is, suggesting that a different rhythmic composition of academic work is effective to succeed in the imperative of the global modernization and competition. It further shows the frictions of workings of neoliberalism in academia, which is not universal: while both the state's project of optimization and the "effective modern academic" project of doing research and contributing to industry carry neoliberal imaginaries, they take different, and even conflicting, compositions.

Yashin and Strukova continue:

> It is not uncommon for situations when, with a standard teaching load of 900 hours per year, three-quarters of it (especially among early-career teachers) is classroom teaching. This teacher turns from the creator and interpreter of knowledge into a simple repeater, that is, mechanically retells the content of textbooks. […] In order to collect a necessary amount of teaching load, the teacher is often forced to take on a wide variety of courses, which a teacher is often not specialized in. (Yashin and Strukova 2015: 101)

That is how Yashin and Strukova counteract the narrative of the efficient and modern academic subject: research work is an essential part of academic development, and without it, a teacher becomes a simple "repeater" of the textbooks, they suggest. To fill in the individual work plan, a teacher

should take on a larger number of courses, which teachers are not specialized in. The word "mechanically" is used again: under contemporary working conditions, both teaching and assessment become a mechanistic task of formally performed working duties and go against the creative labor of an academic subject as "interpreter of knowledge." (Fig. 6.7). Thus, the accelerated "effective" pace of academic performance leads to the mechanistic routine of teachers performing tasks they may even not be qualified to do. This de-professionalization could be interpreted as a sign of proletarianization due to the optimization policy in Russian universities. The neoliberal accelerated speed of academic production allows the state to save resources and reproduce itself cheaper.

Academics feel the impact of the emergent affecto-rhythmic order at universities and relate differently to this accelerated pace of academic performance. A university teacher can face the choice: either to comply with hourly regulations, to decrease the supervision and effort invested in courses and, thus, to keep up with new pace; or to fall out of this rhythm of the cheap state reproduction based on neoliberal rationality and perform teaching duties outside the working hours, which increases academic labor.

> The number of hours allocated for a term paper is reduced, and there is no emerging graph for compensating this supervision of the individual work of students. Consequently, a teacher works for free with students; this is a fairly common practice in Russian universities, despite the fact that many teachers follow such a […] model, "I was paid for an hour – this is the hour students will receive." Still, most teachers work for free. Let's call a spade a spade. (Yulia, June 14, 2020)

The asynchronism of two understandings of academic performance—one actualized by state policies of "optimization" and another by teachers concerned with the quality of higher education—leads to deteriorating working conditions and an increase in unpaid labor.

Iuliia: Is it harder to work like that?
Alexey: Of course, of course. Because a significant part of the independent work of students remains outside the official workload. One way or another, time is spent on this, but this is no longer included in paid work. (Alexey, June 15, 2020)

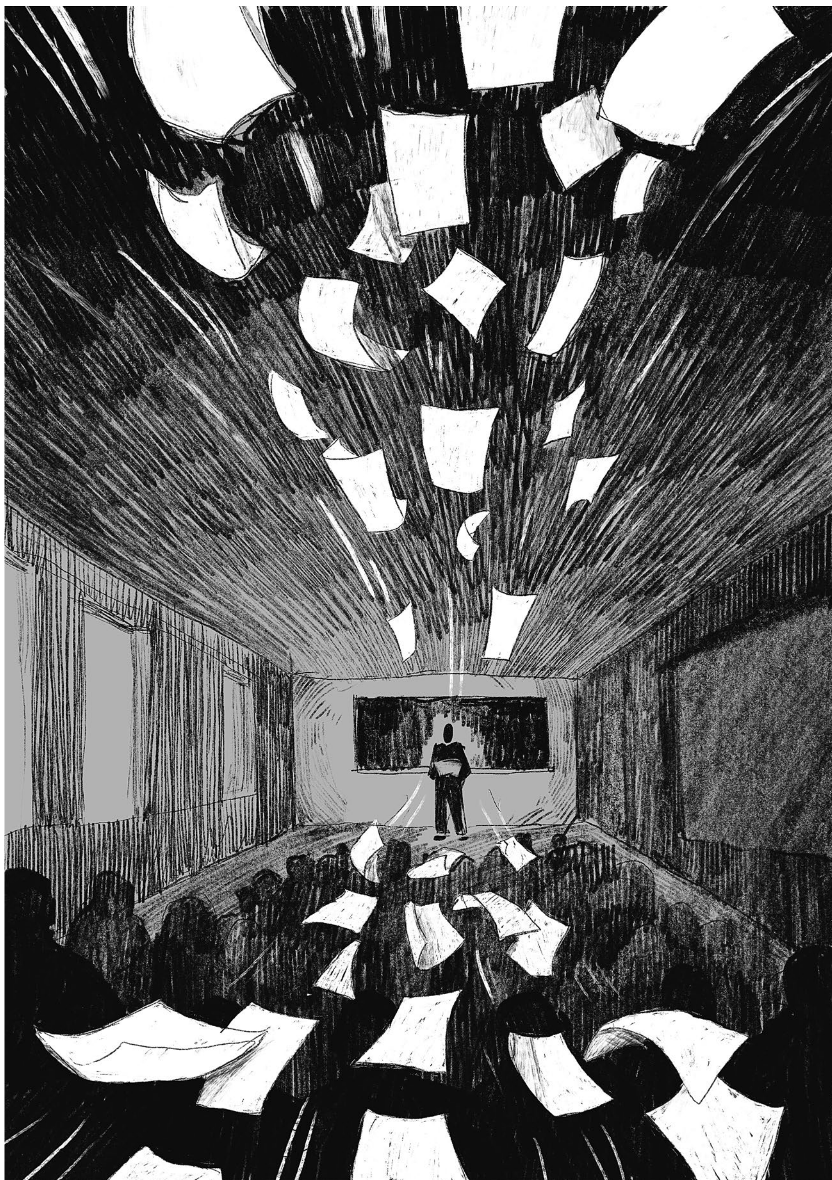

Fig. 6.7 Repetition. Illustration by Natalia Batrakova

The increase in unpaid labor at Russian universities seems to be a powerful concern: as part of my fieldwork, I was following an open academic Telegram chat where people from different institutions created a community and discussed academic-related issues. At some point, one person posted a Tweet about the resistance to unpaid duties in academia which read: "Just for today I will not volunteer to… write an essay, review an article, proposal, or manuscript, produce a conference, join a committee, manage a program, recruit faculty, develop curriculum, launch an initiative, submit a grant proposal, conduct an interview, write a blog…" (fieldwork diary, October 21, 2021). It seemed to touch a nerve. "I look at this Tweet and think that I need to print something like this and hang it over my desktop so that before opening a laptop and messages, I will first read it as a mantra or as an affirmation," shared one of the chat participants (fieldwork diary, October 21, 2021).

While some participants in the Telegram discussion praised this assessment, there were also other voices. Remuneration and rigorous calculation of every academic activity capitalize the relationships within the university even more, and the desire for a more community-based exchange of products within contemporary academia is something people longed for. It seemed that some members of the academic community found inspiration in performing some duties even though they would be not remunerated but would, nevertheless, entertain academic creativity and professionalism within the academic community. Further capitalization and more rigorous regulations of duties would have solved the problem of unpaid labor, according to one group of chat participants, but would have increased the control over one's academic performance, according to the second group of participants. In other words, increased economic and administrative control over academic responsibilities might deepen the process of proletarianization of academic labor. The question raised is somewhat grand and persistent: do we give in to the capitalist logic to at least receive the benefits from it? Or do we oppose it in principle? What brings about the change?

Some academics insisted that the emerging affecto-rhythmic order of academic performance and accelerated pace of work was a necessary condition for the operations of a "modern university." Maria and Irina from the Higher School of Economics describe how academic work becomes "a lifestyle" in contemporary times requiring a constant presence at work and professional development:

Irina: Higher School of Economics is a way of life, more than just a professional activity. It surprises a lot of people, and it's hard for them to adjust to the fact that you, who work at the Higher School of Economics, are doing it 24/7. It's a fact. Yes, this is a lifestyle, a modern profession. (Maria and Irina, May 07, 2020)

Maria and Irina continue how academics from the peripheral universities sometimes oppose this "modernity" as they are not, according to Maria and Irina, sufficiently dedicated to their professional activities; Maria and Irina seem to negatively judge such a flexible perception of one's work:

Irina: They are used to eight-hour days, five days a week.
Maria: Well, an eight-hour day, Irina? We know perfectly well that people give one lecture at a regional university and go home. They never worked. I say all the time to them: I just envy you, here you have one class a day; then you do whatever you want. [...] That is, such activity is not enough for a normal person. [...] They all have this style. (Maria and Irina, May 07, 2020)

First, Irina and Maria's accounts seem to contradict how academic workload at regional Russian universities is perceived by the interviewees and scholars at these universities that I presented above. However, it is interesting how they construct a neoliberal subjectivity around a "lifestyle" that a modern university requires: being connected to one's work 24/7 is an activity that, supposedly, is required for contemporary academia and fast-paced life in general. In these accounts, the accelerated rhythm of academic performance becomes a necessary condition of "modernity" (cf. Rosa and Scheuerman 2009). In other words, presumably, to keep up with the pace of academia and succeed in the competitive environment, one needs to dedicate oneself to professional life and learn how to do things fast.

This "lifestyle" often requires very strict time management with work duties falling outside working hours (evenings and weekends) to keep up with the rhythmic order of "efficiency," as it was discussed with Anastasiya Laskovaya, a docent in management at St Petersburg State University, in her public interview:

From 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. I teach classes or perform administrative duties. In the morning I go through the emails and divide all the questions into urgent

> and non-urgent. In the evenings and on weekends, I prepare for courses, conduct research, and write scientific articles. (Znamenskaya 2021)

Those quotations support the claim by Abramov et al. (2016: 68) that academics in leading universities that are included in the "ranking race" tend to be less critical of optimization reforms as they entertain sufficient financial and status-like dividends from these reforms. Similarly, Anna from the Higher School of Economics mentioned in her interview that "you can write a lot of good articles [at the Higher School of Economics], apply for bonuses, and get good money. These possibilities exist. Other universities don't have them." The academic staff of smaller peripheral universities seem to be more cautious and even critical toward the reforms promoting optimization through efficiency and call for the return of the "old Soviet" system and increasing state funding (Abramov et al. 2016: 68).

The increase in unpaid duties was one of the main reasons why Yulia in the end left Ulyanovsk State University.

> Why did I leave Ulyanovsk State University? It happened that my workload remained the same, but the administrative duties grew [alongside the main workload]. […] Then I lost my nerve. Two years later it became clear that it would not improve, it was very difficult. As the dean said to me when I quit that I had "an excellent student syndrome." I understand; but if this job is delegated to me, even if it's an unpaid job, it must be done. That's why I quit. (Yulia, June 14, 2020)

The dean asked Yulia not to be so scrupulous when performing her tasks; apparently, Yulia's "excellent student syndrome" prevented her from navigating within the formal and informal extensive workload, which, according to the dean (here his—supposedly common—academic subjectivity becomes visible), could be successfully performed by just trying a bit less. Yulia, arguably, has fallen out of the authoritarian-neoliberal rhythm, which resulted in her decision to leave the university.

Synchronizing Rhythms [2]: Curriculum Software

Lastly, I turn my analysis toward a technological component within the university assemblage that plays a role in composing a new affecto-rhythmic order. When I was talking to Yulia about how hours are

redistributed, I felt the vague presence of another regulating component when Yulia discussed the working conditions, although, I was not exactly sure what she meant. Here is this extract that caught my attention:

> We are given a matrix that we fill in. And this matrix does not give us any opportunity to redistribute hours in favor of contact teaching. It just won't let us count it all there differently. And accordingly, we work according to this matrix. (Yulia, June 14, 2020)

I contacted Yulia once again and asked what she meant by this "matrix" and learned that this component easily left unnoticed is a curriculum software that dictates the hourly distribution of workload for university teachers. This software further composes an affecto-rhythmic order of academic labor that can be characterized as proletarianized as it helps the university management to apply this new hourly distribution to teachers (Fig. 6.8).

Such components are indeed not always easy to notice. Attila Bruni (2005), for example, reflected on this when studying the introduction of an electronic patient records system in an Italian hospital: this system was present in some times and places but not in others. Such technological components can be referred to as virtual in the assemblage sense of the term: they exist in the digital space and hold potential for actualizations within the assemblage when connecting to other localized components (Buchanan 2021: 58).

The software is not a physical object present in the university space and cannot be observed directly; although, in a sense, the software is always there, orchestrating university teachers in their everyday work. Tracing the role of software in (re)producing a proletarianized affecto-rhythmic order took me some time; I needed to read beyond the social interactions and physical presence. This corresponds to the research on the introduction of algorithms into public service which underlines the "invisibility of algorithmic systems and opacity of their operations" (Gritsenko and Wood 2020: 4).

This software is simply called *rabochiy uchebny plan* (curriculum plan), and that is essentially what it is: a technological component containing information on curriculum and teaching requirements. The software displays the quantitative requirements for the degree programs and distributes the workload among the teachers: how many credits the course is supposed to be; thus, how many hours should be dedicated to a specific teaching and learning activity (contact teaching or independent learning)

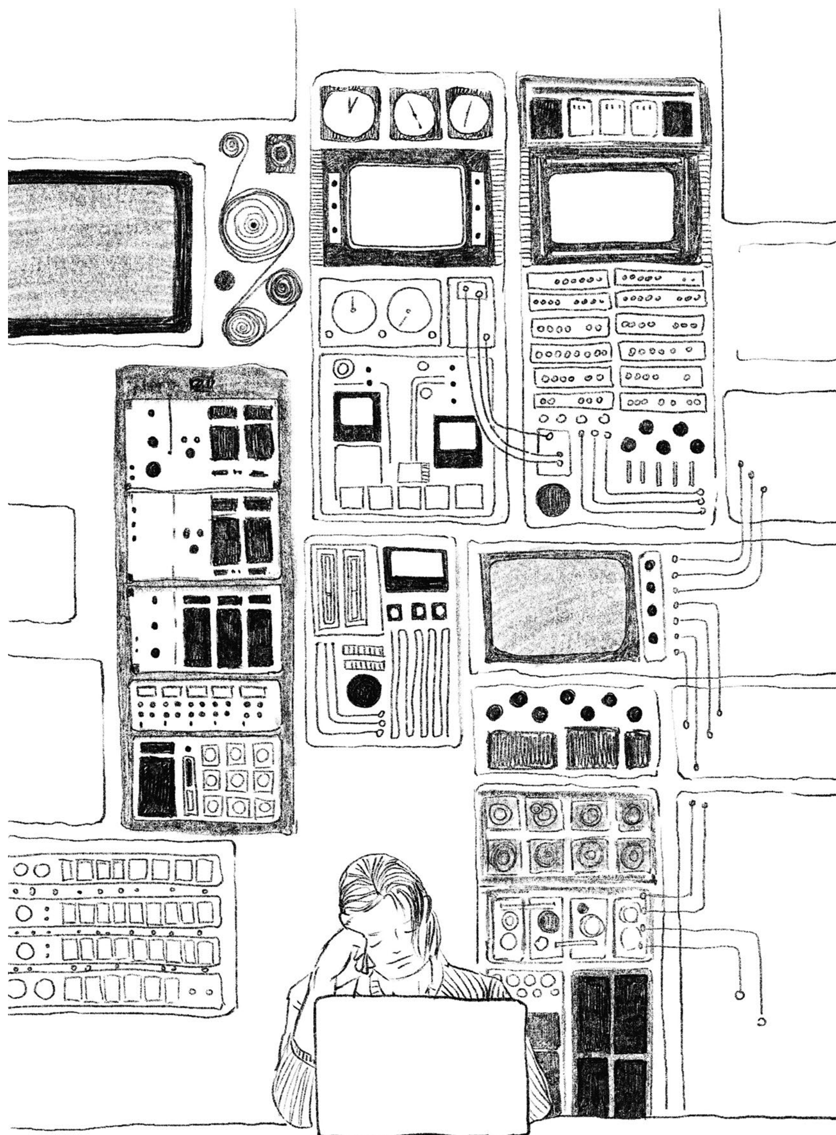

Fig. 6.8 Curriculum software. Illustration by Natalia Batrakova

as well as the course evaluation options (an exam with a 2–5 grading scale, or a pass/fail exam). This is how the software becomes a force-full component orchestrating the proletarianized order of academic performance, as it contains all the information on the hourly composition of university teaching.

When working with the software, it is not always clear what formulas it uses to calculate the hour requirements and course evaluation options. Thus, educators can exercise no control over quantitative requirements for their teaching, which results in their alienation and estrangement: "[The curriculum] is made in a particular software, it calculates everything (including independent work) on its own, according to its formulas—I have no idea how" (Yulia, June 14, 2020). Yet, impersonalized software and its unexplained formulas enable the accelerated rhythm of teaching. This might invoke affects of alienation and loss of control as is shown in Yulia's accounts: "I have no idea how," she proclaimed with frustration.

Technological components shape new realities of labor at universities. They rearrange the agency of teaching practices: software and algorithms have the capacity to exercise managerial control (Buffat 2015: 154)[4] and, arguably, are used to increase the "accountability" of educators. In Russian universities, accountability is ensured through the synchronization of higher education institutions to the more "effective," that is, cost-efficient, rhythm of academic performance coordinated by the centralized power of the bureaucratic state. Moreover, the digital component facilitates controlling the academic activities: the agency in the decision-making process of teaching is now distributed between teachers and the software (cf. Buffat 2015). Previous research has recognized the social power of algorithms, which can "exert power, shape reality, and ultimately, (re)construct social order" (Gritsenko and Wood 2020: 3). The intensified loss of control over one's academic performance prompted by curriculum software further legitimizes my reading of this order as proletarianized.

The need to sustain efficient academic performance under the state bureaucratic dictate interestingly brings new elements into the composition: private companies. Several private companies offer their services and products to universities. At least two companies develop technological

[4] Scholars have pointed out recently that implementation of technological components is prevalent in the public sector more broadly: software and predefined algorithms, for example, have been reshaping the work of street-level bureaucrats and introducing e-government (e.g., Buffat 2015).

solutions for university management in Russia: "Russian Solutions" (Russkie Reshenija n.d.) and "Tandem" (TANDEM n.d.). They are both private business enterprises that specialize in the "development and implementation of software for automation of work in private and state organizations" (TANDEM n.d.). These companies provide several packages for the automation of university operations that cover the majority of document management in a university: formation of and accounting for curriculum plans in accordance with the Federal State Standards, calculating and distributing workload, admission of new students, managing ranking systems in a university, scholarships for students and much more, as it is stated on the Tandem website. Tandem is used in more than 50 Russian universities with different statuses.

The software is designed to make academic performance more efficient, synthesized by the state policies of optimization. Nikolay Klevansky et al. (2020: 45) argued that while the curriculum software is a costly solution, it is much more "effective" than using MS Excel for internal document flow and governance within universities considering how bureaucracy-driven Russian state institutions, including universities, are. The bureaucratic dictate of documented reporting within university practices calls for more nuanced—and complicated—technological solutions that, apparently, assist with the document flow, which can be hard to sustain otherwise. The curriculum software synchronizes academic performance with the control of a bureaucracy-driven Russian state. The rhythm becomes further proletarianized under the force of this state bureaucratic dictate which tries to control and unify academic performance in different universities across the territory of the Russian state. The state reproduces its institutional and territorial coherence.

The software is advertised to the universities by emphasizing how it could help to attune workflow to the state regulations. The software companies promise to become a mediating tool that will synchronize the universities with the authoritarian-bureaucratic order of state regulations. Full accordance with the rhythm of state regulations was visible in the educational videos for using this software: "The basis for planning the curriculum is the federal state standard, which sets the compulsory disciplines for training, and working curricula are built from it. […] Let's go to the section 'Federal Standards'" (Russkie Reshenija 2020). The Federal State Standards, as a bureaucratic-managerial instrument that allows the state to oversee universities' attunement to its centralized regulations, create a

zone of awkward engagement and enable the presence of private companies within the university assemblage.

Despite the presence of private companies in the university assemblage, the proletarianized order of optimized academic labor in Russian universities does not involve the processes of privatization and commodification that were specifically pointed out in the analysis of proletarianization in other contexts. In Australian universities, Kanishka Jayasuriya et al. (2020) argues, the proletarianization of academic labor is aimed at minimizing the costs of higher education due to its commodification and privatization. My analysis also shows that the proletarianization of academic labor in Russian universities is aimed at cost-efficiency, but the order is composed by the state mechanisms of surveillance and control that attempt to synchronize the performance of universities within Russia at an accelerated pace and optimize efficiency. These mechanisms of surveillance and control increase the feelings of alienation and estrangement which also composes the new affecto-rhythmic order of academic labor. The entanglements of affecto-rhythmic order and state dictate impact on the composition of the authoritarian-neoliberal university.

Rhythms of Dispossession: Neoliberal Rationality and Reproduction of the State

Analyzing neoliberalism and authoritarianism through the idea of rhythms and affects shows us that these dispossessive regimes of governance are not only rationalities or ideologies that work through enforcement. They have other dimensions: affectual and temporal, which are equally important for their reproduction.

The accelerated speed of production has been largely discussed in relation to capitalist rationality, which also permeates universities. The acceleration of academic work is closely connected to the neoliberal ideas of cost-efficiency in university activities (Jayasuriya et al. 2020: 43). But what does this accelerated speed do within—and to—an authoritarian state when neoliberal modernization—and the precarization and dispossession that it generates—is orchestrated and supervised by the state? It ensures the efficiency of state reproduction. Teaching and graduating people for the labor markets in a faster way: this is the rhythm of cheap state reproduction based on neoliberal rationality.

This new affecto-rhythmic order can be characterized as proletarianized: it is a system of surveillance and managerial control over academic work, which simultaneously leads to its de-professionalization (McCarthy et al. 2017: 1017). Proletarianization is characterized by "the loss of control over coordination, planning, and allocation of academic work" (ibid.: 1018). The accelerated speed of academic work is composed of controlled schedules imposed externally by the state's regulations.

Proletarianization leads to various types of dispossessions: economic dispossession when teachers don't receive the payments they deserve for their work; academic dispossession of expertise and subsequent de-professionalization; and dispossession over means of production. Through neoliberal rationality, the proletarianization of academic work eliminates academic expertise for the technocratic reproduction of the educated labor force for the state. Dispossession as a practice of governance is ingrained in both neoliberalism and authoritarianism: they create dispossession, but also feed from it.

In this chapter, I analyzed the acceleration in relation to teaching: an academic activity left outside the direct competition in globalized neoliberal modernization. Since these activities were designed to be upheld by a specific group of universities (as I discussed in Chap. 4), it meant that academic workers in those peripheral universities have been particularly targeted by these processes of proletarianization and dispossession. In the next chapter, I turn my gaze mainly to the regulations of publication activities, the main asset in the globalized neoliberal market of higher education and research, and trace the political consequences of authoritarian-neoliberal control over academic labor in this regard.

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CHAPTER 7

Disciplining Efficiency: Performance-Based Pay

Introduction

It is the summer of 2020. I am aimlessly scrolling through the news in Russophone non-state media channels on Telegram. I am in St Petersburg, feeling the embodied presence of the changing political regime in Russia. Various protests have been happening throughout 2019 and 2020, with the increasing use of police violence and unlawful detentions: protests against the falsification of election results for the Moscow Duma; protests against the constitutional change allowing Putin to be re-elected as president for another two terms; protests in Khabarovsk against the imprisonment of its governor under the Kremlin's attempts to strengthen its power over the Russian regions; and protests in support of Alexey Navalny after his poisoning (Voronin 2020, 2021). Checking out the political developments in the news has become a daily practice; a precaution; a manifestation of fear but also a far-reaching solidarity.

Something in the feed catches my attention: some academics are fired from the Higher School of Economics in Moscow due to their oppositional political activity, mainly their participation in street protests and social media posts. I read further. What strikes me is that laying off academics has become possible due to the university administration not prolonging their so-called efficiency contracts (*effektivnyj kontrakt*). The protesting academics have been perceived as unreliable and inefficient in

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I. Gataulina, *Neoliberal Authoritarianism: An Ethnography of Russian Universities*, Central and Eastern European Perspectives on International Relations,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-89451-0_7

the eyes of the university. I feel struck: the neoliberal mechanism of performance-based pay becomes violently entangled with the strengthening of the authoritarian regime. Looking back, I must say that this moment might have been the birth of my whole project analyzing the encounters of authoritarianism and neoliberalism. Before that, I was mostly interested in understanding solely the neoliberalization of Russian higher education, for example, through participation in the Bologna Process. It was at this moment that I started to think about how authoritarianism was brought forward not only by the use of direct force and violence but also by institutional arrangements, which, apparently, are synced with the global neoliberalization of universities and have penetrated institutional practice in Russia (Fig. 7.1).

I traced this performance-based payroll mechanism—an efficiency contract—in Russian universities, and it became the gateway to so much more. The efficiency contract becomes the main protagonist of this chapter. It shows once again how neoliberal modernization has been adopted by the state, often under the authoritarian-managerial patronage of Vladimir Putin. An efficiency contract is a direct example of how neoliberal governance has become a localized template of governance and penetrated the institutional practice of not only Russian universities but the Russian state in general, as efficiency contracts have been designed for all public services.

As pointed out by David Harvey (2005), neoliberalism as a theory is full of contradictions—contradictions which, as shown in this chapter, become dangerous and violent. The neoliberal mechanism of efficiency, supported by economic incentives and supervised not only by universities but by the state itself, produces possibilities for authoritarian practices. Efficiency is imposed and surveilled, leading to institutional regimes of discipline. When this authoritarian practice reverberates to the scale of the state, it reinforces state authoritarianism.

Contemplating Quality

Performance-based pay is a relatively new payroll mechanism in the Russian public sector, partly copied from the international template. The efficiency contract can be understood as a university's performance management of academics (Kallio et al. 2016): a neoliberal mechanism to increase academic productivity through economic incentives. This is part of New Public Management, which aims to govern academic staff as the main asset to ensure good results in global academic competition (Kenny

Fig. 7.1 Authoritarian-neoliberal discipline. Illustration by Natalia Batrakova

2017; Kalfa and Taksa 2017; Shore 2008). Stephen Ball (2003: 215) argues that performance culture, which he calls "performativity," governs the public sector, including universities, in an "advanced liberal" way, where individuals, in this case academic workers, are expected to respond to targets, indicators, and evaluations. Performativity is defined by Ball (2003: 215) as "a technology, a culture, and a mode of regulation that employs judgments, comparisons, and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition, and change based on rewards and sanctions (both material and symbolic)."

In Russia, performance-based pay was introduced through a state policy document in 2012 in the "Program for the gradual improvement of the wage system in state (municipal) institutions for 2012–2018." The program defined the efficiency contract as a mechanism to evaluate one's job performance; the evaluation is translated into incentive payments designed to increase the quality of public services, including higher education:

> an employment contract with an employee that specifies their job responsibilities, wage conditions, indicators, and criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of activities for assigning incentive payments depending on the results of work and the quality of state (municipal) services provided, as well as social support measures. (Rossijskaya Gazeta 2012)

Over time, the knowledge of the liberal expert community bolstered the mechanism of the performance-based pay. In 2017, the expert community of the Higher School of Economics prepared a report and a set of recommendations on the "Efficiency contract for social professionals" where they evaluated the workings of efficiency contracts and defined its status. In this report, the efficiency contract is described as "a system of measures aimed at ensuring decent wages for public sector employees, ensuring their level of well-being in accordance with the established standards of life of the middle class and stimulating high-quality and efficient work in the interests of the consumer" (Kuz'minov et al. 2017: 2). The efficiency contract actualized a new set of rationalities: higher quality of the public sector services is imagined to be achievable by increasing the well-being of employees which is solely defined in the class terms (increasing the *economic* incentives becomes a class-enhancing mechanism in exchange for good performance). All of these measures are aimed at "efficient work in the interests of the consumer," that is, in higher education, the student.

The recipients of public services are referred to as consumers, which recasts the university–student relationship in the marketized terms of service providers and users (see, e.g., Molesworth et al. 2011). Arguably, as I show below, this discourse influences the subjectification of academics and students into these roles.

An efficiency contract has not only synchronized Russian universities with global neoliberal modernization but also produced a neoliberalized state. As such, the efficiency contract is a legal labor contract between a public sector employee and a state or municipal institution. As both definitions mention, the efficiency contract is an instrument used exclusively in the public sector, regulating state and municipal services. The efficiency contract consists of a set of criteria upon which the "efficiency" of work is evaluated. Economic incentives are offered and directly influence an academic's salary based on the evaluation of their personal performance at work.

Both definitions talk about the quality of services, which became an important factor actualizing an instrument of performance-based pay into the universities. Quality refers to the quality of public services offered by various public institutions (universities as one of the main ones as well as schools and hospitals). The governmental liberal expert community who designed the legislation argued that remuneration for particular achievements would stimulate employees' interest in the results of their labor and, in the end, increase the quality of "services" and employee productivity (Kurbatova and Donova 2019: 128). Quality of education and research is measured quantitatively (Ball 2003: 215). Cris Shore (2008) argues that measures aimed at increasing the productivity and efficiency of individual academic subjects have resulted in the development of an "audit culture" that is now pervasive in university activities.

There is a temporal aspect to the discourse of quality: it is often formulated in relation to the presumed inefficiency of the Soviet legacy. Neoliberal mechanisms in post-Soviet Russia were oftentimes aimed at making state officials more responsive and the public sector "more effective" as opposed to "inefficient Soviet times"; those mechanisms would often include economic remuneration and external control over quality assurance (for higher education, see, e.g., Minina 2017). The dissatisfaction with the quality of education and administrative services in Russia was visible in my fieldwork: some students were craving more responsive pedagogies as well as administrative support for students. For example, Lina and Emina, both graduates from St Petersburg State University,

complained about both pedagogical and administrative disregard for students' interests at the university. Lina emotionally shared with me how her expectations of studying at the "best university in the country" were shattered by the study experiences that did not take into account students' interests.

> I was told about the best university in the country, but then you come and face incomprehensible bureaucratic problems and absolutely inadequate teachers. […] It is very rare to meet those [teachers] who at the very beginning clearly and understandably convey what, how, and why this course will be studied, implemented, and evaluated. […] You [as a student] expect one thing, another is told, the third is done, and the fourth is evaluated. (Lina, December 19, 2019))

Lina further continued how "teachers were not on a par with students" and how much effort it took to reach teachers—again, making references to their unresponsiveness. The same was visible with the administrative support: both Lina and Emina said that administrative staff did not respond to students' questions and concerns: "You can't just adequately clear out some questions that relate to your studies; they don't answer your email for a week; […] or there is no one in the office again, and you wait for hours to find an answer to your little question" (Lina, December 19, 2019).

This sense of being abandoned and ignored by an institution leads to a search for mechanisms of responsiveness; such a mechanism is often imagined in the neoliberal marketized discourse of the university's accountability to the consumers of higher education—students. It further intensifies specific subject positions: students imagine themselves as consumers who make economic decisions about the university, which is seen as a service provider (Raaper 2019). So, the subjectification of students into consumers and customers and university into a service provider does not only emerge out of the increased dependency of universities on the funding via tuition fees (Cannella and Koro-Ljungberg 2017; Field 2015: 172). It is also manifested through the post-Soviet desire for responsive and caring (state) institutions.

The dissatisfaction with university pedagogical and administrative support also resonates with the neoliberal discourse of investments: money and effort spent on higher education should, according to this view, correspond to received services.

> It is very disappointing. I have a study right at the university paid by the state and do not spend 290,000 rubles [approx. 3500 euros in 2019 when the interview was done] a year in order to receive this education. Whereas I have many classmates who actually complained, "What are we paying money for, guys?" (Lina, December 19, 2019)

The idea of "investments" is also shared by university teachers. Yulia, a teacher from Ulyanovsk State University, mentions how "progressive" the students are by knowing their rights and defending their interests in the high-quality education that they pay for:

> They know all their rights. I also understand them when they have a course, but they are not taught what is expected. I support them in these situations. Because, well, you paid for your education there, or the state pays for your education; if you paid yourself, it's even more disappointing. And they teach you about Maya the bee or some other nonsense. (Yulia, June 14, 2020)

Students, accordingly, try to employ different mechanisms to make the university responsive often resorting to the neoliberal imaginaries of accountability. Yulia, for example, mentioned how students can go to the dean's office and "make an anonymous complaint" about their dissatisfaction with the studies. Interestingly, Lina referred to her experience of doing an exchange at a university in the USA: she remembered positively "the possibility of an anonymous survey of the quality of teaching. That is, after each semester or the course, you evaluate the teacher; if you don't like something, there is always an institution where you can complain." Students craving a more responsive university long for the external accountability for their teachers—one of the ways to achieve this, in their opinion, is to make university teachers more responsive to the interests of students. The neoliberal mechanism of performance-based pay landed smoothly on this ground.

The Authoritarian-Managerial Project

The mechanism of performance-based pay became a continuation of different reforms aimed at increasing the "productivity" of academic workers. In 2008, the government introduced a new pay scale called Novaya Systema Oplaty Truda (NSOT) to the public sector (Russian Government n.d.). A new system replaced the unified wage tariff system for public

sector employees that had been in place since 1992 (Kurbatova and Donova 2019: 124) and, thus, neoliberalized the state activities. The new pay scale was based on the idea that wages would be calculated according to the achievement of particular criteria in quality and quantity of services (Russian Government n.d.). It exposed the academic workforce to new kinds of labor market conditions in order to stimulate the process of competition among academics. The competition was imagined as a way to increase the productivity of the previously "shielded" group in the academic labor force: older professors (Borovskaia et al. 2014). The logic of competition started to characterize not only the relations between universities, as I showed in the previous chapters, but also the governing and working principles *within* them (Poutanen 2022b).

Since the 2010s, entangled with other mechanisms geared at increasing academic productivity, performance-based pay became a managerial tool to oversee academic performance. Performance-based pay became one of the directions for reforming Russian higher education under the principles of New Public Management (Kurbatova and Donova 2019: 128). The designers of new legislations and reforms copied the "global experience" of fixed-term contracts, which increased managerial control and implementation of metrics to evaluate university teachers and researchers. However, the difference in the Russian higher education system was that the mechanism of performance-based pay was enforced from above at an accelerated pace (ibid.).

This imposition of managerial tools from above is visible in the way that Vladimir Putin took up the development of policies around performance-based pay. While these reforms were neoliberal in nature and applied globally, the influence of the authoritative figure of the president in this process signals how these neoliberal reforms are taken up by the authoritarian state. Performance-based pay became one of the themes within Vladimir Putin's presidential campaign in 2012 (Kurbatova and Donova 2019: 128). His political address was published in the article "Building justice: Social policy for Russia" in *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, a daily tabloid newspaper. There, Putin specified that public sector salaries should be based on efficiency: "mechanical" increase in wages for everyone is ineffective; employees' work should not be remunerated only based on their affiliation to an institution but rather on the individual merit which is "the real contribution."

> The salaries of state employees must be correlated with the specific conditions of the regional labor market […] At the same time, a mechanical increase in wages for everyone is ineffective. It is necessary to take into account the qualifications and professional achievements of the employee in the salary much more fully. This means that an increase in the basic level of payment must be combined with an even faster increase in the funds of incentive allowances and additional payments. […] Ultimately, wages should be paid not for the fact of belonging to a particular institution, but for a real contribution to science, education, health care, culture, to the provision of specific services to society and citizens. (Komsomolskaya Pravda 2012)

Thus, economic remuneration is expected to function as a mechanism for increasing the effectiveness and quality of higher education: by contrast, raising salaries for everyone in the public sector, including universities, is ineffective. Moreover, Putin utilizes the language of merit: "real contribution" to services in the public sector is what should be valued and remunerated, not "mere" belonging to the institution. By distinguishing effective and ineffective university workers, this attitude spells out who deserves economic remuneration for their activities, and who does not. The neoliberal reforms in Russian higher education aimed at making it more competitive and, thus, effective in reaching the state's desired outcomes were strengthened by an increasingly authoritarian political regime. Managerialism in the field of higher education became contaminated by the rise of authoritarian governance under Putin's regime: the criteria of efficiency and productivity are established by the figure of the president communicated to the universities in the form of controls and incentive mechanisms, which reinforces the vertical of power in Russia.

Since no institutional instruments were created to evaluate the content of "achieving good results," the evaluation has become very much formalized through quantitative scientific metrics, primarily, the number of publications by individual researchers and research groups (Kurakova and Grigor'ev 2015: 283). Publishing activity became the main indicator to evaluate the success of research. Another imaginary was contained in the use of global scientific metrics based on publishing activity: the aim was to increase the status and, thus, global competitiveness of Russian higher education (see also Chap. 4). Imaginaries for national success in global academic competition started to be a part of the university governance in the 2010s and became the main driver of the government's decisions.

The stabilization of performance-based pay as a mechanism for increasing Russia's competitiveness and status in the field of higher education was again linked to the figure of the president and his personified directives. After Putin became president—again—in March 2012, he issued a set of presidential decrees, known as the May Decrees. They stabilized the situation where performance-related pay for academic staff is measured mainly in terms of publishing activities. First, the presidential decree "On measures for the implementation of state social policy" increased the salaries of employees in the "social sphere" (President of Russia n.d.-a) by 2018: for university employees, salaries should, on average, be 200% of the average salary in the region. This decree continued implementing a mechanism for higher remuneration of university employees (among other public sector workers) to increase the quality of university services. One of the key measures to achieving this was the implementation of performance-based pay, which was initially designed to increase the academics' productivity by increasing their pay scale and, thus, academics' economic positioning. Another May Decree proclaimed publication activity as one of the main indicators of quality and success of national science and research (Guskov et al. 2017: 8); it directly stated the increase in

> the share of publications by Russian researchers in the total number of publications in world scientific journals indexed in the Web of Science database, up to 2.44 percent. (President of Russia n.d.-b)

Increasing numbers of publications by Russian scholars was seen as a mechanism to increase the position of the higher education and science of *the state* rather than of specific universities. A better position in publication databases would enable a more competitive position in the economy of influence and prestige associated with the competitive economy of publishing (McGandy 2021). While it has been admitted in the previous scholarship that competitive publishing has been a tool to increase the prestige of particular academics or institutions (Teixeira da Silva 2021), in the Russian case, competition in academic publishing became a government project to increase the prestige of *the state* (cf. Mäkinen 2021). Global neoliberalism has produced state formations designed to compete on the global market.

The May Decrees of 2012 played their role in shaping the economy of publication activities: again, the figure of the president became an important actor enforcing this economy and these regulations. Moreover, Web

of Science and Scopus databases became forceful in the university assemblage: publication activity, university efficiency, and, thus, academic quality were evaluated on the basis of these databases[1] (Guskov et al. 2017: 8). The reforms were implemented to directly stimulate academic workers to publish more. Performance-based pay was aimed at constructing efficient workers in the sense of contributing to the competitiveness of higher education and eventually became both a political and an economic tool. Higher quality of Russian higher education (understood in terms of scientific metrics, i.e., number of publications) became the main indicator of success of these neoliberal reforms, which was translated into the success of Putin's policies (Kurbatova and Donova 2019: 124). When the state needs to perform well internationally, the state—under an authoritarian president—takes up the governance of the affairs.

This authoritarian-managerial role of the president in implementing the neoliberal reforms is acknowledged by the academics themselves. When we were sitting with Vladimir from St Petersburg State University in his university office and discussed the implications of the May Decrees within universities, he emphasized how the power of these reforms was enhanced by the fact that they came directly from the *presidential* decree:

> As you know, Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin, when he was once again elected president, issued May Decrees, in which he demanded that the salary – on average – of university teachers be higher than the average salary in our region. Accordingly, they are obliged to pay us bonuses. They may not pay bonuses specifically to me, but the bonuses must be paid so that the average salary is higher than the average for the region, otherwise, someone will "knock our rector on the head" [*nadavat' po golove*] for not following the presidential decree. And the state gives money to the rector for this purpose. (Vladimir, June 18, 2020)

[1] In 2022, the Russian government has decided to stop using Web of Science and Scopus as mechanism to evaluate academic performance and implement a national system: "We have been working on creating our own sovereign system for evaluating scientific activity that meets the interests of the Russian Federation", says the Minster of Higher Education and Science Valery Fal'kov (Kartasheva 2022). The information on how this new system will operate is scarce, making it difficult to determine the extent to which the neoliberal logic of evaluating efficiency has influenced the rationales for the new instruments. However, it is important to note the securitization against the Western-centric neoliberal modernization of universities.

The president entertains a personal power over Russian universities, and the academics are aware of that, sometimes taking it as a protection that the regulations will have been followed. The president "demanded" that university employees' salaries were to be increased through the system of performance-based pay, so the rectors "are obliged to pay," otherwise, they might face sanctions. The presidential power takes the form of a fear of receiving sanctions for not complying with his presidential will as expressed in his decrees and speeches. This affect—fear of the president and the authoritarian regime—contaminates and, as a result, stabilizes the neoliberal managerial reforms within universities (Fig. 7.2).

The redirection of material resources by the Russian government established performance-based pay as a mechanism for publishing at an accelerated pace. First, in order to strengthen performance indicators at universities, the state has increased funding for those universities that perform well in publication activity (Fedotov and Vasetskaya 2016: 61). Before 2012, state funding for research institutions was defined on the basis of the number of employees and their position; after 2012 the system of funding started to operate on a competitive basis where one of the main indicators of success is publication activity (Kurakova and Grigor'ev 2015: 283). In order to see how the university administration operationalized this funding and how remuneration for publication activities became a disciplining mechanism, I discuss how performance-based pay is actualized within universities.

Patchwork Salary, Publishing, and Predatory Behavior

Neoliberal theory did not work as it was imagined: the institutional project of the liberal expert community and the power of the president became landed at universities in a different manner (Kurbatova and Levin 2013: 65–70). Performance-based pay was designed as a neoliberal mechanism for increasing the quality of public services through economic incentives. When the performance-based pay entered Russian universities, it encountered the power of bureaucracy and university administration and the lack of financial resources. The implementation of performance-based pay has also increased the power of university administration to control and operationalize university funding in order to stimulate "good workers" (Kurbatova and Donova 2019). When I was discussing the performance-based pay with various university employees, the discourse of improving

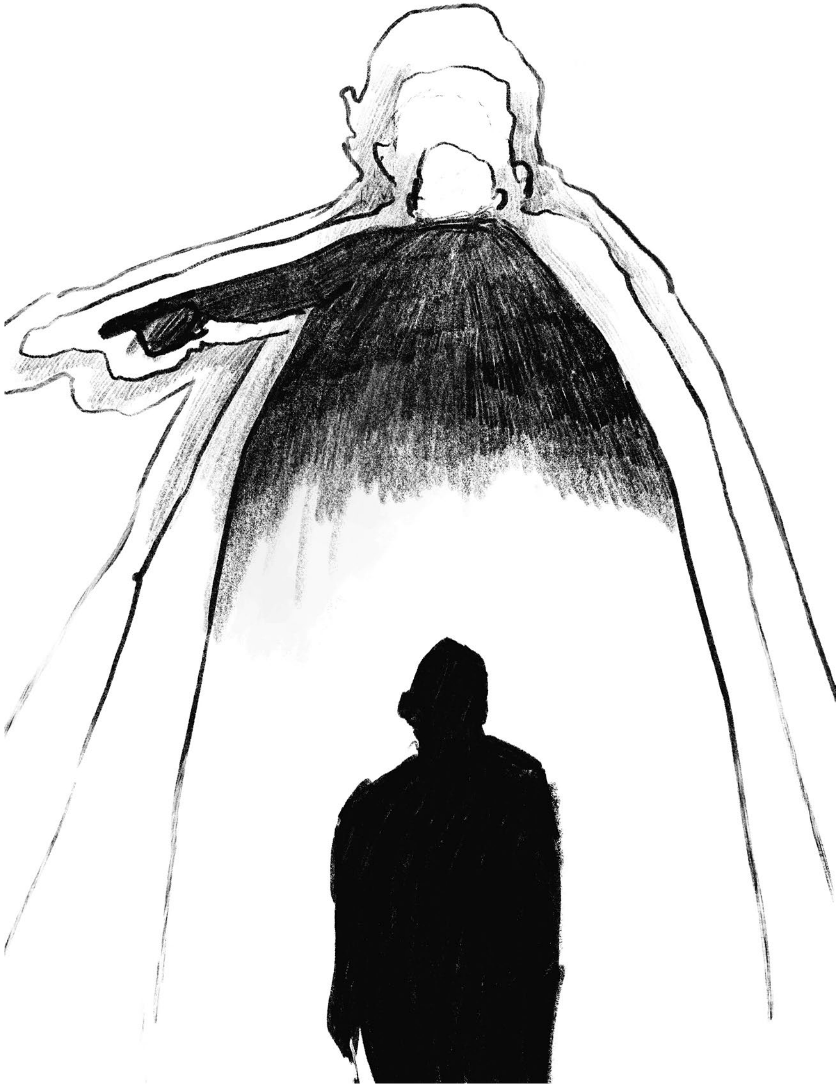

Fig. 7.2 Authoritarian-neoliberal vertical of power. Illustration by Natalia Batrakova

the quality of higher education seemed to disappear. Instead, the academics were specifically talking about how the performance-based pay shapes the power imbalances between the university administration and university teachers, and directly affects working conditions through the idea of workers' efficiency. The mechanism of efficiency contacts increased the control and surveillance over academic performance. This is one of the workings of neoliberal authoritarianism. This contamination produced frictions: while the Russian government attempted to increase the quality and the prestige of Russian science through competition in the global race for publications, the system has been contaminated by different kinds of predatory and profit-seeking behaviors.

Through the references to an efficiency contract, academics tended to frame their working conditions. What the performance-based pay means within universities was acutely summarized by Alexey from Petrozavodsk State University. He seems to situate the performance-based pay only in the domain of academic labor, that is, working conditions, rather than its possible relation to the quality of services:

> [Efficiency contract] is – based on the idea of a contract – an agreement between an administration and an employee that for particular achievements, according to the developed criteria, an employee will receive additional points and, accordingly, they will be converted into money. (Alexey, June 15, 2020)

The efficiency contract has two sides that attempt to stimulate the academics' performance and, simultaneously, to increase control over their activities. First, it is a mechanism that helps evaluate academic merit and consequent remuneration according to workers' "achievements." Thus, the salary of an academic is directly dependent on their productivity according to the list of criteria in the efficiency contract. Second, the efficiency contract is a fixed-term contract. Before the contract comes to an end, a university committee reviews the documents of an employee and makes a recommendation about its renewal. The employee's previous performance is taken into account when deciding whether and for how long the contract will be extended (Kuz'minov et al. 2017: 12).

The mechanisms for compiling efficiency salaries vary in different universities according to resources and specific schemes of distribution (Kuz'minov et al. 2017: 80). However, one principle stays the same: academics from both leading and peripheral universities indicate how a salary

is composed in a complicated manner out of different criteria according to one's achievements. I call this "a patchwork salary."

> That is, the salary is compounded. It cannot be said that you received a salary and that's it, this is what you live with, it turns out to be a very combined thing. (Anna, October 9, 2019)
>
> The salary itself is formed in a very complicated way – we are gradually moving to the so-called efficiency contracts. This is when each person essentially gets a job depending on what they have done so far. (Vladimir, June 18, 2020)

Usually, performance-related pay consists of two main parts: the salary itself, the amount of which is indicated in the contract, and so-called bonuses which are calculated according to one's performance. When, for example, St Petersburg State University calls for applications for a vacant position, it specifies the "guaranteed" salary and the estimated salary according to one's performance: the estimated salary is approximately *four to five times higher* than what initially could be "guaranteed" by the job advertisement; the difference is made up of the bonuses paid to the employee if they are able to perform what is expected from them according to the set of criteria (St Petersburg State University n.d.-a). As Vladimir specifies, the official salary is rather insufficient, and it is implied that academics' income mostly consists of bonuses:

> The problem is that the bonuses are higher than the [official] salary. Thus, people work for these bonuses. Of course, one can live on an official salary, but not very well. (Vladimir, June 18, 2020)

Such a scheme applies to academic staff and university management. By contrast, the administrative support staff receives a stable salary with very rare bonuses (St Petersburg State University n.d.-b). This indicates that the dimensions of productivity are applied specifically to academic activities. In this neoliberal assemblage, academic knowledge production must become profitable in economic terms: the academic (and not administrative) activities are translated into university funding.

Since the academic workers work mostly for the bonuses, the patchwork nature of their salaries becomes a disciplining mechanism used by the university administration, and academics have to comply with the list of criteria in the efficiency contract. What academic activities, according to

the performance-based pay, become remunerated and economically stimulated? What translates into economic value in the efficiency contract? I looked into the internal document of Petrozavodsk State University that regulates criteria for performance-based pay, that is, "Indicators and criteria for evaluating the efficiency of academic staff" (Petrozavodsk State University n.d.-a). The document shows how particular academic activities are translated into "points" which are further directly translated to the size of the worker's salary. When looking closely into this administrative document, it becomes clear that the points are converted into remuneration in a complicated manner; not all points are renumerated.

From this document, I learned that academic activities were divided into three categories: education; research and innovation; organization and methodology. Educational activities include the "approbation" of courses in English and development of textbooks, courses, and online courses that necessarily should be located on the university's educational portal. While all these activities are translated into "points," they are not directly remunerated,[2] but are seen as part of a teacher's agreed individual work plan. As the document states after each of these activities:

> The work is planned and carried out within the framework of the teacher's individual plan, points are awarded, but the point value is 0 rub. (Petrozavodsk State University n.d.-a)

Another part of academic activities that are specified in the efficiency contract are organizational and methodological activities related to working with and supervising school and university students. Half of the list is specifically aimed at performance—in this case, not the university worker's performance, but that of the students. Supervision of students who win competitions is seen as another type of achievement and is remunerated.[3]

[2] The only exception is the last activity in the list, that is, "approbation" of courses in English, which are remunerated, but the amount of money is not specified: "Payments are made upon approbation in accordance with the curricula/programs." Conducting the courses in English makes them "global," which, in this new economy of scales, is remunerated higher.

[3] A couple of indicators, though, are aimed rather at building and sustaining the academic community such as "Organization and conduct of regular educational work and extracurricular work with students" and "Organization and conduct of regular career guidance work with schoolchildren."

The main remuneration value seems to lie within the second category on the list, that is, research and innovation activities: the number of points is higher, and all the activities are converted into monetary equivalents. The list of activities includes writing a monograph, article publications indexed in different citation databases, patents, and supervision of students who graduate as Candidates of Sciences.[4] Out of all activities, the most rewarded one is publications in high-ranking journals. As Alexey from Petrozavodsk pointed out to me when we discussed the new payroll system: "But the main way to make money from this efficiency contract is to write articles in high-ranking journals." Publication activities are rewarded differently according to the journal status. Publishing articles in journals that were indexed in international databases, Web of Science or Scopus, were either 60 points (for journals in quartiles 1 and 2) or 50 points (quartiles 3 and 4). Publishing in journals that are indexed only in the Russian citation databases worth much less: just 1–10 points. The "international" becomes a part of a scale-making project: it is considered more valuable than the "national." The material dimension of international publications is its direct connection to ranking mechanisms that—in the political economy of universities—are converted into the university's branding and funding. The pressure to publish in order to increase academics' symbolic status in the search for jobs and promotion has been documented globally (e.g., Moosa 2018 on the "publish or perish culture").

In the Russian universities, when publications are directly related to economic remuneration here and now, academics became even more precarized and dependent on the culture of publishing more frequently (Fig. 7.3). This salary mechanism corresponds to the state's project to increase the quality of Russian research through publishing in high-ranking journals, that is, through participating in the competitive race of academic capitalism. Global academic competition frames a specific kind of "international," which has been criticized for being a form of Anglophone hegemony (Paasi 2015) and creates a site of friction: Russian universities entered this international/Anglophone competition as a way to increase the position of the national/Russian science. Remuneration under

[4] Candidate of Sciences is the first of two doctoral-level degrees in Russia. Sometimes, it is recognized as a PhD degree. The Russian system of higher education also has a more advanced degree, Doctor of Sciences (often equaled to the German habilitation level).

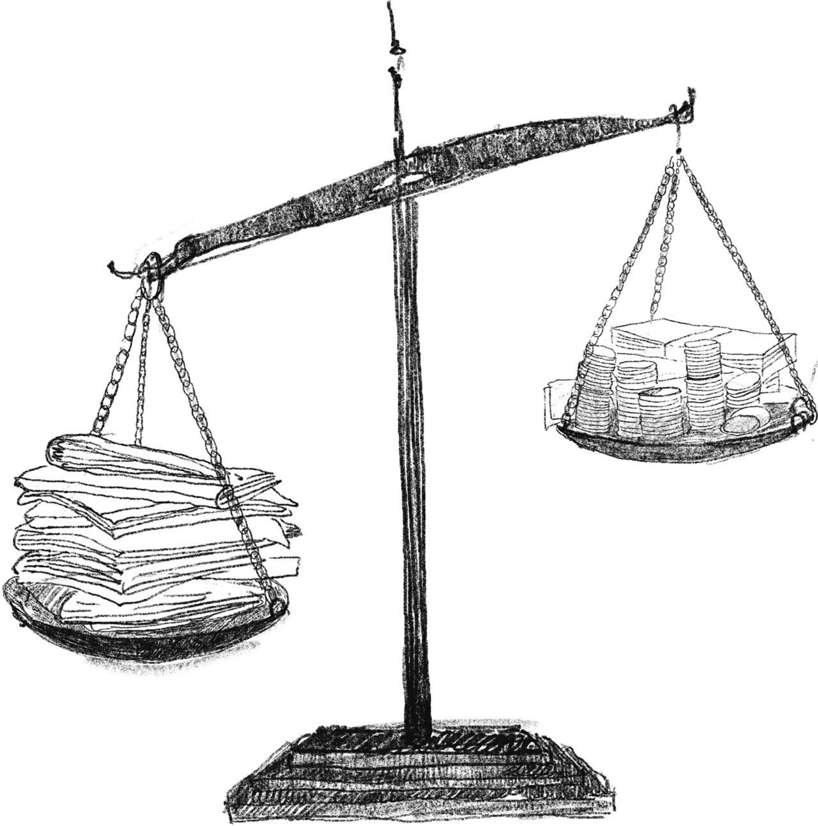

Fig. 7.3 Publishing economy. Illustration by Natalia Batrakova

performance-based pay is given for academic activities that help a university to acquire additional funding from the federal budget, which was designed as means to increase Russia's status internationally.

The patchwork nature of the performance-based pay became a disciplining mechanism in this new political economy of universities. The fact that bonuses do not constitute the official salary guaranteed by a contract led to the deterioration of academic labor rights: the patchwork salary which separated the legally guaranteed official salary from optional bonuses allowed for manipulating academic workers in times of economic scarcity and the lack of federal funding. In times of economic crises, for example, it becomes possible to decrease the funding of universities and the remuneration of employees.[5] The efficiency contract is the legal framework which allows the university administration to change the conditions for paid bonuses and thus withdraw them freely in order to save costs, as bonuses are additional to the base salary. The economic burden on universities is transferred to academic workers: cost savings are made by reducing bonuses that are not protected by the legal force of a contract. The legal composition of the performance-based pay makes academics more dependent on the university administration.

Interestingly, some academics perceive the performance-based pay as a fairer system. In the context of post-Soviet Russian universities, metrics and accountability measures may be seen as a way to fight the nepotism and corruption. In our discussion with Vladimir from St Petersburg State University, I was paying a particular attention on the questions around the new payroll system; I wanted to get my head around how different mechanisms work. For me, the efficiency contract has felt as a deterioration of the working conditions and the interference into the academic activities. I was surprised to encounter that Vladimir felt positive about the change in the payroll system:

> [T]here were all sorts of… um… abuses [in the past]. A person who always followed the leader and said: "As you just said wisely, Ivan Ivanovich," got more salary. It's understandable, it's like that everywhere. But [recently] those who worked harder and better, received more. In any case, I'm some-

[5] According to the federal budget, the funding for education, which had been steadily growing up until 2014, came down in 2015 and 2016. In 2014, 638.3 billion rubles were allocated to education. In 2015, the annual expenditure reduced to 610.6 billion; in 2016, to 597.8 billion. After 2016, the federal funding for education started to increase again until 2021 (Ministry of Finance n.d.).

> how not offended by the payment system, [...] kind of reasonable. (Vladimir, June 18, 2020)

The memories of the "abusive" past stabilizes the neoliberal reforms in the present: the use of metrics and performance management system gains power from the discourse of overcoming corruption and nepotism associated with the "previous system" (Oleksiyenko 2018: 197; see also Sokolov 2021 and Lorenz-Meyer 2018: 168). Academics state that in principle, this system of getting "what one deserves" is fair, but are not happy with how it is implemented in reality. What is important is that the idea of evaluating academic work based on performance criteria is supported even by those academics who express critical views on how it is actualized. Alexey, for example, told me that "such a differentiated approach to assessing the work of a teacher is, in theory, sound"; but in practice, it becomes a tool of control by the university administration, which signals about the dangerous contradiction embedded into the neoliberal theory: when the control over the criteria of "efficiency" and "what one deserves" is sitting with the university administration and orchestrated by the state, it leads not to the emancipation of academics, but a more rigorous control over their activities.

The control, however, is not omnipresent and does not always result in what have been desired by the state. Many academics often subverted this system by gaming it to their financial and reputational advantage, which can undermine the state's vision of what academia needs to achieve. While the state attempted to uphold academic capitalism in order to increase Russia's prestige in international competition by increasing the number of publications, academics contaminated the field by taking some advantage of the system for their survival (e.g., Kalfa et al. 2018). In the Russian universities, the aim has been to profit financially under the performance-based pay. When the research outputs become economically incentivized, publishing increasingly starts to resemble the operations of financial markets (Tienari 2012). Needless to say, all of these undermine the critical tasks of knowledge production and teaching as civic values.

The idea of "gaming" the system was visible in my conversations with Vladimir. During our interview, he told me that the university "gives bonuses for everything." He then continued describing a long list of criteria and providing some anecdotal examples: one could receive the bonus if one reported that one's student had won one of the dozens of competitions or even received a qualification in sports. Vladimir ended his

monologue by saying that "[i]f one even sneezed beyond a workload – bonuses" implying that it is quite easy to do "reporting" to get money out of this contract. I paid attention to how Vladimir talked about these criteria. His various—sometimes anecdotal—examples of what could be counted as performance criteria suggest that some academics try to use the performance-based pay to their advantage. If a payroll mechanism allows for this type of remuneration, one can twist it to one's own benefit. The list of criteria is long; the university administration cannot possibly check the factual content of every performed activity. A documented appearance of efficiency: this is how some academics navigate themselves in this system and try to make the most of it. As such, meeting the criteria under the performance-based pay is not necessarily an issue of doing, but an issue of appearing to be doing, that is, reporting, the correct things: "The creation of an effective system of higher education is mostly imitated, significant resources are directed to 'demonstrative' projects: [...] entry into rankings, the number of international students, etc." (Kurbatova and Donova 2019: 130).

At some point, I also started to sense some indications of positional privilege in Vladimir's story. His accounts do not reflect the stories of educators from the peripheral universities where the most prominent narrative becomes one of unpaid labor, dispossession, and exploitation (described in Chap. 6). The neoliberal system of performance management has its winners: Vladimir as a male professor employed at St Petersburg State University, one of the best-resourced universities in Russia, might be one of them. This performativity culture creates new elites in universities: people who can secure the expected performance rather than a less easily measurable academic quality of research and teaching (Oleksiyenko 2018: 195).

Predatory, profit-seeking behaviors, by both academics and journals, appeared in these cracks contaminated by neoliberal performance management and state-centered governance.[6] As I mentioned above, Alexey claimed that publications are "the main way to make money out of this system." Since direct remuneration for specific academic activities was introduced into the university governance, it became a game for

[6] See also Chirikov (2022) on Russian universities purchasing the services of ranking agencies. Chirikov calls "for universities, governments, and prospective students to reconsider their use of global rankings where conflicts of interest may be generated by the ranker's business activities" (Chirikov 2022: 1).

academics to play. During my ethnographic research journey, I met Polina, who completed her undergraduate studies in Russia but at the time worked in a Finnish university. Polina told me how she was contacted by scholars from a peripheral Russian university and was offered to produce research publications on behalf of other people for compensation. In one email Polina had received, a professor from a peripheral Russian university emphasized Polina's publications: "I was impressed reading your papers published in *reputed* journals" (my emphasis). Polina's capability of publishing in the ranked journals becomes a desirable asset. This is also translated into personal—material and semiotic—value for academics, as the professor asked Polina to "assist [them] with publishing." While it was not stated clearly, the email suggested that Polina would be the one producing—or at least, leading—the writing and publication process while referring to academics from Russian universities as co-authors. The conditions were explained to Polina as follows: the co-authors from the Russian universities agree to pay the required publication fees. The person did not specify any research interests in which they would like to collaborate with Polina; rather, they mentioned several different research fields where they would like to have publications since "now [they] have a backlog of quality research papers in English in [these] fields."

Such predatory behavior becomes another strategy to survive the imposed performance management system by academics and to acquire a "necessary" number of publications directly translated into the monetary equivalent in the university economy: the author of the email mentioned the word "backlog," which suggests the existence of a minimal requirement of publications that academic workers are supposed to produce. Since the "international" is monopolized by English-language journals, academics from peripheral Russian universities became more marginalized in this global unequal race of academic publishing (Paasi 2015: 520) and subjected to predatory academic practices. The "invited author," that is, when an article is (co-)authored by a "skillful" researcher from another university but published under affiliation to a Russian university in need, becomes one of the strategies within Russian academia to increase the number of publications (Guskov et al. 2017: 10). While the performance-based pay was designed as a disciplinary tool to ensure the productivity of academic work and the prestigious position of Russian science, it also revealed its contradiction by undermining these goals with predatory practices.

Academics' economic dependence under the performance-based pay has also actualized different predatory behaviors employed by academic journals. The (gray) market of publications arose in these spaces of contamination between neoliberal nationalist competitiveness and the academics' dependence on efficiency contracts. As Alexey points out, "As soon as this race for publications began, a market appeared." Since 2014, every year more than 1500 articles by scholars from Russia are published in predatory journals, although earlier they had been just a few (Guskov et al. 2017: 11). The academics have to report on their publishing activity four times a year; these cycles of reporting push them to publish in low-ranking journals in order to meet the imposed criteria (Kurakova and Grigor'ev 2015: 289).

In this environment, predator journals spread fast:

> There are journals […] that take everything; they hold scientific conferences, publish the materials of these conferences in electronic format in 46 volumes from one conference. You pay money – you have a publication.[7] (Alexey, June 15, 2020)

While the fact of predatory publishing behaviors has been addressed in previous research, very few empirical studies have explored the conditions under which such behaviors flourish (Mills and Inouye 2020: 101). One of those conditions is when the national search for prestige in the publishing economy leads to the imposition of the state-designed performance management based on direct economic incentives.

Academic journals started to tailor their services and proceedings to the new realities, and profit-seeking behaviors by different publishing houses emerged. For example, the Russian academic publishing house Nota Bene, where some academics whom I met in the field published, reinforces the demands of efficiency contracts by marketizing their services of fast publishing. I started to explore this publishing house after Nina, another research participant and a graduate of St Petersburg State University, mentioned how she tried to find the platforms for her publications which were

[7] Publishing conference materials has become a strategy to increase the publication activity of an academic and, consequently, a university: Guskov et al. (2017: 10–11), for example, analyzed how proceedings of Russian and foreign conferences are one of the most used strategies to increase the number of publications. It is also one of the most rapidly growing strategies by scholars from Russian universities: in 2016, almost 5500 conference proceedings were published, which is 27 times higher than in 2010 (ibid.).

supposed to be reported on time. When visiting Nota Bene website, I saw a banner that stated: “Important to meet the publication schedule? We will help!” The publishing house very visibly advertised its services of fast publishing that corresponded to the needs of academics to meet efficiency criteria within a specific time period under the performance-based pay. The university assemblage, despite the managerial efforts to discipline academic workers and increase their productivity in the search for the prestige of Russian science, is capable of different compositions. In the next section, I demonstrate how neoliberal elements of performance-based pay became further aligned with the authoritarian governance not only to produce academic subjects who are *efficient* in bringing prestige to the Russian state but also to subordinate academics under the administrative and political power of the authoritarian regime.

Creating Compliant Academic Subjects in the Corporate-Authoritarian University

In this section, I zoom into the specific point in time when the renewal of an academic worker’s contract is decided. The fixed-term nature of academic contracts has been discussed in previous literature (Ylijoki and Henriksson 2017; Gallas 2018) arguing how it creates an “academic precariat” (Dönmez and Duman 2021: 4).

Besides contributing to the precarization of academic labor, the fixed-term nature of the contract promotes authoritarian and arbitrary governance of university administration by deciding what counts as “efficient.” Specifically, I analyze how unclear requirements of efficiency become a site for free interpretation by the university administration and a mechanism to suppress politically inconvenient academic subjects.

The fixed-term nature of the efficiency contract enables longitudinal temporal control over an academic worker’s performance. Usually, the contract is between 6 months and 5 years (Kurbatova 2016: 68). At the time when the contract comes to an end and it is time to decide on its renewal, the administration is able to interpret the academic’s achievements. Vladimir from St Petersburg State University specifies how these moments in time become an opportunity for the university administration to influence the worker:

> The bosses want us all the time not only to do well in the past but also to be sure that we will also work well in the future. That is, they do not under-

> stand that if I have written a hundred articles [in my field] in scientific journals as of today, then, most likely, in the next ten years I will write another 50 articles, because, well, if I've been doing this all my life, why would I suddenly stop doing it. But they want it to be clear so that there is growth. (Vladimir, June 18, 2020)

"Working well," then, means working productively for economic incentives as publishing directly translates into economic value: this enactment of productivity enables its longitudinal temporality. As Vladimir specifies, it is in the university administration's interests not only to evaluate the productivity of a worker in the past but to ensure their productivity in the future. As Ian Buchanan (2021: 143) argues, performance indicators become "a means of managing people," intensify discipline, and change how "society thinks and organizes itself." The performance-based pay becomes a way to discipline and manage academic workers. The efficiency indicators are designed to ensure the good quality of services in a competitive market and passed down to working academics by the university managers; the former receive enhanced abilities to look over university operations (Lorenz 2012: 600; Oleksiyenko 2018: 196). It decreases the capacity of academics to influence research and teaching activities or participate in the decision-making process (Dönmez and Duman 2021: 4; Peters 2021). The surveillance over academic performance has also been characterized as proletarianization of academic labor (Jayasuriya et al. 2020; McCarthy et al. 2017) or alienation (Hall 2018; Poutanen 2022a).

Anna, a former student and an employee at the Higher School of Economics, shares how her academic work—along with the work of the whole institution—has been subjugated to cycles of 6–12 months: "Every six months or a year, the documentation at Higher School of Economics and the principles of work in general change: both scientific and educational for you as a teacher and researcher." The terms of contracts tend to become shorter, especially for early-career researchers who are on the margins of performance-based academic culture (Ylijoki and Henriksson 2017). Generally, those who do not secure a privileged position in this performance culture "end up becoming part-time or hourly paid academic workers or members of the 'academic precariat,'" that is, academic workers with even shorter, lower paid and more "flexible," that is, less fixed contracts (Dönmez and Duman 2021: 4).

At this point in time when one cycle ends and another begins, the mechanism of performance management is vulnerable to contamination

by authoritarian governance. When a contract comes to an end, first, the university administration must formally approve an opportunity for an employee to participate in the process of renewing their contract. If the approval is granted by a rector, a vice-rector, or another representative of the university administration, an employee's documents including the results of their performance in the previous contract are examined by an HR committee within the university (*kadrovaya komissiya vuza*). In Petrozavodsk State University, for example, this committee consists of representatives of the university administration, labor union,[8] and faculty the employee is based in. The committee recommends the period for which the next contract should be signed (Petrozavodsk State University n.d.-b). Alexey from Petrozavodsk State University noticed the recommendations of the committee are usually automatically accepted by the university management.

The process of evaluating academic performance according to the criteria under the efficiency contract is not itself transparent. The neoliberal idea of transparent assessment (Jankowski and Provezis 2014) is contaminated by the authoritarian practice: it becomes an opportunity for the university administration to interpret what "efficiency" means in order to discipline academic workers. Employees in the Higher School of Economics have raised critical voices that "the criteria for the renewal of the contract are not disclosed, this is a non-transparent mechanism" (Golubeva 2020). When I asked Alexey from Petrozavodsk, who was then a professor and had a prominent position within the university and its community, how the process worked and how the evaluation committee was making decisions, he replied: "How would I know? I have never been there." Employees are not present during this process of assessment: embodied academic subjects are substituted by their documented performance results behind closed doors (Fig. 7.4).

[8] Petrozavodsk State University has a labor union known as the Trade Union Organization of Workers. It is part of the larger Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR). However, FNPR is often criticized for its close ties to the government and the ruling party, United Russia. In 1990s, FNPR emerged out of the Soviet All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions (VTsSPS) repeating the organizational apparatus of the latter of being closely connected to the state. During the Soviet period, virtually all workers were members of a trade union, but the primary function of Soviet-era unions was not to defend workers' interests, but to enact Communist Party policy at the workplace and distribute social services. See, for example, Ashwin and Clarke (2003).

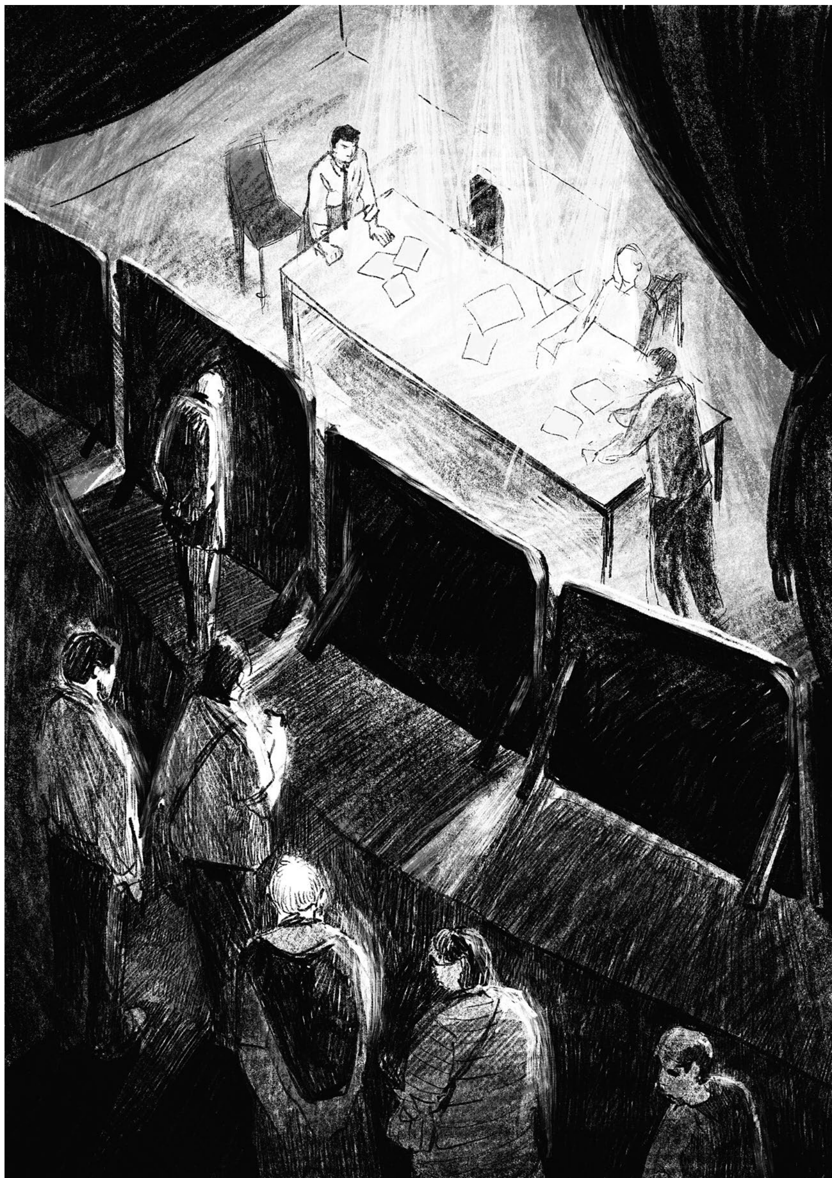

Fig. 7.4 Performance assessment. Illustration by Natalia Batrakova

The academics see such unclear processes of assessment as a tool of control and discipline by the university administration. Alexey emphasized that this was a way "to influence" academic employees through financial incentives; Vladimir also mentioned how the efficiency contract "is, in principle, such a cunning mechanism for personnel management." Vladimir also discussed the terms of a contract, and how they were connected to accountability and productivity in the eyes of one's employer:

> First of all, [the payroll system], of course, affects the term of the contract. If you just came to work at the university, then they would sign a contract with you for one year to see if you are really as good as your CV says. If you really are that good, then in a year your contract will be renewed. [...] Now I have a contract for 4 years. But if I drink beer for these 4 years and do nothing, then, perhaps, everyone will decide that I am not needed, they will not renew my contract at all; or, perhaps, they will decide that I am still needed, but in order to stimulate me, they will again sign a contract with me for one year only. Since, in principle, since [permanent contracts] do not exist in Russian universities, then it becomes such a cunning mechanism for personnel management. We are personnel. (Vladimir, June 18, 2020)

Cycles of fixed-term contracts allow for the university administration to continuously monitor performance: "if you are really as good as your CV says." The temporality of a contract is not regulated by any transparent mechanism and can be used by the administration to influence academics' productivity by manipulating the term of a contract—that is, ultimately, financial safety and feelings of (in)security (Loveday 2018). The number of permanent academic positions is gradually eroded to assure high performance regularly; fixed-termed academic contracts become a governing mechanism to boost academic performance and productivity (Borovskaia et al. 2014).

The "patchwork" system of salaries also allows the university administration to control the productivity and compliance of academic workers. As the list of criteria in the efficiency contract is quite long, which makes it impossible to "tick all the boxes," academic workers perceive the patchwork nature of the efficiency contract as a tool of control and arbitrary power:

> The terms of the contracts are unrealistic, everyone understands this. Therefore, formally, anyone can be fired. Efficiency contracts also become a tool for controlling teachers from above. (fieldwork diary, February 2, 2021)

The nontransparency of the evaluation process and the exact definition of efficiency leaves much power in the hands of the university administration, which becomes a site where arbitrary power flourishes. Such arbitrary power of the university administration is further brought forward by Alexey: he claims that the university administration oftentimes has the ability to change the conditions of a contract unilaterally: “The administration quite freely interprets the rules of the game from time to time, changes them along the way.” The arbitrary governance over academic labor produces specific kinds of subjectivities within universities that are characterized by the mastering of the art of guessing.

The Art of Guessing

Nontransparent mechanisms of evaluating “efficiency” and forms of arbitrary neoliberal-authoritarian governance contribute to shaping compliant academic subjects. This arbitrary power of the university administration creates uncertainty in academic subjects as they need to guess what is required under unspecified regulations. Although Vladimir from St Petersburg State University claimed that permanent contracts do not exist in Russian universities officially (fixed-term efficiency contracts are signed with all academic staff irrespective of their position), he was also under the impression that some people’s contracts are renewed automatically. The website of St Petersburg State University declared that permanent work contracts were possible and signed with “the most productive research and pedagogical workers”; the overall number of permanent contracts at the university was just over 20 in 2020 out of 5000 academic employees (St Petersburg State University n.d.-c). Vladimir’s uncertainty about the conditions for a permanent contract further showed how academic subjectivities are constructed around this sense of uncertainty: what behavior and performance are expected to renew the contract becomes a matter of guesswork.

> Well, in general, if you worked for a year and were a good fellow [*bil molodtsom*], then they will sign a contract with you for two years next time; then three years, and so on. (Vladimir, June 18, 2020)

Academics internalize the subjectivity of being a “good fellow”: to understand what “a good fellow” means requires the skill of guessing. Academics are subjected to compliance and seek approval from the university

administration for what behavior is evaluated as "good," "productive," or "efficient."

This mechanism of making compliant subjects becomes even more forceful when it intersects with hierarchies within universities: what is expected from you "to be a good fellow" might differ according to one's social status. For example, in the public discussion on sexism in academia held in St Petersburg in 2019, two female professors from Russian universities shared their perspectives on performance-based pay. They suggested that the unclear performance management criteria freely interpreted by the university administration produce the subjectivity of "being a good girl." Neoliberal change helps to establish the instruments of control. Since the legal interpretation of bonus payments and the contract system is so large, one has to constantly guess what is required of you in order to receive contracts and bonuses. "Being a good girl" is thus constantly guessing what is required of you.

The subjectivity of "being a good girl" sustains patriarchal power at universities; due to unexpected decisions on promotions/renewing contracts, women are expected to perform well, which often includes care work, obedience, and support: paying more attention to administrative duties, organizing meetings, and being emotionally resilient. It resonates with the role of women to perform "academic housework" within a neoliberal university more broadly (Heijstra et al. 2017). Social reproduction of university activities often sets women back in achieving measurably high performance in research and publications that seem the most valuable under the imperatives of the knowledge economy (Lund 2012; Barry et al. 2013). Efficiency contract and performance management are contaminated by patriarchal assumptions about the division of labor.

Suppressing Political Opposition

Short-term contracts and the arbitrary power of university administrations in assessing academic performance become further contaminated by the Putin's authoritarian regime and its attempts to suppress politically inconvenient academic subjects. The mechanism of the performance-based pay allows not only for influencing workers' productivity through economic incentives (stimulating those academic activities that bring more resources to the university) but also for controlling academic workers in political ways. Short-term contracts allow a university administration to discontinue a fixed-term contract without any legal consequences. As this section shows, it can become a way of suppressing political opposition.

In order to outline how this contamination happens, it is important to trace how performance-based pay became connected to the idea of corporate universities. The rise of understanding universities as business models or even corporations has been happening globally (see, e.g., Giroux 2009). In the corporate university, critical dialogue, analysis, and interpretation are eroded as the main characteristics of a university; rather, it becomes a place consumed by antidemocratic, corporate, and market-driven goals to become a convenient service provider in order to attract funding (Giroux 2009: 670). In the Russian context, the idea of the corporate university and its antidemocratic features documented already in other contexts were further contaminated by Putin's regime: the corporate nature of the university came to mean its financial prosperity, which became possible in exchange for political loyalty to the regime. The corporate identity of Russian universities began to mean compliance with the state's political regime.

Here, I want to return to the episode from the beginning of the chapter. The tightening authoritarian grip in Russia in 2020 mobilized some parts of the academic community to raise their voices against the regime (Fig. 7.5); some of the most politically active academics came from the Higher School of Economics. In the summer of 2020, they became a target of sanctions; as a result, around 20 employees did not have their contracts renewed (Golubeva 2020). The official statement by the university administration explained the layoffs with reference to "optimization" and mergers of the departments. The public relations director of the Higher School of Economics commented on the upcoming dismissal of academics specifying that the political views of the academics are not as important; one thing that matters in renewing one's contract at the Higher School of Economics is "compliance with the requirements of the project university":

> The Higher School of Economics employs people who hold different views. And these views don't matter when applying for a job. Only such factors as professionalism, academic potential, and compliance with the requirements of the project university are decisive (Golubeva 2020).

The neoliberal nature of university's activities, that is, its project-based nature, and the need to secure funding from different sources, including the Russian government, implies a particular type of academic behavior necessary to receive a job at the university. The expected academic behaviors, as the university stated, should not *damage the university's reputation*,

Fig. 7.5 Protests. Illustration by Natalia Batrakova

which is a decisive element in the market-driven search for the university's brand and funding. The university administration expects prospective job seekers to put the reputation of the university above the academics' political views—their own opinions as educated professionals. One of the professors from the Higher School of Economics whose contract was not continued by the university commented in the media how the political activities of academic employees are perceived as damaging the university's reputation under the contemporary authoritarian political regime and might be a reason for discontinuing the efficiency contracts with those academics:

> Ever since the autumn [of 2019], some teachers received some hints that the Higher School of Economics might part ways with them if they don't stop "damaging the university's reputation" with their posts on Facebook and signing open human rights letters. (Golubeva 2020)

The university administration denies sanctions against specific political or administrative views; rather, their principle is to suppress any views that are "damaging to reputation," which might include acute social, political, or economic topics. The university, perceived as a corporation by the university administration, acts to sustain its reputation; in order for the academics to comply with these requirements, they are expected to behave in a docile manner eliminating any controversial statements regarding those who secure the university funding, that is, the state. As a member of the Academic Council of the Higher School of Economics commented on behalf of the university:

> Another point is questions related to academic ethics. For example, using one's affiliation with the Higher School of Economics in some political statements. Roughly speaking, you act not as a scientist, not as an expert, but as an activist, on behalf of a large corporation. There has been a discussion about this at the university for many months, and there is a certain kind of attitude of the university toward such actions that cause damage to the reputation of the university. (Golubeva 2020)

The university is seen as a "corporation" where employees are responsible for its reputation above their personal views. The statement can be interpreted as a warning and expression of control over academics: those who express critical views toward the provider of the university funding, that is,

the state, damage the university's reputation and might face sanctions, for example, as happened with those 20 academics from Higher School of Economics whose contracts were not renewed. While the idea of "reputational risk management" in the neoliberal university has been seen globally to ensure that universities' activities are well reflected in global rankings (Dale 2017), this authoritarian-neoliberal practice of surveillance can revibrate to the state's scale and get captured by the authoritarian regime. Risk management in the Russian context began to mean accountability in the eyes of the main power the universities are dependent upon, that is, the Russian state. This contamination suppresses any political opposition within universities for the sake of their *survival* under Putin's authoritarian rule. The mechanism of performance-based pay and its temporal cycles become a tool to ensure that risk management is understood in political terms. The authoritarian practice of performance-based assessment and disciplining, while not essentially signaling about the authoritarian state regime, can revibrate along the scales and become captured by the state's suppression of the political opposition.[9]

Furthermore, the idea of a corporate university, its reputation, and risk management were actualized by constructing the "apolitical university." As being political has been identified as a risk for university activities under the authoritarian regime, in order to manage this risk, the university administration of the Higher School of Economics made an attempt to create the university as an apolitical place by passing a "Code of Ethics" (Higher School of Economics 2020). The document included provisions on "Concern for the development and reputation of the University" and "Political neutrality and balanced public statements." Openly stating political views under the discourse of "political neutrality" was translated into "political propaganda" by the university administration (Golubeva 2020), which in a corporate university operating in an authoritarian political regime is not welcomed in order to diminish the risks to the university's survival. Besides the "apolitical" Code of Ethics, the university administration also employed a slogan, "University outside politics" (*Universitet vne politiki*), as part of their campaign against the students' and academics' oppositional political activity (Polorotov 2019). The slogan "University outside politics" proclaimed that universities were to be

[9] The crackdown on dissent under the guise of "institutional neutrality" is not limited to authoritarian states; it also occurs in liberal democracies, as vividly demonstrated by the crackdown on pro-Palestinian speech and activism (Uddin and Misbach 2024).

free and independent from political ideology. However, what is discursively marked as political in contemporary Russia usually refers to oppositional politics; dominant ideologies and politics, in turn, are normalized and rendered apolitical. For example, the Higher School of Economics has invited well-known political leaders operating within the regime to give lectures, such as Vladimir Zhirinovsky, a then Russian ultranationalist politician and the leader of the populist Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (Vladimir Higher School of Economics 2013), while inviting opposition leaders was prohibited, as they were determined to be "political" in an unacceptable way (VK 2019).

The claims of a politically neutral university are heard globally and have been argued by scholars to suppress critical thinking, which leads to anti-democratic developments. The "neutrality" of university activities has been referred to by Tuchman (2009: 12) as an "accountability regime": "a politics of surveillance, control, and market management disguising itself as the value neutral." The corporate university is sustained by the politics of "white walls," the aim of which is "to eliminate from the campus all that is labeled as deviant or a nuisance and therefore a threat to its competitiveness" (Belina et al. 2013: 751–752; on depoliticized science see also Gorur et al. 2019). In the Russian context, the aim was to eliminate oppositional politics not only from the campus but from all of the activities of academic subjects within and outside the campus walls.

Those academic workers whose efficiency contracts were not renewed at the Higher School of Economics in the summer of 2020 argued that the discourse of "a university outside politics" also worked as a way to dismiss politically active academic employees (Golubeva 2020).

> [Victor] Gorbatov [ex-Senior Lecturer of Philosophy in Higher School of Economics; fired in September 2020] believes that teachers with an active political position, including those who have recently been openly expressing it on social networks and signing collective appeals in connection with high-profile [political] cases, have come under the threat of dismissal. (Spektr-Press 2020)

Thus, political "neutrality" became part of the performance expected from academic workers in order for them to continue being employed at the university, that is, to renew their efficiency contract. This is how the efficiency contract, which initially meant economic efficiency, was contaminated by forms of authoritarian governance. It absorbed requirements that academic workers should be "apolitical," that is, cease to express

political views criticizing the Putinist authoritarian regime. To stay employed, an academic employee must not damage the university's reputation, which in contemporary authoritarian Russia began to mean abstaining from any political activity. Both deterritorialized neoliberal elements, such as the discourse of the corporate university, and a more localized discourse of a "politically neutral university" were contaminated by the authoritarian attempts of the Russian state to produce politically and administratively compliant subjects, including within universities. Moreover, the neoliberal mechanism of performance-based pay, contaminated by authoritarian governance, is a site of friction: the globalized performance-based management systems, localized in the context of the authoritarian state, began to mean efficient performance not only in terms of profit and international academic competition but also performing "apolitically" for the university's survival under authoritarian governance.

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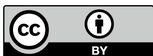

CHAPTER 8

Life in the Ruins: Imagining and Enacting Other Worlds

Introduction

It's March 2021. The feminist collective "Eve's Ribs," based in St Petersburg, is organizing its annual feminist festival, featuring a panel discussion on "Sexism in Academia" (Eve's Ribs 2021). I am sitting in the audience, eager to hear about the feminist critique of institutional frameworks and knowledge production processes in contemporary academia, specifically in Russian universities. Having been part of some activist and political circles myself, I did not separate the critique of academia from the critique of other oppressive power formations such as patriarchy, penetrative and exploitative capitalism, or an authoritarian state. I found it important to participate and learn from various groups that foster critique, radical imagination, and political action for a more just world (Fig. 8.1).

During the panel discussion, the participants highlighted the necessity for alternative academic and educational projects to disseminate knowledge in society, as the university, operating as an authoritarian-neoliberal bureaucratic "machine," fails to fulfill this role:

> There is a demand for the dissemination of knowledge in society, but the university as a structure is not moving forward with this demand. Firstly, the university is a huge bureaucratic and supervisory machine; thus, to get some new courses or any new undertakings started, a lot of approvals are needed.

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I. Gataulina, *Neoliberal Authoritarianism: An Ethnography of Russian Universities*, Central and Eastern European Perspectives on International Relations,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-89451-0_8

Fig. 8.1 Life in the ruins. Illustration by Natalia Batrakova

> Second, a university is there to a great extent to "feed" the university management, fulfil the requirements and chase the rankings. If we want to spread knowledge, we need to work on horizontal projects. (fieldwork diary, February 2, 2021)

In the previous chapters, I have analyzed the different workings and compositions of neoliberal authoritarianism: how it both emerges from and manifests in Russian universities. The effects of neoliberal authoritarianism in the field of higher education and research have often been referred to by the Russian academic community as processes of ruination or even death. For example, the policies of optimization, which I discussed in Chap. 6, were equated with the "destruction" of higher education (Sidorov 2021), while the mechanisms of performance-based pay, which I discussed in Chap. 7, were proclaimed as a "guillotine" for academics (Universitetskaja solidarnost' 2020). Yet, the very nature of knowledge production makes the university and its communities resistant to these intrusions of state and capital interests (Belina et al. 2013: 742). Academic communities might become important centers of alternative visions of society (Ryder 2022: 173).

As a response to neoliberal authoritarianism, an increasing number of educational and research projects have emerged that are horizontal (as opposed to the vertical power structure of neoliberal authoritarianism), lying partially within the state university architecture yet escaping its strict boundaries. They attempt to recompose the processes of ruination and death into livable projects to reclaim academic lifeworlds that have previously been alienated by the authoritarian-neoliberal accumulation of power and resources (cf. Tsing 2015: 6).

Envisioning and enacting change are important processes in political action. Scholars attempt to reclaim the university and assert control over their imaginaries of *what a good university is* (Connell 2019). The new life is imagined differently: there are even calls for abolishing the university altogether to build something new (Hall 2021; Meyerhoff 2019). Some academics advocate for slow scholarship, that is, decreasing the accelerated pace of academic work driven by ideas of productivity and competition (Mountz et al. 2015). Michael Peters (2021) has developed the concept of knowledge socialism in an attempt to counteract the hegemony of knowledge capitalism in contemporary academia. Knowledge socialism is characterized by the sociality of knowledge, the free exchange of ideas enhanced by peer-review collaborations, the utilization of public and

private financial and administrative resources to advance knowledge for the public good, and creative labor.

Although resistance to neoliberalization is often synonymous with resistance to marketization, this is not always the case in every context (Bruff and Tansel 2019: 241). Neoliberalization manifests in various forms; therefore, we should remain receptive to localized resistance efforts and the envisioning of alternative futures. Resistance to neoliberalization in academia is rarely formed around university work alone but rather across the political context (Dönmez and Duman 2021: 10). This is not the struggle for universities alone—this is a struggle to have another composition of the state and the economy. We should also remember that resistance is not always emancipatory; the processes of neoliberalization are equally contested by the Far Right (Bruff and Tansel 2019: 234). Indeed, resistance to neoliberalism is multiform and can lead to a variety of post-neoliberal developments, both regressive and transformative.

Imagination and political action are especially crucial when we need to subvert both penetrative global neoliberalization and the capture of the authoritarian state: neoliberal authoritarianism. In this chapter, I analyze what happens with the resistance to the authoritarian state, which has become penetrated by neoliberal rationality and governance, and the control, disciplinarity, and dispossession it has created in Russian universities. Projects of resistance in these cases must navigate through a complex assemblage of oppressive powers, including global neoliberalization and the authoritarian state. I have been specifically interested in how resistance to authoritarian-neoliberal control is imagined and acted upon, and how we could enrich our understanding of the dynamics of destabilization, translation, and subversion of these oppressive powers.

By intentionally trying to resist the oppressive workings of neoliberal authoritarianism, the projects of resistance analyzed in this chapter become sites for radical imagination, translations, and enactments. They attempt to replace the vertical power structure with collegiality, fear with joy, bureaucratic-administrative dictate with freedom, and separation propagated by the securitized state with a deterritorialized academic enterprise. However, while resistance is usually articulated through such contrasts and binaries, translations are something different: they are messy and patchy and include tensions, contradictions, and paradoxes.

Translations, Imaginations, and Enactments

Imagination is crucial to challenging existing power structures. Different thinkers have emphasized the importance of radical imagination for envisioning and working toward a more just and equitable world (Jameson 2005; Haraway 2016; Lorde 1977; Salmenniemi and Ylöstalo 2024). It is vital for survival and transformation: imagination can be a way to articulate and explore new ways of being, which can inspire action and foster solidarity. Everyday political imaginations propose new forms of social organization, which can serve as inspiration for concrete actions and practices of social change.

In this chapter, to trace the process of enacting the imaginary, I use the concept of translation. Translation involves "drawing one world-making project into another" (Tsing 2015: 62) (Fig. 8.2). Anna Tsing primarily uses this concept to examine the livability of contemporary capitalism. She contends that contemporary capitalism relies on acts of translation, where non-capitalist value systems are incorporated into capitalist accumulation (Tsing 2015: 43). Capitalism, in its various forms, stabilizes itself by acting as "a translation machine for producing capital from all kinds of livelihoods, human and non-human" (Tsing 2015: 133). The spaces where these acts of translation occur are pericapitalist sites, existing both within and outside of capitalism (Tsing 2015: 63). While Tsing mainly focuses on how non-capitalist sites are converted into profit-making entities in these pericapitalist sites, she also acknowledges the potential for other types of translations: "[p]ericapitalist economic forms can be sites for rethinking the unquestioned authority of capitalism in our lives" (Tsing 2015: 65).

I examine three academic initiatives—FEM TALKS, Free University, and DOXA—where resistance to neoliberal authoritarian governance has occurred. These initiatives operate outside the confines of traditional university structures and demonstrate opposition to authoritarian-neoliberal control and dispossession. They represent efforts to transform the processes of ruination into livable projects and to reclaim academia, which has been previously alienated by the authoritarian-neoliberal consolidation of power and resources. I analyze these projects within the framework of this book, where I particularly dissect the workings of *governance*. Therefore, here, I am less interested in the content of their work and activities than in their political and administrative organizing. I am paying attention to how they envision the geometries, spatialities, and affects of their organizing in relation to neoliberal authoritarianism.

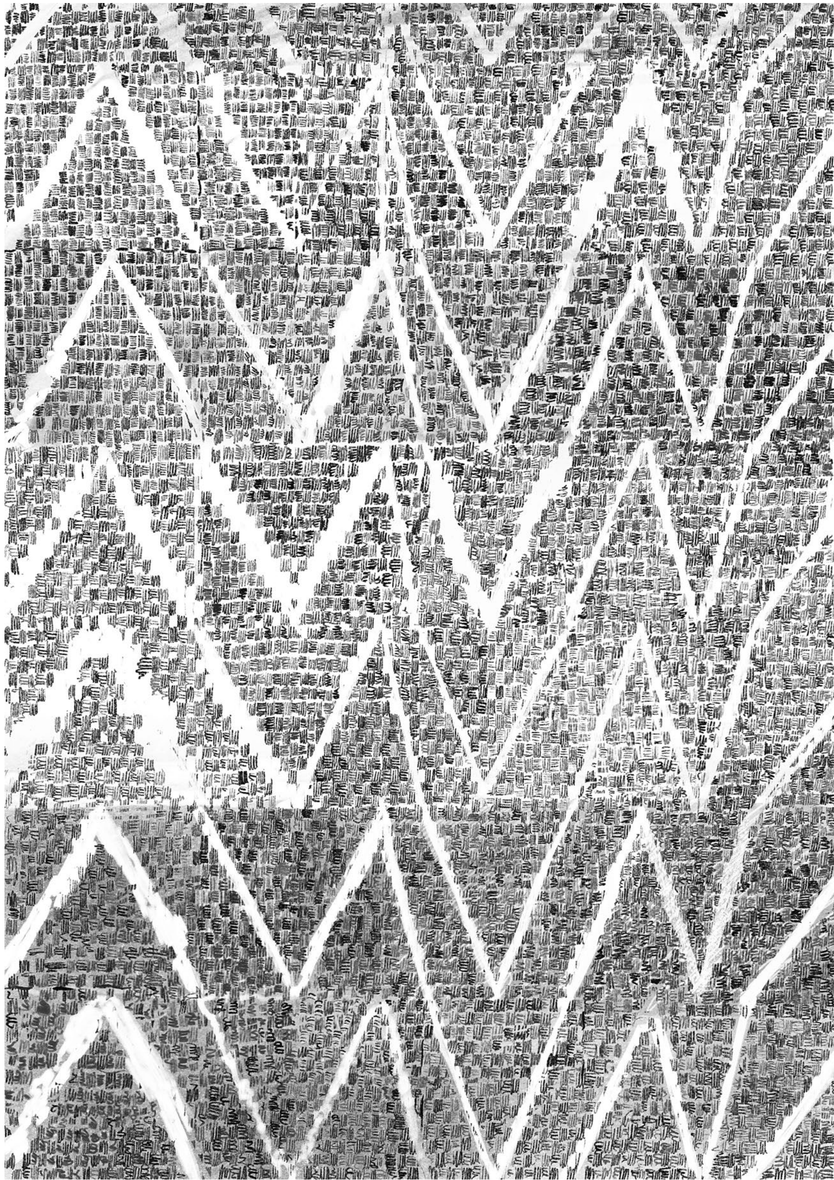

Fig. 8.2 Translation. Illustration by Natalia Batrakova

FEM TALKS is an educational initiative launched by three early-career researchers in 2018. The project encompasses various activities, including mini-conferences, a feminist theory course, the translation and writing of feminist texts, and a podcast. Its aim is "to enable people to talk and learn about [feminism] in the language of current research." Initially intended to popularize feminist philosophy within academia, FEM TALKS has evolved into a comprehensive educational endeavor (FEM TALKS n.d.). The organizers have openly acknowledged the improbability of institutionalizing their activities within contemporary Russian universities, which are influenced by authoritarian-neoliberal governance: "We would not be given a position at the university, even if we all received a degree, and hardly any of us needs it anyway" (Danilov 2020).

Another site of radical imagination and enactment, the Free University, was founded in 2020 by a group of Russian academics whose contracts were not renewed by the Higher School of Economics in Moscow. The university administration dismissed these opposition-minded academics, citing the need to protect the university's business reputation (Golubeva 2020). I discuss this episode in greater detail in Chap. 7, in relation to the emergence of neoliberal authoritarianism.

The Free University was founded by Viktor and Yulia Gorbatov and Kirill Martynov from the School of Philosophy, along with Elena Lukyanova, a professor from the Faculty of Law (Novaya Gazeta 2020). Subsequently, educators from other Russian and international universities outside the Higher School of Economics joined the initiative. Since its inception, the Free University has expanded in both the number of courses and activities. They also publish their own academic journal and produce a podcast (Free University n.d.-a). I have followed their activities in the media, interviewed one of the project's students, and, as part of my nonlocal ethnography, participated in two Free University courses in the fall of 2020 and spring of 2021.

The concept of free universities has been around since the 1960s, rooted in a rich tradition of feminist, anti-racist, and working-class movements that create spaces for autonomous learning and empowerment beyond the confines of public and private universities (Erdem 2020: 316–317). Typically, free universities are organized in opposition to the commodification of higher education and aim to develop "postcapitalist imaginaries in academia" (Erdem 2020: 317). However, in the context where global neoliberalization intersects with an authoritarian state,

Russian academics envisioned and enacted a new form of the Free University which I discuss in more detail below.

The third site, DOXA, began as a student media publication at the Higher School of Economics in Moscow but quickly became a prominent voice of political opposition in Russia. DOXA reported on university news, published academic articles, and provided support for students persecuted and detained for their political activities (DOXA n.d.). Consequently, DOXA's official status as a student organization was revoked. The university administration justified this by claiming that DOXA's activities were "harming the business reputation of the university," reflecting the authoritarian-managerial discipline discussed in Chap. 7 (BBC News 2019).

All three projects are sites of imagination, translation, and enactment. In the ensuing analysis, I scrutinize the work of these translations. This allows us not only to crystallize the most disastrous workings of neoliberal authoritarianism but also to envision new forms of social, political, and academic organization.

Outside

Contrary to the authoritarian-neoliberal nature of contemporary institutionalized universities, these projects aim to create opportunities and spaces for translation by deterritorializing academic knowledge production and seeking connections beyond the traditional university framework.

The organizers of FEM TALKS, who initially launched their project within university confines, soon realized that these boundaries were becoming restrictive:

> We really lacked feminist theory at Moscow State University. We wanted to make ourselves known and arrange events, lectures, and seminars on feminism. […] But over time, it became cramped inside the university, we were something like a circle of interests there, this did not quite suit us. Our goal is to popularise feminist knowledge. (Danilov 2020)

FEM TALKS describe their feeling as "cramped" (*tesno*), as if experiencing the physical sensation of boundaries pressing on them. They explain that, in their quest to promote feminist knowledge, they have sought to create spaces beyond the institutionalized settings of teaching and learning.

> It was all the more joyful to meet like-minded people at the faculty and create some kind of safe "islands" – mini-conferences and scientific seminars on feminism. The [FEM TALKS] project was the culmination of our desire to create a feminist space within the university. (Danilov 2020)

As it does not seem possible to change the university composition, FEM TALKS have aspired to create safer spaces *within* and *near* the university. The organizers refer to these as "islands"—new territories that are detached from the institutionalized university environment.

During my fieldwork, I encountered instances where FEM TALKS's external position was labeled as "profanation" and "devaluation" of academic knowledge, not due to the format but rather the perceived lack of teacher qualifications. However, feminist knowledge has historically been produced outside academia, often within activist groups. As MacKinnon (1991: 15) notes, "[m]ost of the groundbreaking contributions to feminist theory were made by the women's movement in the 1970s through practice; some of its insights were published in journals, obscure newsletters, and some books." In this spirit, FEM TALKS asserts that valuable knowledge can indeed be produced outside institutionalized universities, and that is precisely what they aim to do.

> It seems to me that we and projects similar to ours are proving that a good education can also be obtained outside institutions. This became especially clear after the dismissals of outstanding teachers from the Higher School of Economics. (Danilov 2020)

The term "dismissals of outstanding teachers from the Higher School of Economics" refers to those who were laid off from the university due to their political opposition. These educators went on to establish the Free University in 2020, a case I partially covered in Chap. 7. This situation can be viewed as an indication of increasing authoritarian-neoliberal control over academic performance in Russia. At that time, the urgency to teach and learn in alternative ways—to create sustainable projects outside the authoritarian-neoliberal university—became particularly acute. The Free University declared their move away from the university governed by authoritarian-neoliberal state policies: "This is where the paths of the university and the state part" (Free University n.d.-a).

The Free University attempts to dismantle not only the governance of neoliberal authoritarianism, which universities have become a part of, but

also to subvert the power of staticity that is captured within the territorial grip and institutional coherence of state reproduction. The Free University envisions and constructs its infrastructure through connections that extend beyond regional and national boundaries. Its existence in the digital space, without a physical campus, has made the Free University a project with multiple spatialities, as its members are often on the move. When I was taking courses at the Free University, I noticed the geographic mobility of the course participants; this observation was echoed by one of the students I interviewed at the Free University:

> Of course, it would be cool to see everyone live and all that, but online, of course, has huge advantages, because, for example, our teacher of the "Sociology of nature and city" is from Krasnoyarsk. It's interesting that we already had three lessons, three Thursdays, and it turns out that the first Thursday I was in Berlin, the second Thursday I was in Turkey, and yesterday I was in Novgorod. Another Thursday I will be in St Petersburg – and everything works. Bliss. (Oksana, October 9, 2020)

Free University activities are attuned to the multiplicity of contexts and spatialities. The charter of the Free University states: "The Free University is extraterritorial; there are no citizenship restrictions for community members" (Free University n.d.-a; my emphasis). This deterritorialization/extraterritoriality is also emphasized in the project's manifesto: "We do not have a campus. We will teach from home, we will teach from libraries, we will teach at summer schools" (Free University n.d.-a; my emphasis). The project aims to subvert the workings of staticity and break free from the state's attempts to territorialize and capture.

Horizontality and Joy

When breaking outside, these projects aim to translate the geometries of governance: they attempt to decompose the vertical power structure strengthened by neoliberal authoritarianism into horizontality (Fig. 8.3). These geometries of governance have their affective dimensions: while the vertical power structure prompts feelings of fear, horizontal and less hierarchical organizing brings feelings of joy.

> [FEM TALKS] have lectures in the format of parties and our course: they are all about a horizontal and relaxed format of interaction with people. Here you first discuss serious things and then dance to Lana Del Rey with a

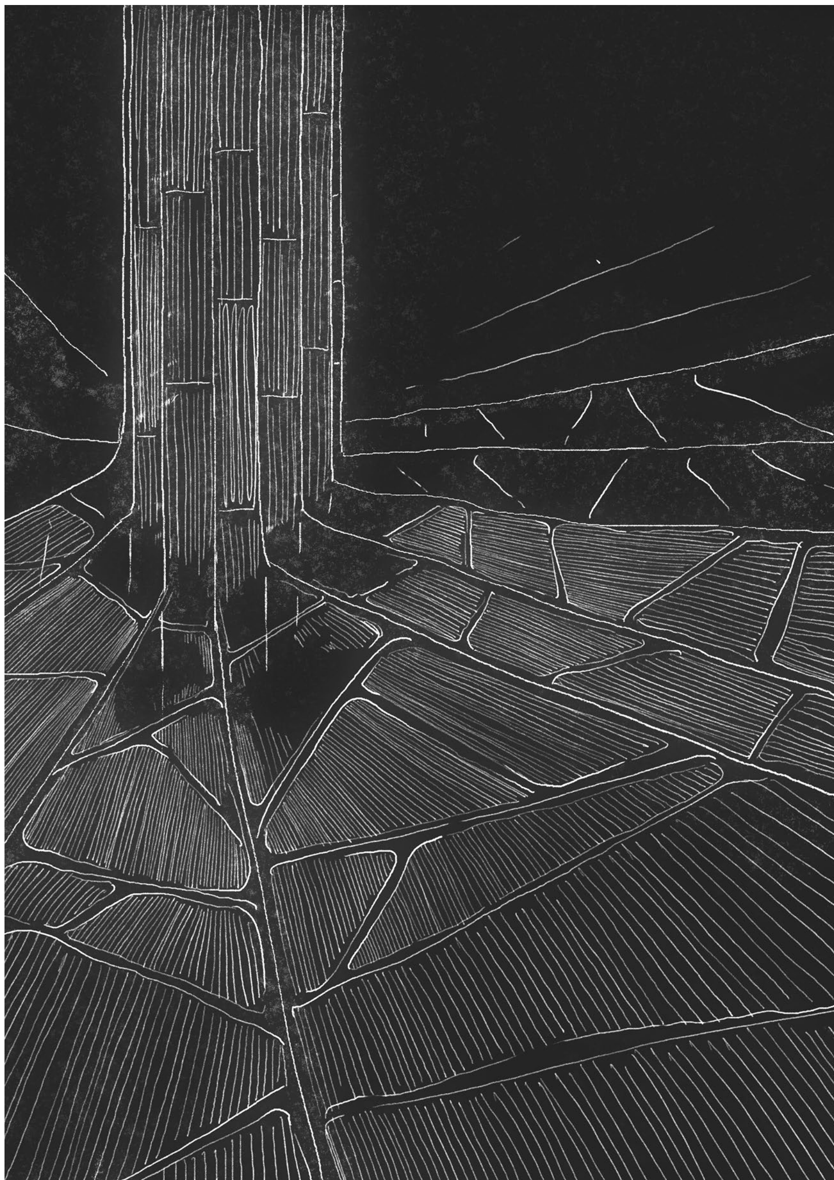

Fig. 8.3 Verticality and horizontality. Illustration by Natalia Batrakova

> glass of cider in your hands. You are discussing memes in Zoom before the lecture, while you are waiting for everyone to join. This is the kind of communication that is impossible to imagine in an ordinary university, and the format that eliminates the fear of everything academic. Many wrote to us that initially that they were afraid to take the course because of the fear of not understanding some complex terms and concepts, but later these fears disappeared. And it's cool. I think feminist theory is about that, and not preaching from the tribune. (Danilov 2020)

FEM TALKS activities embody resistance to institutionalized university hierarchies and power relations through their "horizontal and relaxed format," which is "impossible to imagine in an ordinary university" where knowledge is preached "from the tribune." Hierarchy is translated into horizontality, and the fear propagated by such hierarchies is transformed into joy.

One of the course students shared with me in an interview a very joyfull account of her participation in the FEM TALKS activities:

> I love them. [...] I enjoy it a lot, I look forward to seeing them every Saturday. There I'm not afraid to look stupid. Especially because there are such topics, you know, as "queer" or "transgender." And I'm just a simple girl, from Novgorod [smiling]. I understand that I am able to ask different, even offensive, controversial questions there because they understand that we are learning. [...] And we communicate with memes, and TikToks, and so forth. In short, there is a very kind atmosphere there. (Oksana, October 9, 2020)

The student highlights the project's non-hierarchical approach to teaching and learning. Here, social media played a crucial role in facilitating this project by bypassing traditional hierarchies and further decentralizing university knowledge. This allows academic life, characterized by collegiality and diverse topics, to emerge from the remnants of the corporate-authoritarian university. Interestingly, the student notes not only the free communication between participants and "the teachers," but also the breaking down of boundaries between the elitist and the peripheral. She humorously refers to herself as "a simple girl" from the small city of Novgorod, contrasting her (peripheral) position with the presumably elitist academic (feminist) research. This contrast is dissolved in the FEM TALKS format, which dismantles academic hierarchies and transforms it into a space for challenging authoritarian-neoliberal hierarchies and control.

Freedom

Subverted staticity and horizontality, as opposed to the authoritarian-neoliberal vertical of control, are often imagined in terms of freedom. The name of the Free University already suggests this aspiration, and the project describes itself as "an independent educational project free of administrative pressure and censorship" (Free University n.d.-a; my emphasis). The goal is to build a university anew, freeing teachers from any corporate-authoritarian dictate: "We, professors and teachers at different universities, are joining forces to work with students in a new way" (Free University n.d.-a; my emphasis). This newness signifies the attempt to reimagine academia, to breathe life into higher education that has become synonymous with "bureaucratic indicators, massification, and cheapness of the educational process," as expressed by Viktor Gorbatov, one of the founders of the Free University:

> When, due to COVID-19, universities were forced to be thrown into the online space fully, it suddenly became especially clear that many of the institutional requirements that we used to take for granted are completely false in terms of goal setting and ridiculous in form. We realized that they are not at all about the quality of education, soft skills, and motivation. Rather, they are about bureaucratic indicators, massification, and cheapness of the educational process. And then we further realized that we could do a lot on our own, if we need a quality education not for show, but for life. (Free University n.d.-a)

However, "freedom" is understood in specific terms. The Free University does not seek to abandon the concept of a university altogether. Instead, it positions itself in opposition to the institutionalized framework of corporate-authoritarian knowledge production. The Free University serves as a transformative space where the corporate-authoritarian university is reimagined into a liberated institution (Fig. 8.4).

During my interview with a student at the Free University, who was also involved in other oppositional activist and academic networks, she expressed that the freedom from corporate-authoritarian censorship and bureaucracy was precisely what drew her to this project.

> Well, I'm probably attracted to this one because it is free. But not even because of the money, but because […] your background is not important to them. That is, they are not such bureaucrats. I like this very much. That they don't look at your regalia, at your diplomas; there are no such obstacles. […]

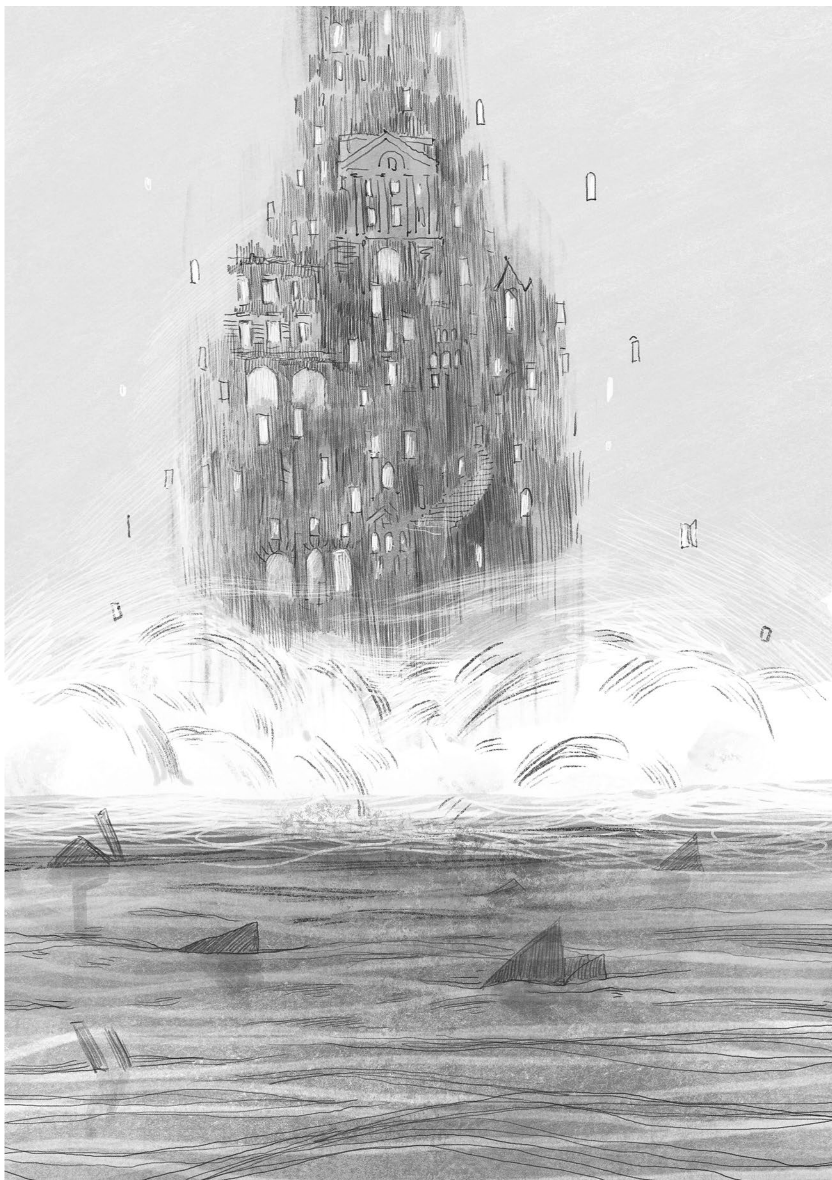

Fig. 8.4 Building anew. Illustration by Natalia Batrakova

> I also really like that the teachers have a position similar to mine. Not like at St Petersburg State University where the teacher kisses the dean's ass, the dean kisses the rector's ass, the rector kisses Putin's ass. That just made me feel sick at St Petersburg State University. And of course, this is one of the main, most significant things for me, that people there [at the Free University] have a connection with reality, that they do not deny it, that… I know that if I join a course on political systems, we will analyze things that are unpleasant for authoritarian regimes. I joined just for this. Because I understand that if I would like to study Political Science or even International Relations at St Petersburg State University, then they will iron out difficulties, and all controversies will be avoided. I do not need it. What I want is the most critical view, the relevant agenda. I just understood that I would find it there [in the Free University], and not in the institution. (Oksana, October 9, 2020)

The student highlights several aspects that she found appealing about the Free University: its "freedom" from bureaucracy ("they don't look at your regalia"), from the hierarchical power structure of neoliberal authoritarianism ("the teacher kisses the dean's ass, the dean kisses the rector's ass, the rector kisses Putin's ass"), and from the depoliticization enforced by neoliberal authoritarianism ("they will iron out difficulties"). At the Free University, knowledge is openly produced in a politicized environment. The institution not only fosters spaces for critical knowledge but also arguably creates a sense of community united by the values of freedom from censorship in an authoritarian context where self-organization has become extremely challenging (cf. Erdem 2020: 320).

Reclaiming University

When the university is captured by the authoritarian state for its reproduction or penetrated by market-based forces for economic growth, the ability to control the content of studies, the role of the university, and the academics' working conditions are increasingly alienated from the academics (Poutanen 2022; Hall 2018a, 2018b). Academic communities worldwide try to resist these processes of capture and penetration by reclaiming: "We are the university" is an empowering slogan used in various contexts (Corbett 2018).

Similarly, the alternative projects organized by Russian academics and students aim not only to escape institutional boundaries and subvert authoritarian-neoliberal control, transforming it into something joyful,

collegial, and horizontal. In these new spaces of radical imagination and enactment, the organizers and participants strive to reclaim the essence of the university. They seek to take it back not from the processes of academic marketization, as noted in the contexts of the Global North, but rather from the forces of neoliberal authoritarianism, namely, the authoritarian state and the pervasive global neoliberalization. As the Free University's manifesto states, "We cannot be expelled from the university because we are the university" (Free University n.d.-a) (Fig. 8.5).

The slogan "We are the university" has been echoed by various academic groups. In Russia, the Free University was not the first to adopt this slogan. Prior to that, it was used by the Russian student collective DOXA in 2019. Despite having their official status as a student organization revoked by the university administration due to their oppositional political activities, DOXA continued to operate without official recognition. They asserted that "the university is a platform that belongs to society, not to business reputation, the brand, the vice-rector, the Board of Trustees, or anyone else" (DOXA 2019). DOXA resisted authoritarian-neoliberal control over university activities and sought to reclaim them, frequently using the slogan "We are the university" in their media publications.

DOXA leveraged the concept of reclaiming the university during the protests against the arrest of opposition figure Alexey Navalny in January 2021. They released a video statement declaring that university authorities' threats to expel students for protesting were illegal. In this context, DOXA emphasized citizens' right to protest and encouraged students to express their political views "in any peaceful way," such as volunteering for a human rights organization or starting an independent student initiative (Meduza 2021). The video concluded with DOXA editors stating, "The state has declared war on youth, but we are the youth, and we will win." Although the video was quickly banned by government agencies and the editors faced criminal charges, the slogan "We are the youth" / "Youth is us" (*Molodost' – eto mi*) became a key rallying cry for DOXA and the broader student movement. The identity of youth was largely framed around the student identity, which DOXA viewed as a crucial academic subject within the university. DOXA resisted the university's authority to punish and expel students for protesting and sought to reclaim their subjectivity as active citizens and university members.

Fig. 8.5 Non-hierarchical academic architecture. Illustration by Natalia Batrakova

Intrusive Staticity

Despite efforts to transform the corporate-authoritarian university into a space of horizontality, freedom, and joy, and to reclaim academia, these translation processes face limitations. The enactment of radical imaginaries is embedded within the existing structures of control and staticity. The authoritarian state's power continues to exert, and even strengthen, its hold on academia, hindering possibilities for transformation. Breaking free from the state also means losing access to the material, administrative, and institutional resources that the state monopolizes through its authoritarian-neoliberal governance. For instance, the FEM TALKS project, not being affiliated with a state university, was unable to receive institutional funding. Most of the project's activities were carried out voluntarily, with organizers sometimes contributing their own money. To fund their feminist theory course, they had to charge students fees (Danilov 2020).

The Free University faced similar challenges. Due to the lack of institutional support and resources, one student observed that the activities, particularly in the initial rounds of courses, were poorly organized. The number of applications far exceeded the capacity of each course, making the selection process arduous. Given the unstable resources and overlapping projects of the Free University teachers, the organization was not always seamless. Additionally, there was criticism regarding the formation of course groups: while the student I quoted earlier appreciated the anti-bureaucratic nature of the Free University, she criticized some courses for not considering the diverse backgrounds of students, making the course content unsuitable for everyone.

> What I don't really like is that, to be honest, [the course] is difficult for me. Probably, if I were a teacher, I would not approve my application, because I don't have this background, and it's very difficult for me. […] In terms of background, there is a heterogeneous group, and we have these two boys for whom, apparently, [this course] is a professional field. […] In short, these criteria are not very pedagogical. […] It's rather strange to me why there was an eleventh grader in our group […]. There are these two dudes who fucking quote Lacan and Deleuze by heart. I am also there. And we are all different. We are completely different. (Oksana, October 9, 2020)

While the student initially found the freedom from bureaucratic control appealing, this eventually led to tension: such horizontality becomes a challenge in a course that lacks resources due to the project's external

status. The student remarked, “But this [Free University], of course, is not a replacement for [institutionalized] academia. Of course not.” Although new academic life emerges from these transformative spaces, the traditional institutions are not abandoned and remain vital for participants. The ability to transform authoritarian-neoliberal structures is limited. Institutionalized universities still provide opportunities that other projects cannot match: structured education, funding, resources, and degrees recognized in the labor market.

These resistance projects are not immune to the oppressive forces of authoritarian states, which tighten their grip on sites of subversion and transformation. The state does not tolerate these emerging lifeworlds, not only because of the knowledge they generate but also because of their self-organization beyond hierarchical control. This undermines the authority of centralized governance and pervasive control.

All three projects heavily relied on digital technologies, creating deterritorialized spaces where one could presumably escape the grip of state control and authoritarian-neoliberal governance. However, these digital spaces also become reterritorialized and infiltrated by the state’s authoritarian and controlling powers. For instance, students at the Free University from Belarus faced internet connection issues when authorities shut down the internet to counteract protests against the falsification of presidential election results in August 2020. This demonstrates that some individuals cannot escape the territorial grip, even with digital technologies that authoritarian regimes can control.

The state’s intrusive authoritarian powers further tightened in March 2023, when Russian authorities declared the Free University an “undesirable organization.” This designation imposes administrative penalties on anyone participating in its activities and criminal prosecution for those organizing them. This affected the project’s spatial dynamics: for safety reasons, the Academic Board of the Free University decided to cease activities within the Russian Federation (Free University n.d.-b). The Russian state’s efforts to halt Free University activities forced the project out of the country, leading many teachers and students to relocate abroad. Although the Free University has expressed its intention to continue its work (Free University n.d.-b), the authoritarian state’s powers have significantly constrained the possibilities for more livable transformations.

Although the projects discussed in this chapter aimed to break free from authoritarian-neoliberal control, distance themselves from the state, and redefine the concept of a university beyond institutionalized entities,

they faced significant limitations. The authoritarian state controls many of the resources essential for knowledge production and can use its power to eliminate these projects from its institutional and territorial framework. While these projects strive to operate independently, there is rarely a utopian outside, and they may become entangled in other forms of power during their fragmented transformations.

Persevered Neoliberalization

These sites of radical enactment do not completely dismantle authoritarian-neoliberal control. The pressure to institutionalize, seek alternative resources, and amplify their voices may lead to alignment with other power structures. The concept of assemblages and relationality suggests that these sites of translation are rarely immune to the influences of capitalism and authoritarianism. In their fragmented transformations, they may also adopt elements from other governance regimes that perpetuate control and dispossession.

While striving to escape and resist the authoritarian-neoliberal control of the Russian state, the Free University aligned itself with the European Union's higher education governance projects, particularly the Bologna Process.[1] After the Russian government decided to sever ties with the Bologna Process in 2022 (Vorob'eva 2022), the Free University issued a statement condemning this move: "We believe that this step opposes the interests of students and teachers. It leads to the isolation of Russian universities from the world, the destruction of academic rights and freedoms" (Free University n.d.-a). The statement further distanced higher education from state boundaries: "Science should not serve the interests of any state; it is engaged in the search for knowledge. Modern academic science

[1] The "Europeanness" of the Free University was evident in its various activities and representations. During my data collection in 2021, the homepage of the Free University featured a photograph of Michel Foucault at a demonstration, which arguably linked the Free University to a specific European academic tradition. Foucault, depicted with a megaphone, symbolized the idea of raising voices and being heard, reflecting the Free University's initial motivation to escape state control and censorship. The photograph conveyed a sense of movement, urgency, and loudness. Interestingly, the photo was apparently from an anti-racist demonstration in Paris in 1971, following the killing of an Algerian teenager. However, the Free University detached the image from its original context, recontextualizing it from the anti-racist struggles of 1970s France to their own political struggle against an authoritarian-neoliberal university.

is unthinkable without international cooperation. […] We declare that we have been and remain part of the international academic community" (Free University n.d.). There is a visible tension here: the concept of a deterritorialized Free University and science paradoxically intertwines with efforts to anchor the Free University within the EU's higher education framework, specifically the Bologna Process. The Free University stated that "[t]he efforts of Free University will be focused on the recognition of our programs within the Bologna system and the development of academic mobility programs" (Free University n.d.-a).

Paradoxically, while resisting the authoritarian-neoliberal governance of the Russian state, the Free University aligned itself with the Bologna Process, which has been criticized as a neoliberal, hegemonic, Eurocentric, and even colonial project in higher education (I analyzed this in more detail in Chap. 4). One of the motivations behind the Bologna Process was to enhance the competitiveness of European economies (Hummel 2009; Kaya 2015). This was precisely why the Russian state initially joined the Bologna Process in 2003 (Deriglazova 2019: 346). In the global competition of knowledge economies, the European Union aimed to become the most competitive through the Bologna Process (Jessop et al. 2008). Figueroa (2010: 248) argues that the Eurocentric nature of the Bologna Process is rooted in "narrativizing history" within Europe as the creator of progress, understood solely in terms of capitalist culture.

Aligning with the neoliberal Bologna Process, initially adopted by the Russian government to boost state competitiveness, now serves as a form of resistance against the state's authoritarian politics. These translations are fraught with tensions and contradictions: despite efforts to break *outside* of the authoritarian-neoliberal control, they may be still entangled into the patchy acts of translation and not be fully shielded from the powers of states and global neoliberalization which penetrate these projects.

In the absence of resources, these projects may need to align with other powerful structures. Various forms of capitalism and neoliberalism exist within states, sometimes in opposition to each other: the Russian authoritarian-neoliberal regime has positioned itself against the Eurocentric neoliberal project of the EU. This creates paradoxes in translation: resisting one authoritarian-neoliberal entity, like the Russian state, may involve aligning with another neoliberal project, such as the EU's Bologna Process. This highlights that translations are complex and incomplete, combining

different elements with porous boundaries. Acts of political resistance may contribute to both the establishment and subversion of oppressive powers.

Given that neoliberalization is diverse and hybrid, the idea of completely breaking free from these forms becomes even more challenging. The question remains: how far can our translation projects go beyond neoliberal and/or authoritarian structures? How can we subvert oppressive powers? How drastically can we escape control assemblages? As capitalism thrives on diversity and translations, as noted by scholars like Anna Tsing (2015) and J. K. Gibson-Graham (2006), the same applies to resistance forms. While our radical imagination allows us to envision escaping oppressive powers, political action is often constrained by the capturing forces of staticity and penetrative logic of global neoliberalization. For liberatory practice, a comprehensive relationship between both is needed.

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CHAPTER 9

Concluding Remarks: State Formation of Neoliberal Authoritarianism, Ungovernmentality, and Solidarities

It is time for some brief concluding remarks (Fig. 9.1). What have we learned about—and from—neoliberal authoritarianism? How does it elucidate the global situation, governing practices, and, most importantly, the formation of authoritarian-neoliberal states? What open questions arise from this work?

Global Situation

Neoliberal authoritarianism reveals developments in the global situation. As neoliberal authoritarianism pertained to the behavior of states that sought to supervise, manage, or benefit from the competitive and inherently unequal conditions of global neoliberal competition, it is unsurprising that this state-led and securitized neoliberalism had the potential to fuel neo-imperial aspirations. Ensuring the excellence and prestige of universities globally has become a geopolitical ambition, accompanying efforts to enhance the prestige of states and economies. This is particularly ironic given that neoliberalism has been often portrayed as leading to peace and cooperation through economic interdependence. However, competition has become a slippery path, rarely resulting in truly cooperative, compassionate, and mutually beneficial arrangements.

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I. Gataulina, *Neoliberal Authoritarianism: An Ethnography of Russian Universities*, Central and Eastern European Perspectives on International Relations,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-89451-0_9

Fig. 9.1 Concluding remarks. Illustration by Natalia Batrakova

Excelling in this competition became a geopolitical asset that had to be preserved. It increased state control and surveillance over academic activities, which are believed to directly translate into economic performance through knowledge economies and the status of "national science." The Russian state has attempted to supervise international competition by classifying universities into groups, implementing funding mechanisms, and establishing performance-based systems of control over academic labor.

Global competitive conditions generate contradictory forces: outwardly to compete and participate, and simultaneously inwardly to securitize, prevent abnormality, and reproduce the authoritarian state. However, these forces are contradictory only from the perspective of a neoliberal canon. In reality, this is precisely how neoliberal authoritarianism operates and shapes the global situation: securitization is an essential part of a neoliberalized competitive world.

Neoliberal Authoritarianism as a Governance Practice

Despite the gradual securitization of the Russian state and its departure from the international project of neoliberal modernization, neoliberal effects persisted, having penetrated Russian universities and the state as a result of global neoliberalization. Neoliberal authoritarianism emerged as a new form of governance. Some conventional features of neoliberalization, typically observed in liberal democracies, are "rubbed away" through friction. However, neoliberalization is not necessarily disrupted but rather unfolds in various other forms. The situation in Russian universities, which are extensively controlled by the state, cannot be simply characterized as privatization and deregulation. Simultaneously, neoliberal ideas such as competition, cost-efficiency, managerial control, and economic growth thrive when integrated with the authoritarian governance of the Russian state.

What is neoliberal authoritarianism as a governance practice? It is characterized by hierarchies and unobstructed decision-making, disciplinarity, and pretentious depoliticization. These elements constitute the governance of universities and mirror the alienation of academics worldwide under neoliberalization policies. Administrative hierarchies at universities are streamlined, and decision-making is concentrated in the hands of university management. Labor is surveilled, disciplined, and precarized due

to the infiltration of performance-based mechanisms aimed at institutional performance and efficiency (understood in terms of cost-effectiveness rather than academic knowledge). The bargaining power of academics for political and economic rights diminishes in this precarious system. Some political activities are blocked due to neoliberal-authoritarian policies of "apolitical neutrality," which typically target "unreliable" behavior to uphold the university's reputation in the higher education market. Neoliberal ideas of political neutrality reinforce authoritarian governance and help suppress political opposition. I call this depoliticization pretentious, as it usually leads to the sanctioning of uncomfortable views while reinforcing the political status quo.

State Formation of Neoliberal Authoritarianism

While discussions about the authoritarian-neoliberal university permeate different contexts, this book also explored what happens when this authoritarian-neoliberal practice of governance transcends the boundaries of universities and reverberates at the state level. Neoliberal authoritarianism represents a new state formation: an authoritarian state penetrated and reinforced by neoliberal rationalities, sustained through authoritarian-neoliberal institutional practices of control and dispossession. This form of state authoritarianism not only protects the interests of capital, as seen in neoliberal states of the Global North, but also reproduces a territorially and ideologically coherent state of control that safeguards the political ruling apparatus at the center of the state (cf. Ishchenko 2024: 99–100).

Understanding this state formation solely through universities is, of course, limiting and future work is needed. However, it partly reveals these authoritarian-neoliberal compositions, given that universities in Russia are state institutions and that, under global neoliberalization, universities have become extensions of economic production, typically aligning with the state's goals.

Neoliberal rationalities of efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and unobstructed decision-making align well with the processes of state's reproduction. A state is an institutional mechanism with its own goals, economy, and politics; it is no wonder that it can uphold certain governing neoliberal rationalities of corporations. Neoliberal authoritarianism allows for the reinforcement of institutional and territorial integrity and coherence, enabling the state to reproduce itself (i.e., elements necessary for the state, such as the "labor force for economic production") at a cheaper and faster

pace. Here, the institutional architecture of an authoritarian state is reinforced through spatial and temporal dimensions.

New Public Management, with its emphasis on hierarchies and top-down decision-making, aligns with the authoritarian vertical of power, where the managerial role is primarily attached to the authoritarian role of the president and the government. The latter oversee the homogeneity and political and economic subordination of the Russian regions. The authoritarian state controls and produces the state territory as a material, contained space and a resource for international competition.

Governance is also characterized by exploiting peripherality, which both authoritarianism and neoliberalism generate. Authoritarianism concentrates resources centrally, while neoliberalism helps to produce such hierarchies. Both authoritarianism and neoliberalism benefit from exploiting the peripheries, which bear the brunt of institutional and dispossessive burdens. Peripheries are dispossessed both politically and economically. Here, I understand peripheries in both territorial and institutional terms: regions that are geographically marginalized as well as lower institutional hierarchies. When these intersect, exploitation is intensified.

Ungovernmentality

It is important to emphasize that I believe institutional governance created to control is hardly ever totalizing. It might seem so, and honestly, my language in this book might have sounded the same at times. However, here, I follow Deleuze: coherently designed and totalizing control is only true on a larger scale when we analyze, for example, how global neoliberalism or draconian state authoritarianism operate. To capture the global situation, we are bound to abstract it from the messy reality into a generalized discussion. However, as the ethnographic gaze of those global and large-scale forms shows, reality is often characterized by ungovernmentality. A closer look reveals that on the scale of micropolitics, "[t]here is always something that flows or flees, that escapes the binary organizations, the resonance apparatus, and the overcoding machine" (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 216). Societies, even when subjected to controlling measures and designs such as neoliberal authoritarianism, are irreducible to the aims to govern [and] dictate (Joronen and Griffiths 2022). Neoliberal authoritarianism might be a central condition to understand the workings of the state, global neoliberalism, and the governance it produces, but "it can never create conditions that inexhaustibly capture the lives it claims to

dictate" (ibid.). As we saw throughout the book, people always find ways to subvert control, even on a smaller scale: be it gaming performance-based systems or subverting the neoliberal university status designed by Moscow to reappropriate it for regional development. These glitches are only visible on a smaller scale, through the ethnographic gaze of larger forms. I believe that attention to ungovernmentality and messiness enriches our scholarly understanding of global processes and perhaps even makes us more compassionate.

Places of Commons

The issue of authoritarian-neoliberal state formation, which works for its own reproduction, raises the question: what kind of state do we want, and what place should a university hold within it? Soviet socialist thinkers, for example, argued for a university coupled with a (socialist) state to work for the common good, contrary to a capitalist society where reliance on competition and profits pushed science to maximize profit rather than work for the betterment of society (Ryder 2022: 4–5). Similarly, contemporary Western critiques, in the context of rising university privatization and deregulation, contemplate the disastrous undemocratic effects of public spaces falling into corporate interests (Giroux 2004).

The usage of the term "public," however, creates confusion here. As this book showed, public might mean being captured by the (authoritarian) state. It is worth noting that universities are public institutions in Russia; however, "public" here hardly means a place of commons. Russian universities are statist rather than public. What we need is to decouple universities—as well as other public spaces—from both the draconian and capturing state and corporate property, and to think of them in terms of the commons, which is contrary to enclosure by both capital and the state (Kamola and Meyerhoff 2009). Commons is about civic liberty, which is different from both market liberty and authoritarian state control.

Building Solidarities

Finally, regarding our possibilities to move forward: Building global solidarities beyond the oppressive lines of capture that divide us is more important than ever. In recent years, it has become evident that resisting the authoritarian power of the Russian state sometimes means aligning with Eurocentric, neoliberal, civilizational, and now militarized politics

(Gataulina and Shahmoradi 2024). With the embodied memories of fear and terror that the state produces to preserve its apparatus, many scholars and political activists (myself included) have easily believed in the neoliberal canon of democratization and reducing the state's grip. Any conversation from the privatized and deregulated Global North about bringing the state back has been hard to reciprocate.

How do we find global solidarities across progressive politics in both East and West? Our truly liberatory global democratic project should maintain distance not only from the overt offensives of draconian authoritarianism but also from any abuse of democratic thought in securitizing one's own geopolitical goals (Morozov 2013).

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Appendix: Fieldwork

Interviews

Pseudonym	*Status*	*Affiliation*	*Date of interview*
Julia	University leadership	A university in Europe	October 08, 2019
Anna	Researcher	Higher School of Economics	October 09, 2019
Vladislav	Head of a department	Tyumen State University	October 23, 2019
Pavel	Researcher	Higher School of Economics	October 25, 2019
Darya	Administrative staff	Petrozavodsk State University	November 22, 2019
Michael	Head of Education on a degree program	Tyumen State University	December 12, 2019
Lina	Student	St Petersburg State University	December 19, 2019
Elena	Researcher	Higher School of Economics	January 17, 2020
Zeynab	Graduate	American University of Central Asia	January 19, 2020

(*continued*)

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https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-89451-0

(continued)

Pseudonym	*Status*	*Affiliation*	*Date of interview*
Anna	Researcher	Higher School of Economics	January 28, 2020
Artem	University lecturer	Petrozavodsk State University	February 14, 2020
Vera	Student	Tyumen State University	March 12, 2020
Maria and Irina	Head of a research center and postdoctoral researcher	Higher School of Economics	May 07, 2020
Maria and Irina	Head of a research center and postdoctoral researcher	Higher School of Economics	May 13, 2020
Nina	Student	St Petersburg State University	June 11, 2020
Yulia	University lecturer	Ulyanovsk State University and Ulyanovsk Pedagogical State University	June 14, 2020
Alexey	University lecturer; Head of a department	Petrozavodsk State University	June 15, 2020
Vladimir	Docent	St Petersburg State University	June 18, 2020
Artem	University lecturer	Petrozavodsk State University	June 29, 2020
Emina	Student	St Petersburg State University	September 17, 2020
Oksana	Student	St Petersburg State University and Free University	October 09, 2020
Olesya	Researcher	European University in St Petersburg	November 12, 2021

Interviews accompanied by the creative exercise of mapping a university

Pseudonym	*Status*	*Affiliation*	*Date*
Lotta	Researcher	Tampere University	September 30, 2020
Zhenya	Graduate	St Petersburg State University of Culture and Arts	October 06, 2020
Katya	Graduate	St Petersburg State University	October 14, 2020 (the discussion continued in October and November 2020)
Pauliina	Researcher	University of Eastern Finland	October 26, 2020
Masha	Graduate	Ulyanovsk State University	April 15, 2021

Email, social media, phone, fieldwork conversations, correspondence

Pseudonym/ code	*Status*	*Affiliation*	*Time of correspondence*
COR-1	Researcher (cooperation with Russian universities)	Tampere University	September 2019
COR-2	Senior researcher (Russian and Eurasian studies)	Tampere University	December 2019
COR-3	Senior university lecturer	Ulyanovsk State University	June 2020
COR-4	Graduate	St Petersburg State University	November 2020
Sergey	Student	Ulyanovsk State University	February 2021
Polina	Postdoctoral researcher; graduate	University of Helsinki; Higher School of Economics	September 2021
Dmitry	Researcher	Higher School of Economics	October 2021
Nadya	Administrative staff; Researcher	A federal university in Russia; University of Helsinki	June 2022

Events

Name of the event	*Place/organizer*	*Offline or online*	*Date*
20th Anniversary of the Bologna Process	Bologna, Italy	Online	June 24–25, 2019
Set of discussions “How education is changing in Europe”	Center for the Study of Germany and Europe; St Petersburg	Offline	September 27–28, 2019
3 webinars of the professional development program “University management”	European University in St Petersburg	Online	December 19, 2019; November 24, 2020; February 09, 2021
10th International Russian Higher Education Conference	Higher School of Economics; Moscow	Offline	October 23–25, 2019
Slow academy conference	Helsinki	Offline	October 26, 2019
7 events around higher education policies at Tampere University (Triple Helix; Internationalization at home; European Consortium of Innovative Universities (ECIU) launch, etc.)	Tampere University	Online and on campus	2020
4 round tables on the university governance	European University in St Petersburg	Online	2020
10 European University Association events (Academic career assessment; Toward the Bologna Process Ministerial Meeting; Funding Forum, etc.)	European University Association	Online	Spring 2020
International seminar “Problems and opportunities of Russian master’s degree programs”	Lobachevsky University; Nizhny Novgorod	Online	April 28, 2020
International conference “Linguistic and cultural aspects of Antoine de Saint-Exupery’s art”	Antoine de Saint-Exupery Center; Ulyanovsk State University	Online	June 10, 2020
Conference “University personnel policy”	Higher School of Economics	Online	November 12–13, 2020
Discussion “Sexism in academia”	Eve’s Ribs festival; St Petersburg	Offline	March 02, 2021

Other university visits

University	*Date*
Higher School of Economics in St Petersburg	October and December 2019
Togliatti State University	July 2020
Ulyanovsk State University	July 2020
European University in St Petersburg	October–November 2021

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