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Neo-traditionalist fits with neo-liberal shifts in Russian cultural policy

Russia's post-2012 cultural policy is often justly seen as having been based on reactionary foundations. International awareness of this arose from the case of Pussy Riot, which publicly illustrated how a criminal trial can rely on anti-feminism and accusations of disrespect for Russian Orthodox culture. At the same time, however, other elements of the policy turn had already shown themselves in earlier cultural incidents, which were less explosive from the point of view of the attention they brought from the international media, but no less important to the administrative model that was being established. Since the 2003 exhibition "Beware! Religion", the intrusion of far-right and fundamentalist movements into gallery and museum life has been boosted by the criminal justice system prosecuting the art curators rather than the violators (Jonson 2015: 50–53, 106–10). In 2012, the model was inverted and there was evidence of an expansion of fundamentalist values into the government itself. One of the key figures of the movement, Vladimir Medinskii, was appointed Minister of Culture in May 2012. He quickly became a herald of the moralist turn, providing public espousals of official intolerance towards contemporary art, academic research on political history and verbatim theatre, which he called unacceptable or immoral phenomena nourished by public financial aid.

All this highlights the neo-traditionalist nature of recent state management of Russian culture. Nonetheless, I argue below that behind the moral design based on values of cultural unity and social cohesion it is easy to find a contrasting trend that consists of the commodification of culture and austerity with regard to the public finances. This trend robs the Russian case of its uniqueness, placing it in line with the majority of national cultures. This chapter pays particular attention to the speeches and strategies of Medinskii and focuses on the political and social variables that constitute the context for his activities and for the whole new style of cultural management in Russia.

The moralist turn in its political context

The moralist turn, or the harsh governmental criticism of westernized contemporary culture and decadent public values, cannot be explained if it is isolated from the recent political context, that is, from the wave of protest that began in December 2011 (Bikbov 2012). The criticism of Vladimir Putin and "his" regime—which was loud and unexpected, at least in its extent—led to explicit governmental responses to reduce public dissent, not least a hardening of "counter-extremism" legislation and anti-NGO measures. Other responses consisted of: suppression of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) movement (which in many ways had recreated itself as a political phenomenon as a reply to this suppression), in the form of the promotion normative family model; administrative and penal measures against "revisionism" in Russian history, in the form of a glorious vision of the past; the adoption of laws that penalized "offending religious feelings"; and several other conservative campaigns that provided clear evidence of a repressive use of culture. The concept of the "Russian World" should also be noted in this context. It was established by the Russian government in the early 2000s as a framework for soft power activities in the Commonwealth of Independent States, and as a tool for furthering cultural influence in Western Europe (see chapter 2).[1] During the war in Ukraine, the concept served as the basis for a campaign to "save" all Russian-speaking populations from discrimination and repression.

Another strong but less explicit aspect of the moralist turn seems to flow from the Soviet-style populist impetus for proletarian virtues, which consists of a rare but firmly stated appeal to the common people in official discourses. The form of such an appeal can vary, but might include a prize established to recognize the "ordinary people of culture", inspired by the example of the first Soviet Commissar of Education and Culture, Anatolii Lunacharskii, "who was the first to grant systematic attention to ordinary people, without whom nothing can exist" (*RIA Novosti* 2015). In the broader context of popular education, the same preoccupation with the loyal majority is translated into patriotic and religious training in school curricula and campaigns of propaganda condemning decadent western values and lifestyles, targeted at the poorly educated among the population. The various governmental acts and discourses that oppose themselves to harmful modernity contain a common feature: they operate in a normative and moralist culture using the tools of political prohibitionism and legal restrictions.

Proclaiming nominally universal access to culture based on simplified identities, such as mastery of the Russian language and respect for Orthodox traditions, the official definition of culture seems to use a clearly asymmetrical opposition between cultural populism and cultivated elitism,[2] which is quite common in classic cases of political reaction such as the Soviet Union in the 1930s or Vichy France (Muel-Dreyfus 1996). When neo-traditionalist movements become official, they generate their own institutions, such as prizes, councils of trustees, supervisory bodies and social foundations. The stress of its current version on the

glory of "classic Russian culture" and "our traditions", however, makes it difficult to observe autonomous cultural effects or content generated from within the policy turn. Nonetheless, its political aim remains perfectly clear. It is practically recognized in the trends and manifestations of the censorship that is applied, which contradict the patrimonial unity in which the imaginary "core" and "simple" majority serve as sufficient provision of a national order. This order is considered to be better than that of the "idle middle class", a concept that belongs to the same imaginary scale.[3]

This position showed itself to be perfectly suited to the opportunistic instrumentalization that was quite fresh during the 2011–12 political crisis, when Putin's "working majority" was commonly opposed to the "leisured public of protest rallies" (Kalk 2012). The momentary meaning of that class division, which was mainly defined by cultural capacities rather than economic power,[4] consisted of a comfortable essentialist explanation of political predilections. Although its medium-term political meaning goes further, in a situation of compulsory national unity, raised against external dangers and their "minority" representatives on the national scene, the path is kept open for a state of exception through the abnegation of more complex consensual negotiations and a legal harmonization of interests. In this way, a normative "popular" culture can justify modifications to the political regime by means of a "manual override", in which a personalized authority is applied to "poorly working" institutions in the name of global justice, the people's will or the nation's needs.[5]

New public management of culture

This short overview shows that the symbolic dimension of national policy, and the way cultural policy in particular presents itself, is clearly populist and moralist. However, can the administrative dimension of this policy also be understood in class terms, as favouring "ordinary people"? Some of its facets, such as the state-supported production of blockbuster patriotic World War II movies, do indeed maintain a clear "pro-ordinary" orientation.[6] But does this orientation express something other than what are presumed to be popular tastes and sensibilities? Does it imply an awareness of growing cultural and economic inequalities, so that the "ordinary" classes could comfortably survive or, in a more optimistic vision, be able to gain from the cultural collisions arranged by the post-Soviet cultural institutions? Many interpreters of Russian policy tend to automatically transfer the normative model from the realm of traditionalist declarations to the realm of practical management. In reality, however, these two realms hardly ever align, and the resulting formulation of cultural policy is left in a double bind between the regulatory zeal of national unity and an administrative propulsion to mercenary competition.

In fact, it is easy to find rhetoric that drives ideas of social justice in culture, at least in its visible opposition to 1990s declarations praising “income” and “consumption”. Medinskii states that: “Cultural policy cannot be described exclusively in economic terms, nor in terms of ‘freedom from censorship’. And it is in any case unacceptable to think about it in terms of ‘the provision and consumption of services”’ (Medinskii 2015b). His admiration for Soviet cultural policy, even where tinged with non-orthodox nuances, seems to strengthen this idea: “A guarantee of equal and compulsory access to art works was equally the aim of the state. Hence all kinds of aggressive and effective [Soviet] ‘marketing’ in the sphere of culture, including the ‘imposed fashion’ for a culturally rich leisure, the large-scale promotion of cultural institutions and art works, affordable ticket prices, and mandatory cultural outings in the framework of schooling and education” (Medinskii 2015b).

Such statements could seduce us into believing that a solution to cultural inequalities might consist of either a return to Soviet redistributive policy based on class-based positive discrimination or another step towards hard nationalist protectionism. Medinskii’s close collaborator based in the Legal Department of the Ministry of Culture, Natalya Romashova, apparently confirms such hints: “We are convinced that under market conditions and with the objective incapacity on the part of most cultural institutions to reach self-sufficiency, the state must guarantee budget expenditure in this sector. This is what cultural institutions and consumers of cultural goods expect from us” (Romashova 2014). Strangely, but in concordance with her boss’s idea of Soviet “marketing”, she goes on to give quite a radical commercial redefinition of such a “social guarantee”: “Therefore, the dominant line of economic regulation [in the cultural sector] should be a transition from the ‘sponsor state’ to the ‘investor state’, by making provision for efficient cultural activities through adequate budgetary expenditure, and introducing effective tax mechanisms and extra-budgetary funds” (Romashova 2014).

It is easy to find more confrontational proposals emanating from the same ministry, and even from the same representatives who generate contradictory messages on cultural justice or the means of social justice-inspired culture. If one insists on the primitive hypothesis of the purely moral and traditionalist origin of the current turn in cultural management, such incongruence might easily be interpreted as a typically Russian, uneven and incomplete implementation of the reform. Alternatively, if we look for a logic that legitimately permits both anti- and pro-consumption, and pro- and anti-profit official discourse, this gives us a chance to discover that the basis of their confluence lays deeper. To reveal the guiding principle that concurs with the oppressive moralization, we need to search for it in the practical expressions that seek to resolve the ambiguous orientation of the Ministry of Culture in the field of social guarantees and consumerism.

In fact, traces of a concurrent logic, as well as its derivatives realized in the form of direct prescriptions, are numerous and quite explicit. In the catechism of Russian cultural policy willingly disseminated by Medinskii we discover, among other things, the following scheme: “While reducing, for example, subsidies to some theatres by 2.5 per cent, we immediately

promised a bonus of up to 7.5 per cent to those that had the best sales" (Medinskii 2015a). A similar solution was applied to cinema and to the understanding of what is socially significant in the current model of culture: "We support not only commercial but also socially valuable projects. Money is directed to where it can be effectively spent. When deciding on whether to support one or another film studio, we focus on all their previous achievements, awards and public success, and not only on the box office" (Medinskii 2015a). As for cultural management itself, "much really depends on the director, who must cut drastically the flows which go 'past the cash desk', must attract sponsors, create a board of trustees and establish endowment funds. That is why [today] contracts with directors of public cultural institutions include a clause about the imperative of growth in extra-budgetary revenues and attendance" (Medinskii 2014b).

These practical and pragmatic solutions have little to do with traditionalist rationality. On the contrary, they refer to the generic neoliberal scheme that dominates the European scene in cultural institutions. Funds for public culture redistributed on the basis of better attendances and earnings, institutional constraints on competition between "service providers" with the same profile and public-private partnerships are commonplace in the New Public Management (Boston 2013). All these recipes break Russia away from its presumed uniqueness and place it in the common and well codified deregulated condition applied to the public sector. Even the minister's crusade against contemporary art is resolved in a purely pragmatic concern: "As for supporting contemporary art, I have nothing against this idea. Although I think that we need to buy something that, speaking bluntly, you can always resell: something that will only grow in value. You cannot buy something of an uncertain value" (ibid.). The same neoliberal tolerance fits films that are regarded as defiant: "Some may like, for example, the director Ivan Tverdovskii and some may not. Although his debut film *Correctional Class* has already won some 30 international prizes, I personally could not watch this film to the end. Not because it is bad in itself, I just cannot watch such things. I become nervous. Some went mad with delight. Neither matters. What matters is the objective success story. With such a story both the director and the producer gain priority rights to state subsidies for their next project" (Medinskii 2015a).

In contrast to the neo-traditionalist agenda, which focuses on the restoration of family-style cohesion and implies a specific moral economy as opposed to a monetary one,[7] neoliberal trends in culture management transform the historical process by reshaping both the technologies of human administration and the employees' subjectivities in favour of accountability, striving for profit and the translation of exterior control into interior motivations (Boltanski and Chiapello 2006; Laval 2007). If the neo-traditionalist model presupposes a recoding of economic relations in moral and cultural terms, the neoliberal model does the contrary, presenting culture as a set of quantifiable and accountable services. From this point of view, a contradictory but explicit ministerial redefinition of the vocabulary related to the social value of culture into financial scales makes sense within the commercial remaking of officially

supported culture. This is precisely the way in which Romashova combines a social and commercial vocabulary to give new meaning to old terms: “Expenditure on culture should not be regarded as a burden on the state and as its irrecoverable expenses. Meeting the needs of society related to intellectual achievements and the growth of human capital—that is precisely the return that makes government expenditure an investment in people” (Romashova 2014).

A commercial turn in the public sector and two parallel histories

In addition to the instructions and declarations of the Ministry of Culture since 2012, these trends are part of the global conjuncture of neoliberal reform and a wider shift towards the commercial management of the public sector. These have been established in various administrative forms in a pattern and tune shaped by the specific political moment. In Russia this tune was shaped in the context of a reactionary governmental response to the mass protest movement of 2011. In the old democracies, this tune was forged in particular by accelerating competition in the international economy. Even in what was becoming “traditionalist” Russia, it has been possible to trace a shift in this direction since the early 2000s. Guided by neoliberal rationality, the policies of several consecutive governments that were not always in concordance with one with another found new institutional solutions to issues linked to social justice and public culture. It is possible to identify these steps as originating in 2001, when a progressive tax on personal income was abolished in favour of a universal “flat tax” set at 13 per cent, a measure justified by the pragmatic reason that it would collect more tax from the highest income earners who might otherwise choose to totally evade the tax system.

Once again, as happens globally, the logic of public duty and public expenditure is especially revealing in the model of cultural management. Further change followed in 2002, when the tax advantages for publishers of academic books and school textbooks were removed, raising the effective rate of tax from zero to 10 per cent, with virtually no assistance or grants for the publishers concerned. Just over half of all new students have been paying tuition fees since 2004. The law now allows a reduced number of publicly financed student places.[8] Another revolutionary act in the field of taxation and remuneration was perpetrated by the government in 2008. The universal scale of wages (*edinaya tarifnaya setka*), which was introduced in 1936 to regulate labour relations, was abandoned for the public sector. A system of supplements was introduced instead. These ranged from 15 per cent to 70 per cent of salary, depending on the activity—the highest being for those working in medical care—to be awarded by administrators. A new page was turned in 2010 when Federal Law 83 changed the financial model of public institutions, pushing them to provide fee-based services. This was followed by major forms of guided commercialization in public schools and hospitals, which forced them to make profits from the provision of “additional services”. These changes in legal and

commercial rules in the educational sector were accompanied by regional experiments involving the outsourcing of personnel in public social services, and the closure of some small schools in rural areas. In 2011–12 the number of civil servants was cut by 10 per cent.

Some of these changes, such as raising taxes on academic and school textbooks, affected the cultural sector directly, and brought about new forms of economic stratification based on the level of household resources available to spend on cultural pursuits. Others had an indirect but powerful impact. The abolition of the universal scale of wages, which affected the public sector as a whole, altered career structures in universities, museums and secondary schools. Some of the changes not specific to cultural management may have had a positive effect on the public sector. For instance, fines of the equivalent of EUR 100–300 were imposed on state officials and their line managers who failed to respect the 30-day deadline for replying to citizens' enquiries. But in general such measures redefined the meaning of public service, but its culture was no longer associated with specific competences but with procedural and financial performance.

These mutations observed in the 2000s were not sufficient to clearly identify the future direction. They appeared side by side with bureaucratically shaped practices and policies destined to maintain the social and cultural institutions inherited from the late Soviet period or, paradoxically, reinvented in the 1990s. One major dilemma much discussed concerning Russia's public sector is whether its future orientation will be towards the needs of the population or as a throwback to Soviet-style bureaucratic over-regulation. The cumulative effect of the above-mentioned changes revealed itself in unexpected ways, such as an obviously ultra-liberal paradigm of financial management and a growing regulatory role for the state as the central inducement to competition, as well as in the certification of competences and qualities. The most recent initiatives by the Ministry of Social Affairs, such as attempts to introduce a medical tax on the unemployed and official rhetoric using the Soviet moral concept of "parasitism" (*tuneyadstvo*) to redefine unemployment as a practice of hiding income (Petrov 2016),[9] clearly put the Russian government on the side of mercantilism, as opposed to the Welfare State model.

This brief and of necessity incomplete overview of these changes reveals two histories of Russia's public sector in the 21st century. The first talks about the public sphere, human rights and political freedom, and is marked by a shift towards neo-traditionalist government using a series of moral attacks and restrictions. The second focuses on administrative rules and regulations, and tells an alternative story guided by instrumental turning points in which the pressure of financial enforcement has grown into a revision of the institutionally administered dilemmas of social justice.

Table 4.1. Two parallel histories on Russia, 2000–2015, based on neo-traditionalist and neo-liberal trends

	Neo-traditionalist trends in the public sphere	*Neoliberal trends in the institutional sphere*
2000–2001	Boris Yeltsin appoints Vladimir Putin as his "successor"	Progressive tax on personal income is abolished in favour of a universal 13% flat tax
2002	Tax exemptions for NGOs are abolished; major international foundations supporting civil rights programmes quit Russia	Tax benefits are reduced for publishers of academic titles and school textbooks
2003–2005	A campaign of economic and political recentralization is undertaken by the Kremlin; Mikhail Khodorkovskii among others is arrested and imprisoned	Half of all first-year students pay full tuition fees; attempts made to monetize and reduce social benefits for vulnerable social groups
2007–2008	Police centres 'E' (for counter-*e*xtremism) are created to fight against human rights defenders and social activists; penalties for "extremist activities" are increased; regular arrests are made during legal street rallies	The universal scale of wages is abandoned in the public sector in favour of supplements distributed by administrators
2010	Increased pressure on social, civil rights and LGBT activists; the case of the "Khimki hostages"; anti-fascist activists Aleksei Gaskarov and Maksim Solopov are unlawfully imprisoned	Federal law no. 83 is adopted, pushing public educational and health institutions towards partial financial self-provision; experiments with outsourcing in regional social services
2011–12	Massive falsification of the parliamentary elections; penalties for civil protest are increased; freedom of speech in digital media is reduced; a law on "foreign agents" damages NGOs' activities; the case of Pussy Riot	Small schools in underpopulated areas are closed; the number of civil servants is reduced by 10%; financial penalties for negligent officials are introduced (equiv. of EUR 100–300)
2013	A law against "homosexual propaganda among minors" is adopted, criminalizing LGBT activism	Pension reform increases minimum qualifying age by between 5 and 15 years; the number of tenured positions is reduced in universities; the Academy of Sciences is reformed, institutional control passes to a Federal agency
2014	Annexation of Crimea; Russia participates in the war in Ukraine	Public secondary schools are merged and closed; hospital staff massively reduced; total number of hospital beds also reduced

Observing these parallel histories as empirical phenomena, we should not be struck by the incongruent vectors of the Russian present. Such complexity fully conforms with many other cases, especially those of peripheral national capitalisms such as China, South Korea or nations in the Arab World, where neoliberal tools of governance are closely articulated with a traditionalist agenda with regard to human rights, gender relations and political succession (see e.g. West and Parvathi (2010); Kerlin (2002); Wu (2010); Kyung-Sup (2010); and Shechter 2011). Western societies are no less complex from this point of view, even though there such complexity is translated in a double bind of a different nature that articulates economic ultra-liberalism with support for cultural and political diversity, alongside previously constituted

forms of grassroots self-governance. Such alternatives and potential directions for national development are chosen taking account of weighty historical backgrounds, but no doubt also with pragmatism at each particular moment, as was the case in Russia during the post-protest political reaction of 2012–13. Taking these facts into consideration, we should not be asking how such ambiguity it possible but rather: "in what way does it work?"

Pragmatic neo-traditionalism

Two strong links can be identified between the neoliberal and neo-traditionalist agendas for the new cultural management. The first is a business-oriented one that links the promotion of success and the profit motive with a strengthening of the Orthodox Church and of the re-patrimonialized state. The second is administrative or governmental, and pragmatically restricts production and consumption to within the country.

The first has been articulated on many occasions by Medinskii in his praise for Russia's winning strategy:

> What is the main change we see in Russia in the Putin era? The fact that Russia has started to win. For several decades, we did not win anywhere. We became accustomed to defeat and often to humiliation. A whole type of post-Soviet man was produced: an outsider. Add here the pseudo-intelligentsia's rubbish about Christianity being the religion of losers. Nothing of the sort! Christianity calls on man to win victories at every turn, during the whole of his life. Christianity requires individuals to gain a decisive victory over their own weaknesses: over selfishness, laziness, discouragement. (Medinskii 2014a)

Christian virtues that it is possible to read in many ways are given an emphatically militant and expansive edge. This can also be observed in the morals of the younger generation in the fundamentalist movements that articulate Orthodoxy with a patriotic agenda. Humility is no longer appreciated and an "active" and "winning" attitude is promoted together with "justified force".[10] The leaders of such militant Orthodox groups might own their own businesses and also serve the material goals of the Orthodox Church. As a result, fundamentalist groups are currently contractors for gardening services, local trade fairs and amateur sports festivals, but equally in less peaceful services such as private security or mercenaries in local conflicts with citizens who protest against commercial or parish capture of common spaces.[11]

The confluence of the minister's vision and the agenda promoted by business-oriented fundamentalist groups is more than pure coincidence. Combining moral and economic investments in the Orthodox and patriotic wave is considered, at least in part, to be a winning business strategy and equally proper by Vladimir Medinskii. His roles include the presidency of the Russian Military-Historical Society, established in 2012 and destined to "consolidate

state and society forces in the study of Russia's military and historical past, to promote the study of Russian military history, to counteract attempts to distort it, to ensure diffusion of the achievements of military-historical science, to educate on patriotism, to raise the prestige of military service and to preserve the military-historical heritage".[12] This clearly neo-traditionalist mission is achieved by the Society's commercial activities as a contractor with the state to meet its demand for diverse large-scale cultural and patriotic projects, such as monument restoration and cinematic production (Reiter and Golunov 2015). Medinskii himself justifies such moral-and-business activity in the recognizable terms of commercial performance: "The Russian Military-Historical Society is probably one of the most cost-efficient organizations of its kind in the country. Every penny hits its target. And for every budgeted penny there is a rouble of private co-financing. ... The Company also earns from publishing books and making computer games. The books *The History of Crimea* and *The History of Novorossia* or the video *Aircraft Ilya Muromets* are potentially profitable projects" (Medinskii 2015a).

That a variety of public-private partnerships have been given the form of highly moral enterprises with commercial outputs clearly demonstrates one of the mechanisms used by the Ministry of Culture in its promotion of national unity. The construction outbids both traditional cultural nationalism and private business interests. This is nationalism made business, and its potential expansion through the involvement of both the new faithful and new clients is connected with a utopian motif of the lucky historical moment that has long escaped from the mouths of senior Russian officials:

> Looking from the outside, one might say that 21st century Russia has entered a phase of incredible luck. Increased fertility and a reduction in mortality, the growth of citizens' personal incomes; never in Russian history could its citizens live so well and so free. And consider the peace in the Caucasus and the constant growth in the salaries of military men, teachers, doctors, and now finally of cultural workers. And the triumph in Sochi! [the Olympic Games] Do you remember the truly incredible triple victory of our skiers in the last race on the last day of the Olympics? And Crimea? No one could even dream of it. (Medinskii 2014a)

A new element in this thrilling ode brings us to the second conjunction of neoliberalism with neo-traditionalism. The fertility and mortality mentioned by the minister do not just refer to population issues; they are equally charged with a wider care for the territory managed by the state. In general, the demography topic was one of the most explicit and regularly revisited in the 2000s, representing the idea of a low and even shrinking population in such a vast territory. It was picked up in various versions, including on advertising posters promoting higher fertility using hyper-realist slogans such as: "The Country Needs Your Records: Every minute three people are born in Russia".[13] Treated in its purely biological expression, the topic received equally obvious ministerial incarnations in which demography and territorial issues were targeted by means of culture. The above-mentioned project "Russian World" was intended to symbolically recreate the territory of the former-Soviet Union, based on the argument of a

unique language and culture.

Another administrative form of cultural and territorial concern was a project to establish ten federal universities in the late 2000s and the 2010s as important territorial outposts. They were created as a result of an aggregation of existing universities in strategic regions,[14] in an attempt to resolve two types of territory-related issues: "geopolitical problems and the need in human resource terms for large inter-regional investment projects" (Remorenko 2008). As in the above-mentioned cases, the insertion of the project into the economic realm was clear: "Their [federal universities'] scientific schools should determine the sustainability and competitiveness of the domestic economy" (ibid.). The newly appointed Minister of Science and Education, Olga Vassileva, expressed similar concerns in the long-standing debate about uniform manuals for every school discipline. Criticizing the existing wide variety of manuals and promoting the idea of uniform school manuals, she targeted the scale of cultural unification across the territory: "I believe, and it is my profound conviction, that every pupil in the country, especially in elementary school, from the Far East to Kaliningrad, must have the same basis" (*Regnum* 2016).

A clear step in the redefinition of the global mission of state cultural policy was realized by the Ministry of Culture under the direction of Medinskii. A much discussed and widely ridiculed document, the *Project on the Fundamentals of State Cultural Policy*, was published in 2014, followed by a modified and then an approved final version—which was even more explicit in its political agenda and pragmatism (*Rossiiskaya gazeta* 2014). The first document was cheered by the traditionalist far-right in culture (Burlyaev 2014) and strongly criticized by left and liberal experts as an essentially neo-traditionalist programme involving forced ideological indoctrination, nationalist mobilization, and an anti-European and Russian pro-ethnic tune.[15] In these debates, the second crucial dimension went unobserved—the neo-mercantilism explicitly set out in especially clear detail in the final, widely altered version of the text. First and foremost, culture had been defined as an aim in itself in the late 1950s and had officially maintained this status until the late 2000s, when it was redefined as a tool of two major heteronomous tasks: economic growth and national security. "State cultural policy is to ensure privileged cultural and human development as the foundation of the *economic prosperity*, national sovereignty and civilizational identity of the country. State cultural policy is considered an *integral part of the strategy for the national security* of the Russian Federation" (*Osnovy gosudarstvennoi kulturnoi politiki* 2014, emphasis added).

Second, the document clearly defines the desired results of state cultural policy, and here the pragmatic logic of the new culture management is once again outlined in correspondence with the issues of demography and territory in an exhaustive list of the desired results:

Growth of the intellectual potential of Russian society; growth of social value and the status of the family, awareness of family values as a basis of personal and social well-being; growth of the number of citizens, especially young people, who want to live and work in their native land, who consider

Russia the most favourable place to stay and develop their creativity, creative abilities; mastery of the Russian literary language, knowledge of Russian history, an ability to understand and appreciate the arts and culture, as a necessary condition of personal fulfilment and social demand; harmonization of the socio-economic development of the regions of Russia, especially of small towns and rural communities, and a reactivation of the cultural potential of territories; qualitative growth in the cultural and recreational needs of citizens, including those for media production. (*Osnovy gosudarstvennoi kulturnoi politiki 2014* Section VIII)

It is possible to see here the future spread over the next 15–20 years (ibid.), realized with the help of culture as a tool, completely absorbed by the imagery of a growing national economy and economic might, where all social inequalities are negligible or non-existent. Thanks to culture, the population, and especially its youngest sections, should remain in Russia, build creative, proactive, productive and healthy families, contribute to regional development and consume nationally produced media products. The point about "mastery of the Russian literary language" might concern both locally born younger generations and immigrant populations settled in the country. Hyperbolically, culture as a magic mercantilist tool is even destined to develop small towns and rural communities. All these expected outputs depict culture as an essentially economic instrument applied to the national territory, and even national security is tacitly redefined as part of a mercantilist rationale, as declared in the goal-setting. After all, it would be wrong to decode these formulas as a simple travesty of moral principles, covering purely instrumental financial accounts, or as a naive demand for moral order. On the contrary, on both eventual readings, this document as well as the complete set of cases given above constitute a tangible core of genuine neo-mercantilism where a belief in national cohesion as a desired state does not contradict, but only boosts, the drive for economic prosperity and makes commerce integral to national integrity. One crucial point that should be remembered here is that attributing such a mission to culture really has little to do with Russia's historical past, but makes a sub-type of the global neoliberal disposition fit a locally and newly invented traditionalist form.

The making of moral capitalism

The aim of creating a moral capitalism is not an original idea of Russia's state mercantilists, but has been haunting right wing reformists since at least the mid-2000s. One of the best known attempts was made by the then President of France, Nicolas Sarkozy, who in 2008 declared the need to moralize capitalism and encouraged the population to embrace initiative and entrepreneurship, giving them a clear idea of moral capitalist institutions and articulating their liberties and responsibilities (*Le Monde* 2008). In opposition to classic liberal conservatism, Sarkozy insisted on giving the state a central regulatory role in the management of competition and remuneration policy. Classic praise for the ethos of the free market and self-

regulation are probably better known in the English-speaking world, such as that provided by various conservative institutions like the Prager University Foundation which was established in 2013 to distribute video and Internet content that presents "the values that have made America and the West the source of so much liberty and wealth". It justifies the free market as serving morality as part of a set of "Judeo-Christian [values that] at their core include the concepts of freedom of speech, a free press, free markets and a strong military to protect and project those values".[16]

Compared to these variations of a socially adjusted mercantilism in continental Europe and libertarian conservatism in the USA, Russian and other peripheral versions contain an important inversion. As seen in Russian cultural policy and the transformation of its entire public sector, the mission is less about capitalism made moral and more about a moral turn made profitable. The high tide of isolationist official discourse was designed to persuade the population to maintain the pursuit of a highly non-egalitarian arrangement of illiberal forms of governmentality, to use an important Foucauldian concept.[17] In so far as capitalism has never been widely accepted as a social or cultural goal in Russian society, state-arranged attempts to make the capitalist model acceptable consisted of masking it with moral or even religious convictions and non-profit collective gains. A question arises about the relatively successful conduct of such a large-scale operation over more than a decade. This interest is especially relevant if we take account of the widespread expert scepticism about the ability of the early post-Soviet state to successfully carry out liberal reforms. How did the new strategy become the core of Russian public management?

A structural explanation can be found in the content of the international agreements concluded by successive Russian governments since the early 1990s. A whole set of assistance programmes in the 1990s and further intergovernmental treaties in the 2000s targeted a uniformity in the institutional framework and a synchronization of Russian administrative reforms with European ones (Delcour 2001). The integration of Russian public sector decision-making into European and international dynamics, achieved through medium-term institutional cohesion, had complex effects on the cultural and public sectors. It was assumed that the symbolic expressions of neo-traditionalism that followed the neoliberal public management reform, which had been agreed and progressively implemented by Russian officials, were a local strategy for coping with or adapting to irrevocable institutional game rules. In this context, it is worth noting that, regardless of the recent harsh anti-Western and anti-European campaign, the Russian government has not broken any international agreement signed since 1991.

A closer look at the biographical trajectories of the Russian state mercantilists provides a more complex explanation for such constraints. The officials who entered the Russian federal administration after 2012 adapted their activity to institutional conditions that had been heavily structured by previous Europe-related agreements and reforms. This is also the case for the Minister of Science and Education, Olga Vassilieva, who was appointed in 2016. She was a

historian of the Orthodox Church until early 2012 and a promoter of the conservative cultural agenda in public debates. Those who entered earlier or are now the most active promoters of a neoliberal management of culture, however, have another source for their neoliberal views on cultural issues—their own experience in the private sector or in privatized public enterprises founded on the ethos of competition. Key actors in the neoliberal reform of culture and education share this background. Medinskii co-founded an advertising agency in 1992–98 and then led the public relations departments of several public institutions. His experience and his age (he was born in 1970) separate him quite obviously from his predecessors: Aleksander Sokolov, born in 1949, minister in 2004–2008 and formerly a professor and a director at the Moscow Conservatory; and Aleksander Avdeev, born in 1948, minister in 2008–12 and formerly a senior diplomat.

A glance at the biographies of the protagonists in the neoliberal reform of the public sector provides more of the same. Senior officials promote neoliberal reform with an energy that is proportionate to their previous careers in the private sector or the most commercially oriented government offices. Their experience of the private sector, shared by some state mercantilists, dates back to the 1990s, when business rules had little to do with international regulations and were much more closely related to management by violence. Others have public sector experience from the 1990s linked to adapting highly bureaucratic institutions to emerging market conditions. Among them, former ministers of education Andrey Fursenko (2004-12) and Dmitry Livanov (2012-16) followed in the 1990s R&D business careers and obtained business-oriented university positions. Tatiana Golikova, the minister of healthcare in 2007-2012, brought to life a commercial pension reform preceded by her long lasting professional career in the Ministry of Finance, since 1990. This helps us understand the absence of a uniform rationality from the international assistance programmes internalized by the members of successive Russian governments implementing a neoliberal agenda. The key mechanism of the commercial turn over two decades has been a transfer of private sector experience and a neoliberal agenda formed by public institutions such as the Ministry of Finance to the sectors of culture and education. The partially conflicting sets of rules generated in these two poles of social and political change produce tensions not only between the state administration and its employees in the administered sectors, but also between the regulatory principles themselves.

On the one hand, economic deregulation managed by the state administration is clearly discernible, such as aligning the budgets of cultural institutions to attendance rates, making schools and universities compete for students or reducing tenured research and teaching positions in favour of precarious contracts. On the other hand, state over-regulation is introduced to the economically deregulated field of culture, such as integrating educational programmes or introducing private-public audit for public institutions. Where these visible contradictions converge we find a nominal democratization with regard to access to education and culture based on flat-rate admissions, a "flexibilization" and disempowerment of employees and a growing segregation between "excellent" and "backward" cultural institutions

in terms of performance and fundraising. This can currently be observed in museums, universities, secondary schools and theatres, as well as in other centres of cultural production and reproduction. Such tensions bring Russia in line with many other nations, including the established liberal democracies.[18]

The Russian case adds another dimension, derived from attempts to compete against technologically and economically more advanced societies in a situation in which the adoption of capitalist competition has been only partially accepted (or is partially rejected). The above-mentioned neo-mercantilist tools for administering the population and the territory, among which culture is destined to serve the basic goals of boosting productivity and security by promoting a moral order and national cohesion, provide a response to the global challenge. The senior ranks of the Russian administrative apparatus today represent a *strategic assembly* of the newly formed state bureaucracy and converted business leaders who accept, internalize and trustingly apply an amalgamation of neoliberal regulation and neo-traditionalist beliefs. As for the population of the administered cultural and public institutions, the basic tension is resolved once again through a transfer effect—being politically conformist becomes economically profitable. This effect reveals itself in silent public loyalty under the double bind of growing commercial competition and a moralization of state-supported cultural activities.

The collective illusion of ensuring loyalty operates by removing the security of careers and on shaky institutional integrity. Positive economic and negative administrative motivations tend to maintain the status quo, even if important segments of the employees of key cultural institutions show obvious dissatisfaction with the established mode of management. Under such conditions, the translation of economic inducements into political and moral loyalty serves as the core regulatory principle of the new state mercantilism.

Notes

1 The model for this cultural influence was founded on the promotion of the best traditions of the Russian language and Russian literature as well as Russian folk heritage.

2 This was something that led a faction of liberal-oriented commentators to stress that Vladimir Putin and his administration now favour "Uralvagonzavod", undereducated and politically obscurantist workers, as opposed to the civilized and illuminated intellectuals favoured previously. See e.g. Rubinshtein (2012); Nemtsov (2013).

3 This image spread on both sides of the political frontline. In the Russian media it could not escape profound contradictions. According to Putin's 2012 policy manifesto, the "working people", such as school teachers, workers and military men, should transform themselves into the "middle class", following the standards for prosperity and rational culture. But that is a matter for the coming decades. Today's nation-building requires them to be "common people". See Putin (2012)

4 Even in Putin's view, "The middle class are people who...have, as a rule, such a level of education that it allows them to consciously choose between [party] candidates, rather than to 'vote with the heart'" (Putin 2012).

5 The term "manual override" [ruchnoe upravlenie] was already in active use in the 2000s, with reference to non-functioning institutions that were relaunched through the personal intervention of the President or another senior official. Hiding behind the reasoning on "inefficient institutions" is the routine application of extra-legal supreme authority, the state of exception similar to the one justified with solemnity by Carl Schmitt (1985).

6 In addition to remakes of Soviet era Second World War films, such as *The Dawns Here Are Quiet* (1972 original, 2015 remake), and newly produced patriotic blockbusters glorifying the First World War, such as *Battalion* (2015), the Ministry of Culture has supported the production of many film and television projects of this kind through the Russian Military-Historical Society (see below). A list may be found on the society's website, http://rvio.histrf.ru/activities/projects/item-1600 (in Russian).

7 Pierre Bourdieu reveals quite clearly the paradoxes of a moral economy that cannot express itself in proper economic terms (Bourdieu 1990: Book 1, Chapter 8).

8 The previous version of the Federal Law on Education set a norm of 1700 publicly financed student places (so-called budget places) for every 10,000 of the population; the version adopted in 2013 introduced a norm of 800 places for every 10,000 persons aged 17–30.

9 The project intends to impose a tax on unemployed citizens' medical and social services, thereby demonstrating a clear break with the social solidarity and security that offered the unemployed social and financial assistance.

10 This is precisely the case for the group *God's Will* (*Bozhya volya*) led by Dmitry Enteo, which became famous for its aggressive acts against contemporary artists and exhibitions, or the militant fundamentalist movement *40x40* [*Sorok sorokov*], which regularly extols "an active approach" to issues of faith. See their public group in social networks: https://vk.com/sorok_sorokov (in Russian).

11 Corresponding journalistic investigations are regularly published in the Russian media. See e.g. Tumanov (2015).

12 Ustav Rossijskogo Voenno-Istoricheskogo Obshestva (official page), http://rvio.histrf.ru/officially/ustav-rvio.

13 The example is from a laconic 2010 public service advertisement poster depicting a young woman with three babies, a blue sky background and this motto.

14 Among the regions concerned, Siberia, the Baltic, the Far East, the Southern territories, the Arctic, the Urals and Crimea represent the frontier zones or zones with low population densities.

15 See, for example, "Zayavlenie Komiteta grazhdanskikh initsiativ" o proekte 'Osnov gosudarstvennoi kulturnoi politiki', 2014, 16 April, https://komitetgi.ru/news/news/1461.

16 See the website of Prager University, "What We Do", https://www.prageru.com/what-we-do.

17 In addition to the well-known lectures on *Security, Territory, Population* by Michel Foucault, see Dean (2010), especially Chapter 7.

18 On France see, for example, Charle and Soulié (2007); and Schultheis, Escoda and Cousin (2008).

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