

Теоретические дискурсы и дискуссии

Are we looking for a “guinea pig”? Difficulties in researching the “middle class” in Russia¹

DOI: 10.19181/inter.2018.16.1

Bernhard Begemann*

Since the dissolution of Soviet Union, Russian society has undergone historic change. Following the upheaval of the 1990s, the beginning of the 21st century was characterised by economic growth and stabilisation. This period of socioeconomic change has frequently been interpreted as the cradle of an emerging “middle class”, triggering the transition from a socialist to capitalist society. However, while some researchers find a fuzzy share of “middle class” in descriptive criteria, others question the applicability of the analytical category of “middle class” to contemporary Russian society on principle. Drawing from ongoing research in Moscow, this article scrutinises this conventional class ontology by pointing out the ambiguities of the socioeconomic dynamics, based mainly on qualitative ethnographic fieldwork. As a productive lens to reveal social dynamics, the article distinguishes between formalist and substantivist uses of the term “middle class”, thus implying that a new language is needed to reflect this distinction. Illustrating these arguments through two ethnographic examples, it aims to contribute to current anthropological debates about class and post-socialism.

Keywords: Middle Classes, Russia, Anthropology of Class, Post-Socialism, Social Mobility

“Talking about a middle class in Russia by no means makes it possible to understand Russian society”

— Samson and Krasilnikova (2014: 62)

Since the dissolution of Soviet Union, Russian society has undergone historic change, transforming its economic and societal basis. Following the upheaval of the 1990s with their hyperinflation, property reallocation and political disorder, the beginning of the 21st century was characterised by economic growth and stabilisation. This unique historic period of socioeconomic change was frequently interpreted as the cradle of an emerging “middle class”, triggering a societal *transition*² from a socialist to capitalist society. As early as 1995, President Yeltsin assigned a key role in successful consolidation to the future

¹ This work is part of a PhD project, which is funded by the German Academic Scholarship Foundation.

* B. Begemann is a PhD Candidate in Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Vienna, a1408333@unet.univie.ac.at.

² I will later further elaborate a distinction between *transition* and *transformation*. While *transformation* refers to amore open process, *transition* implies a more unilinear, teleological process. For more details, see the subsection on the anthropology of post-socialism.

formation of a “middle class”.³ In political and academic discourse, this increasingly became a catchphrase for a normative “Western”-style modernisation.

However, there is considerable disagreement on how to conceptualise “middle class”. When I told informants about my project, a typical, jocular, reply was: “but there is no middle class in Russia, so who would you ask?” In academic literature, sociologists also disagree. Depending on the various criteria used, sociological studies have found that as little as 5% or as much as 52% of Russian society belongs to the “middle class” (Remington, 2011: 99; Gontmakher and Ross, 2015: 269), making it a fuzzy concept indeed.⁴ As I planned my research project based on these ambiguous and inherently imprecise data, the Russian “middle class” reminded me of a “guinea pig”. Just as this animal is neither a pig nor from Guinea, the so-called “middle class” seems to be neither in the midst of society nor a homogeneous social class.⁵ Departing from this humorous analogy, the analytical punch line of the anecdote soon became one of the main hypotheses of my research project: the formal criteria defining the fuzzy group do not relate to an analytical group of common functional elements in content. To grasp this distinction analytically, I shall borrow the terms of the “formalist-substantivist” debate in anthropology, the Polanyian “economistic fallacy”, in which

a “formalist” approach emphasises the regular operation of ideas, in this case the universal claims of neoclassical economics; while a “substantivist” approach gives priority to the empirical content of material circumstances and disputes that this diversity can be adequately grasped through just one set of concepts (Hann and Hart, 2011: 57).

In these terms, then, “middle class” might well be identified by descriptive criteria in a formalist manner, transferring formal criteria from other societies; but it appears not to be a useful and productive analytical term for researching and understanding Russian society. The purpose of this article is to lay out ambiguities in the contradiction-laden character of an economic middle stratum of society. By ethnographically sketching the complex lived experiences of these middle classes and relating my empirical findings to theories of social class, I aim to gain insights into processes of social classification. The variety of means of livelihoods encompassed within formally similar criteria will enable me to problematise the universal validity of conventional class ontology, which is mainly developed in and for capitalist societies. This will prove useful in developing a new language that will — as suggested by this article’s epigraph — characterise contemporary Russian society better than “middle class” does.

I begin this article with a short description of my research field and a reference to the socioeconomic conditions of a “Muscovite microcosm”. I next briefly review academic debates about the emergence of a so-called “middle class” — or rather multiple middle classes⁶ —

³ Russ. (Yeltsin, 1995): «Острой проблемой остается медленное формирование среднего класса — оплота социальной и политической стабильности».

⁴ Most of the respective literature proposes criteria, as higher income, higher education, higher professional status and self-identification (cf. Balzer, 1996; Gontmakher, 2008; Maleva, 2008; Gorshkov and Tikhonova, 2008; Remington, 2011; Avraamova and Maleva, 2016; Gorshkov, 2016). Depending on the degree of application (some take a minimum of three, some take all four, etc.) the results vary quite significantly.

⁵ I first learned this joke in a different context. A Russian journalist told me that at the beginning of the 1990s, when political parties were newly founded in the Soviet Union, many were named according to formalistic “Western” political divides despite representing different constituencies: just as the guinea pig was neither from Guinea nor a pig, allegedly the “Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia” was referred in a popular anecdote as neither liberal nor democratic. A sarcastically sharpened version of the punch line, which transferred designations without accurately considering context, turned out to be appropriate for my research.

⁶ As the use of “middle class” in its singular form suggests a homogeneous social class, I will rather use its plural form of middle classes — without quotation marks. If, in the following, I want to emphasise the essentialising use, I will refer to the singular form, but then use quotation marks.



in post-socialist, transforming, Russia. Reviewing anthropological debates about post-socialism and class, I discuss their analytical implications for this research project. Finally, drawing on both ethnographic findings and anthropological debates, I sketch the main themes of my ethnographic fieldwork. By doing so, I scrutinise conventional class ontology to illustrate what ethnographic research can contribute to research on class.

Locating the Middle Classes

The referred fieldwork for this research project was conducted in the spring of 2018. While focussing on Moscow, I also collected data in other areas, such as Irkutsk Oblast, Buryatia and Krasnoyarsk Krai. Based on this data, I chose to deepen research in Moscow due to its particular prominence as a metropolitan environment where various and competing influences on livelihoods become eminently visible. After conducting fieldwork that included nearly forty interviews with people of middle income⁷, I developed a quantitative online survey on the main themes emerging from my qualitative content analysis. My interview partners were between 23 and 52 years old, representing various professions. Among them, four were university lecturers, four high school teachers, two CEOs of medium-sized companies and two of small companies, three project managers in multinational enterprises, a bank officer, a mining worker, three students, a journalist and several professionals working in government administration. Out of the 38 interviewees, 32 had a university degree. In the following sections, I will elaborate on why I chose to focus on economic middle income criteria in Moscow as a point of departure. In the further outline of the article, two cases will illustrate this choice in a more particular way.

To start with, one should take into account that Russia is one of the most “asymmetrical federations” (Gontmakher and Ross, 2015: 273) in the world in terms of socioeconomic status, ethnic composition, territories and populations. Other authors as Moshaw (2002: 101) take up this theme by arguing that the Russian regions are easily distinguishable by criteria such as the amount of foreign economic investment (centre vs. periphery) and resource extraction (raw material deposit areas). This phenomenon is conceptualised as “punctual globalisation” (ibid.) and is closely linked to people’s adaptation ability (Samson and Krasilnikova, 2014: 42) in new and transforming circumstances. This emphasises the necessity of attention to spatiotemporal embedding in socio-scientific enquiries. Moreover, it reminds us to also beware of “methodological nationalism” (Wimmer and Glick Schiller, 2002), the homogenisation and essentialisation of the nation state as an analytical category. While economic transformations in a post-socialist economy and interactions with global capitalism do take place in Russia, even within one country, their kind and degree can differ significantly. So, when looking at the Muscovite middle classes, one needs to take into account a megalopolitan environment with a great share of foreign investment, a magnetic attraction of migration and a very dynamic labour market, just to name a few aspects (Gontmakher and Ross, 2015: 273f.). This would seem to impact whom to talk with concerning middle classes. However, even choosing locations within Moscow turns out to be complicated. While researchers such as Klein et al. (2018) found their focus groups in specific neighbourhoods of big cities in Brazil, this turns out to be harder in Russia. When considering rent levels, there are of course some indicators — such as the proportion of rent to the distance to the city centre, nearest metro station, etc. — but it would be an oversimplification to name particular “middle class” areas based on rent levels. Moreover, the rate of homeownership is very high, reaching up to 87.2% (Trading Economies, 2016). Due to the socialist allocation of housing and the subsequent privatisation policy in the 1990s, there is still little social segregation, apart from some newly built super-rich districts as “Rublevka”.

⁷ According to official statistics, median income in Moscow states 48,200 rubles, which equates at the moment to around €650 (RIA Novosti, 2017).

For instance, owning a flat in the city centre could thence have many reasons: having earned millions of rubles to buy it, or having lived or been registered in it in the early 1990s and then having privatised it for a relatively low fee.

Moreover, what is conceptualised as *middle*, in, for example, income stratification, is highly debatable. According to official statistics, the middle (i.e. median) income in Moscow is 48,200 rubles (around €650) a month (RIA Novosti, 2017). However, income differentiation is high, as shown by the 2013 decile coefficient (ratio between the average income of the poorest and the richest 10% of the population) of 16.3 (Sibirskaya et al., 2013: 130). Based on the International Labour Organisation (2013: 33) definition of middle income as 70–150% of the median, one would thus end up with a quite small stratum that would probably lack any distinct characteristics. Other analyses use a monthly income of more than 120,000 rubles as one of the criteria (RBK in Echo Moskv, 2018). Whereas this doubtless selects for a wealthy socioeconomic group, this could scarcely be described as the *middle* classes. Even taking 100,000 rubles as a marker would include only 4.1% of the whole population (RIA Novosti, 2017). Thus, it is difficult to approach such an indistinct and hard to circumscribe category of analysis using quantitative data. Since one has to start somewhere, I decided to begin my fieldwork using mainly economic criteria and refine the anthropological analysis from there. I thus conducted research with people with monthly incomes above 50,000 rubles with no real upper limit. Although this includes some people with incomes far above the average — and thus oversteps the *middle* strata — it is quite valuable in reflecting dynamics of social mobility and the ethnographic examples will underline this aspect. Taking this as a point of departure, then, I aim to focus my analysis as it is in progress.

Starting with material issues, one of the topics I necessarily touched on in interviews was self-identification. When I asked people in my research field in Moscow whether they felt themselves to be part of a so-called “middle class”, some of them answered: “well, not yet, but I’m striving for it”. Others added that they actually never thought about the term before and only had certain associations about it. However, when it came to self-identification in verbal terms, most people subjectively associated themselves with a middle stratum (*sloi* rather than *class*): position 5–6 on a scale from 1–10 (q.v. Tikhonova, 2018: 19). Kordonsky (2008: 40) states that in contemporary Russia there is hardly a social group that people can unambiguously identify with (excluding clichés such as oligarchs, bandits, simple people, etc. (ibid.: 134). Rather, it seems that people identify with multiple or even mutually-contradicting status groups. Whereas some, including Kordonsky (2008) see this as a sort of Durkheimian (1982: 21) “anomie”, others emphasise these ambiguities as being instead a common phenomenon of societies in transformation (Tikhonova, 2018: 22). For those, this recalls similarities with what Yurchak (2005) describes as the last phase of socialism, where contradicting meanings were probably the only reliable norm. These ambiguous circumstances thus call for ethnographic examination. There is a definite anthropological interest in grasping the various and indistinct lines “between the way things are formally declared to be and the way in which things get done in practice” (Ledeneva, 2013: 3). Regarding the various transformations and changes in Russia’s society during the last thirty years, it is not very surprising that people may feel unclear about their social identity. In particular, this seems to hold true for the concept of “middle class” as it is used in various contexts with divergent and sometimes contradicting meanings. For instance, in normative contexts, like the President’s Poslanie (i.a. Yeltsin, 1995; Medvedev, 2008; Putin, 2007, 2012, 2018), it points to a progressive societal and economic transformation in general and rather refers to formalist, neoclassical meanings. Mostly used by politicians (ibid.) or marketing companies (Gerasimenko 2017), it indicates a term of belonging, of “membership in a First World translocal social order” (Fehérváry, 2012: 124). However, it is often ambiguously referred to as a category of self-identification. It became a buzzword for better life to many people. As fieldwork results show, people with an above average income between 50,000–100,000 rubles do not quite feel above average. They refer to “middle class”



as a “would rather be” or “still ahead” category for themselves. This might have several reasons. One that a larger part of society is extremely poor and even though my Muscovite respondents are statistically above the average, they do not feel rich and have other standards to compare themselves to.⁸ Another reason is that people feel a discrepancy between their lived and experienced reality of economic possibilities and their ascribed social status. Many people in Russian post-Soviet society do not regard themselves as winners in post-socialist transformations. On the contrary, many issues of post-socialist transformation are perceived as unjust, criminal and unfair by large parts of the Russian population all over the country (Volkov and Kolesnikov, 2018: 1–2). During the upheaval of the 1990s, when an enormous property reallocation took place, only a very few managed to get very rich. As with Marx’s “primitive accumulation” (Marx, 1962: 741) of capital, this reallocation and privatisation of former state property in the end formed a — fairly uneven and perceived as unjust — point of departure for any further socioeconomic developments after the 1990s.

Regarding the striking unevenness, perceived injustice towards one’s position in society and mechanisms of social mobility are thus at the core of my research into the middle classes. The issues mentioned referring to the mixed and uneven socioeconomic conditions will serve as a scaffolding for my ethnographic findings. Before illustrating the ambiguous incorporation in socioeconomic dynamics even within one location at two examples, I will now shortly review existing research about Russian middle classes.

(Trans)Formation of Russian Middle Classes in Academic Research

After the fall of Soviet Union the idea that the former socialist part of the world would abandon its economic, political and social system and eventually and quite “naturally” *transition* into Western-model capitalist market societies, was considered “common sense” by many economists and politicians (Verdery, 1996: 334). However,

Ovsey Shkaratan, Natal'ya Tikhonova, German Diligenskiy, and others have all pointed out that the transition from the Soviet system of social stratification, in which status directly depends on the intertwining of state power (vlast') and property, to one of capitalist class relations, based on private property, has been tenuous and incomplete (Remington, 2011: 107).

So, *transformation* should not be seen as a clearly circumscribed period, with society changing from A to B between one day and another. Rather, ongoing *transformations* continue to take place. Thus, for many societies in transformation, the dialectic between different forms of economic incorporation entails a discussion about society’s stratification. This precarious character of society in general points to the large debates looming about the disputed “configuration of post-socialist middle classes” (Heiman et al., 2012: 3) in particular. A great deal of political and public discourse saw the creation of a “middle class” as inevitable, simultaneously a result and promoter of the economic *transition* from socialism to capitalism, although this view was criticised in anthropology as a unilinear and teleological “transitology” (Verdery, 1996: 336). Nonetheless, a crucial part of the published literature in anthropology and sociology focuses on “middle class” in a formalistic manner, “as if” it were *naturally* there, defining it by sociological criteria according to a certain income, a certain level of education, and self-identification (see i.a. Maleva, 2008; Gorshkov and Tikhonova, 2008; Remington 2011). Following Moore’s (1966: 418) notion of “no bourgeoisie, no democracy” many authors in academia as well as in public discourse expressed their hopes and beliefs in the new “middle class”. In Russia’s booming 2000s,

⁸ As statistics show, Moscow is third in income among Russian regions (RIA Novosti, 2017). However, prices are extremely high and the share of people earning more than 100,000 rubles is 17.05% (ibid.).

the emerging middle class was commonly alleged to be a backbone and bearer of democracy, irreversibly following economic growth and the transition to market economy (For “middle class” in general, see Lipset, 1959; for the Russian case in particular, see Kolesnikov, 2011; Siegert, 2013; Gontmakher and Ross, 2015; Rosenfeld, 2017). Furthermore, in post-colonial as well as in post-socialist contexts, “middle class” tends to be described as a “universal” and “uniform” ideal type, being a product of economic growth and gain for everyone (Seidl, 2017: 176f.). In opposition to this formalist approach, I argue, similarly to other authors (Samson and Krasilnikova, 2014, Mrowczynski, 2010), that this is more wishful thinking than scientific, and ends up trapped in the same metaphorical transfer as the “guinea pig” analogy. For a given “definite structure of society, the class theory works; but what if that structure itself undergoes a change?” (Polanyi, 2001 [1944]: 159). Following Polanyi’s (ibid.) argument, “middle class” in one society does not necessarily mean “middle class” in another; so one has to beware of transferring a formalist, phenomenological notion without regard to its substantive grounds.

The discussions about the configuration of those called “middle class” in Russia, illustrates this confusion as well. On the one hand, classical “middle class” professions in capitalist European societies in a Marxist sense (Marx, 1965: 576), such as academics, doctors and small and medium entrepreneurs were usually hard to find among those with middle or higher income in Russia; on the other, those with higher income were to a great extent directly related to, and dependent on, administrative state institutions, e.g. senior ministerial officials. These last higher income professionals were — in contrast to Lipset’s (1959) and Moore’s (1966) above described assumptions — not associated with political independence or economic innovation (Gontmakher and Ross, 2015: 274) and had quite mixed views on socioeconomic issues (Gudkov et al., 2009). Moreover, the referred criteria are not cumulative: one does not necessarily lead to the other and the group of people with higher education and high professional status such as academics or medical doctors is not necessarily congruent with that of people of high income. Samson and Krasilnikova (2014) sharpened this observation, concluding that the

[...] persistence in the search for, the analysis, and the dissection of the middle class in Russia is not a scientific approach; instead, it represents faith in the existence of that class. In other words, Russia’s middle class is a myth. [...] This myth, which is promulgated by the West, conceals a desire to create Western-type countries all over the world, especially in the postcommunist countries. [...] It is thus becoming clear that the social structure in Russia differs from that of Western societies for which the term “middle class” was created (Samson and Krasilnikova, 2014: 62).

Samson and Krasilnikova (2014) call Russia’s “middle class” a myth, while Mrowczynski (2010: 35) considers it an “ahistorical concept”. Is the “middle class”, then, non-existent, even though there are both people with high income and people with high status and education? Or is it like the “guinea pig”, named in a formalist way, but ignoring empirical evidence with regards to substance, although? In their examination of the Brazilian “new middle class”, Klein et al. (2018) bypass this analytical problem in an intriguingly artful way: the authors call their focus group the “previously poor” (ibid.) and thereby avoid any a priori assumptions. However, for Russia, this analytical turn does not work: just 30 years ago, people in Soviet society had fairly equal economic conditions. So, the Russian middle classes remain an elusive target.

The middle class [...] size and shape shift depending on how it is conceptualised and measured, to the point that there is substantial doubt as to whether there is any single social group that merits being classified as a middle class at all (Remington, 2011: 115).

The nature and condition of this ‘middle class’ thus calls for ethnographic examination. First, to grasp the evolving social formation from a bottom-up perspective and thereby to better



understand macro-anthropological contexts, in-depth ethnographic material is indispensable. This is demonstratively underlined for social transformation in general in the anthropological literature of post-socialism (Bridger and Pine, 1998; Berdahl, 2000; Hann et al., 2002), above all for research into formation of middle classes (Heiman et al., 2012; Klein et al., 2018). Secondly, anthropology is the discipline par excellence to counter “transitological”, sociocentric inquiries through the acquisition of a foundation of substantivist knowledge. Thus, “theorizing through ethnography” (Heiman et al., 2012) is of particular value in developing an analytical framework for conceptualising those so-called middle classes. Furthermore, there is still remarkably little anthropological research on processes of social classification in Russia. Hence, delineating lived experience while putting it into conversation with broader social forces is of deep scientific necessity and promises a valuable contribution to anthropological debates. It aims, as Caroline Humphrey once formulated the goal of her ethnography of two collective farms, “to achieve an understandable representation, embracing the plasticity of the here and now” (Humphrey, 1998: xix).

The following discussion of anthropological debates about post-socialism and class will address theoretical tools for this endeavour. By putting their theoretical arguments into conversation with the empirical findings described so far, I aim to scrutinise conventional middle class ontologies beyond a formalist-substantivist dichotomy.

Going Beyond Conventional Class Ontologies. Anthropological Debates of Post-Socialism and of Class

Anthropology of Post-Socialism

The anthropology of post-socialism is first and foremost a body of literature focussing on a geographical area of former socialist states (Verdery in Hann, Humphrey and Verdery, 2002: 15). Nowadays, authors like Müller (2019, forthcoming) refer to it by the term “Global East”, complementing Global South and North. This construct implies the existence of analytically salient conditions of everyday life faced by people throughout these countries in contrast to those living in formerly “Western” countries. “So while post-socialism is certainly a construct of the academy, it is not ours alone, and it does correspond to certain historical conditions out there” (Humphrey in Hann, Humphrey and Verdery, 2002: 12). However, this should also remind us of the heterogeneity and diversity of those “historical conditions” (ibid.) within the former socialist world. For instance, reallocation of land in the agricultural sector in the 1990s happened to be implemented quite differently in Hungary from Romania (cf. Thelen, 2003), even though both of these neighbouring countries have socialist histories. Hence, no path dependency should be assumed based on a socialist past. Whereas little may be gained in normatively contrasting “Eastern” to “Western” societies (Burawoy and Verdery, 1999: 15, Thelen, 2003: 43), the notion of post-socialism should be, rather, an imperative to reveal the spatiotemporal particularities of each site.

Just as no path dependency should be assumed, no teleological assumptions on social development should be imposed on research either. This persistent issue is well presented (if often implicitly) in a central debate of post-socialist anthropological discourses: the transition-transformation debate. Many authors (cf. Verdery, 1996; Berdahl, 2000; Hann, Humphrey and Verdery, 2002) criticise a widespread assumption, emanating from “a swift and painless shift from socialist totalitarianism to liberal democracy, and from the planned economy to the market” (Giordano and Kostova, 2002: 74). This “transitology” (Verdery, 1996: 336) indicates a unilinear and evolutionary development of all (post-socialist) societies, as if capitalist democracy was the “end of history” (Fukuyama, 1989). In contrast, Berdahl (2000) emphasises the open and processual character of the social changes after 1989 using the term of “transformation” or “transformations”. This notion remained, then, in most of the anthropological literature of post-socialism.

As an anthropological project based on ethnographic fieldwork, this article is clearly committed to an open investigation beyond normative models of development. This is a clear argument for a “transformative” approach that takes the spatiotemporal embedding of the ethnographic field into account. As I have already touched upon in the introduction, this goes hand in hand with a substantivist approach, which prioritises empirical findings as a base for further theorizing. However, this should not lapse into an isolated presumption of Russia’s “unique” social development. Rather, it reminds us to not only *collect* ethnographic data, but also to put it into conversation with aspects which might not be empirically observable, but nevertheless cast a shadow. Suvi Salmenniemi (2012) emphasises this question, stating a need “for further research into the processes of social classification in Russia and the ways in which they are connected with global mechanisms of inequality” (Salmenniemi, 2012: 16f). As Thomas H. Eriksen notes in the preface to the 2010 edition of Eric R. Wolf’s *Europe and the People Without History*, “the networked capitalist world is a framework, or scaffolding, for almost any serious inquiry into contemporary cultural and social dynamics” (Wolf and Eriksen, 2010 [1982]: 29). In particular,

anthropologists of post-socialism have found that their subject matter has been even more directly exposed to the forces and paradoxes of this global programme [of capitalism] than other regions of the world, while being even less prepared. This is why the anthropology of post-socialism is so rich and has so much to offer in building up a new global and comparative anthropology (Kalb, 2002: 322).

Anthropology of post-socialism thus should be closely interwoven with the anthropology of global capitalism. But if — let’s call it “transformatology” — means a detached process totally unrelated to broader global forces, in the end this approach falls short of recognizing the interdependences of our current globalised world. That said, on the other hand, if “transitology” points to a teleological process of equal and unilinear character in capitalist development, it fails to consider the diversity and agency of every time and space. Post-socialism hence remains a valid analytical category only if conceived of as a set of similar conditions, such as a collectivist organisation of social life or a state monopoly on capital property, casting a shadow that extends to the present while also separating the former socialist countries from formerly “Western” countries. However post-socialism does not prove useful as an exclusive, deterministic framework that indicates a path dependency or ignores particularities. Thus, the anthropology of post-socialism calls for ethnographic research that thoroughly discusses the ambiguities of lived realities, rather than formalistically forcing neoclassical concepts to fit them.

Anthropology of Class

“In anthropological hands, then, class is less an already-defined position that determines both consciousness and action, and more an invitation to discover people’s shifting historical, situated and antagonistic social interdependences”

— Kalb (2015: 16)

Class is mainly used as a category of social stratification in the history of the period of capitalism,⁹ so, the anthropology of class should keep track of global capitalism just like the anthropology of post-socialism. Already Marx and Weber, the fathers of class studies, closely related class formation to global capitalism (Carrier and Kalb, 2015). Unsurprisingly, class formation strongly depends on processes of unevenness in the creation of value (Gill and Kasimir, 2016). As Piketty (2014: 20) reminds us, the accumulation and distribution of wealth is always a product

⁹ For an elaborate discussion of roots and evolution of the concept of class, see Carrier, 2015.



of economic, social, and political actors. Thus, unevenness is not only an economic topic, but better examined in a four-fold approach (Gill and Kasimir, 2016). This includes a strong focus on history, politics, space and labour in order to “overcome the problematic, ahistorical formulations of micro–macro or local–global relationships [...], by encouraging us to conceptualise the mutual constitution of these scales of action” (ibid.: 99). It is this constitution of scales that is critical to the anthropology of class as well. Research into class thus means research into people’s shifting interdependences, which form a bundle of configurations called class (Kalb, 2015: 14). In opposition to quantitative and descriptive criteria, this model does not regard class as a box “amid other boxes: sanitized, measurable, reified and reduced to a mere category of income, education and occupational status” (Kalb, 2015: 2, see also: Lawler, 2012: 258ff.). Rather, it emphasises its character as a processual product of social unevenness, developed over time and conflicts, in a Marxist sense (Smith, 2015: 87). In case of “middle class” formation, as will be discussed below, this will become even more evident. It will also become clear that anthropology in this context is understood in a sense of “political economy”, rather than a “cultural interpretivist” endeavour (Kalb, 2015: 7), which is again on the rise especially since the global financial economic crisis in 2008. Regarding global interrelations and the ever-greater social inequality within and between the different parts of the world, an interpretative anthropology of class that considered social class as a mere subjective cosmology might not be particularly illuminating (Carrier, 2012: 271; 2015: 38).

In short, to study class in anthropological terms is to discuss people’s shifting interdependences in the light of social stratification. It is to identify “critical junctions” (Kalb and Tak, 2005) of classification by providing “close ethnographies of critical issues that push theories to account for the histories, intricacies, and nuances of everyday life” (Heiman et al., 2012: 27). Not surprisingly, the anthropology of class presented here demonstratively calls for ethnographic inquiries. Such an anthropological analysis allows the attentive reconfiguration of “class dimensions” (ibid.) by problematising them in a theoretically and empirically informed manner. The “anthropology of class [, then, ...] describes not the dots on the map, but the ever-changing links between them” (Kalb, 2015: 14).

Class, as used here, is not reified as a category of capitalist social theory, but rather is used as a tool to study the mechanisms of social unevenness in a variety of social organisations. Following the substantivist Polanyian notion of “embedded economy” (Polanyi, 2001 [1944]) — that is, an economy embedded in social relations — the close analysis of people’s livelihoods and socioeconomic modes of subsistence will shed light on the dimensions of the framing socioeconomic system. Through ethnographic research of class, it is possible to reveal the various scales of people’s subsistence, while drawing conclusions about the society they live in. As will be discussed below, ethnographic findings indicate a quite ambiguous situation that suggests various, simultaneous and even conflicting scales. This means, social classification may simultaneously work in competing ways, depending, for example, on demand-driven market mechanisms and/or corporative, estate-based (russ. *сословное*¹⁰) ways. For instance, other authors like Shkaratan and Yastrebov (2010) and Kordonsky (2008: 128) argue that the mixture of old Soviet estate-based social groups, new Russian estate-based groups and newly capitalism-based classes (ibid.: 128) — although possibly simultaneously and not mutually exclusively — divides contemporary Russian society. Although Kordonsky (2008) uses “class” as a clear capitalist notion and prefers “group” when it comes to estate-based systems, I would prefer to emphasise the anthropological understanding of “class” described above. However, the use of these concepts points to the core of the “guinea pig problem” explained in the introduction. It is misleading to use “middle class” as a formalist category of a neoclassical capitalist society.

¹⁰ I refer to “estate-based” as a mechanism organising social mobility by social origin, professional group, or other dependent criteria, rather than market economy principles.

To find out about mechanisms of social mobility and unevenness, little is gained through using teleologically imposed frameworks or their respective formalist categories. Instead, one may reveal the various group formations by giving priority to the empirical study of people's shifting socioeconomic interdependences and taking their embeddedness into account, thus contributing to a new ontology of middle classes. The anthropology of class, then, has much to offer to the research of social classification in Russia by going beyond conventional class ontologies.

Various Social Dynamics in Various Middle Classes

Many of the middle-income respondents, like Nastya, consider their lived experience unjust according to their position in society. Nastya, a 33-year old university lecturer at a prestigious Moscow university says she feels her professional status does not correspond to her economic possibilities. She was educated in universities in Russia, the United States and the United Kingdom. Nonetheless, her official salary as a university teacher does not even cover her basic needs. She lives with her grandmother — she could barely afford to rent her own place in Moscow — in the grandmother's flat just next to a metro station near the city centre. Although she earns up to 80,000 rubles a month, only 15,000 rubles of this comes from her official salary, which she supplements by private tutoring and courses for school and college students. Despite her above average income, she feels more “working than middle class”, as she has to work from dawn till dusk to make ends meet and to afford some things she wants, like holidays in Europe. Nastya is a good example of a group called “budgetniks”, professionals like doctors and academics employed by the state and paid from the state budget. Despite her qualifications, it is hard for her to monetise them through her main job, so she feels forced to find additional income in secondary jobs. Although her total income is above average in Moscow terms, most of it is “grey” and thus unreliable: she does not receive it during the summer holiday months or when she is sick, and cannot make demands on social insurance services.

These perceptions of unfairness considering one's merits are tightly connected to mechanisms of social mobility. As I have noted, the transformations and changes in Russia's society during the last thirty years make it unsurprising that people might feel unclear about their social identity. It is also not surprising, that mechanisms of social mobility might be unclear or ambiguous — with regard to both perceived and experienced realities. According to a huge majority of my respondents, informality, insecurity and instability are significant restrictions on upward social mobility. Nonetheless, as suggested by Klein et al. (2018: 89) and other authors' research on global middle classes, meritocratic ideology is one of the main ways people explain their position in society. However, this “belief in upward social mobility” (Hage, 2005: 472) due to one's own achievements is a quite capitalist, neoclassical feature. As my results show, despite the named factors of insecurity and informality, as well as perceived unfairness, a sense of meritocratic self-reliance is widespread among my informants in Russia. Hence, they make a distinction between their reports of injustice concerning their positions in society and inequality in principle. Whereas the former is rooted in unfair allocation mechanisms, the latter refers to income or status difference according to meritocratic mechanisms. For instance, Nastya considers her income to be very well-deserved: she works hard for it indeed, and at several places. However, when she talks about the dean or the rector at her university, she expresses distrust of both the process by which they were appointed and their salaries (i.a. judging by the Mercedes the dean drives to work). Nastya said, she will never be in a position to become dean, as those positions are mainly granted through *blat* (personal connections) rather than by meritocratic mechanisms.

However, people working, for instance, for big companies experienced a more stable environment in terms of economic security or mechanisms of upward social mobility. For instance, Vlad, a 28-year old engineer, works for an international transport company in Moscow and earns about 120,000 rubles a month and “quite presumably feels to be middle class”. He is



quite happy about his job and its recruitment procedures. Although he says he have deserved a job advancement at least within the last year, he does not resent his boss’s Mercedes: at least in principle, he may have his own someday. Like Nastya, Vlad benefited from a good university education. Although he was educated entirely in Russia, he spent some time in the US on a “work and travel” programme. The international company he works for hired him through a competitive recruiting procedure after several tests and interviews in English he got the job. His salary allows him to rent a flat for himself and his girlfriend — not in the city centre, but within 15 minutes walking distance from the last metro station on the line. In addition, the company provides him with a car and annual bonus payments. Vlad says he feels that he can easily afford almost anything he wants, for instance holidays abroad: his last trip was to the United States.

However, consumption reflects mechanisms of social mobility in a particularly interesting manner. Some researchers of class criticise income- or consumption-based criteria for “oversimplifying class experience” (Klein et al., 2018: 86). Indeed, it is hard to measure “middle class” by means of iPhone ownership rates or a neighbourhood’s shopping centre density. “Such materialities carry the promise of a set of benefits on a global scale, a full humanity conferred by coeval status with the West, moral legitimacy, respectability, local status, and a host of other materially enabled desire” (Fehérváry, 2012: 124). In other words, by solely considering consumption, one could get trapped by the “imitation” of particular features and status symbols ascribed to “middle class”.

In this regard, Vlad and Nastya are carefully chosen ethnographic examples. Both spent several months abroad in the United States and United Kingdom for educational and leisure reasons. Both have a very good command of English, and both have jobs requiring high university qualifications. However, they face different mechanisms of social mobility in different branches/sectors of the economy, including different material compensation for their work: despite their quite similar backgrounds, Vlad and Nastya have an 150% nominal income difference and, as discussed, achieving it requires different efforts for each. Both of them, however, are far above the income average in statistical terms. This example, then, illustrates the coexistence of different models of socioeconomic classification and people’s incorporation in them, which in this example mainly depends on the sector they work in. Whereas Vlad’s employer represents a foreign international company hiring skilled personnel in a demand-driven way, Nastya is employed by the state, which also hires skilled personnel, but in a different way and with different remuneration. Teaching privately alongside her official university job is a lot better salaried. Although Vlad has a higher salary than Nastya has, Nastya is able to live near the city centre due to the flat her grandmother privatised in the 1990s. As Vlad has to rent a flat, he could hardly afford to do so. Although Nastya and Vlad share many similar descriptive criteria as education, status or income group, they hardly belong to the same analytical group of society, as implied by formalist categories. Rather they belong to groups exposed to different social dynamics.

The Middle Classes as a Lens for Social Dynamics

“The middle class is necessarily an ill-defined entity. This does not reflect a lack of theoretical penetration but rather the character of reality”

— Wacquant (1991: 57)

At first sight, the epigraph and the title of this conclusion seem to contradict each other. How could an ill-defined category be an analytical lens? That said, I argue that it is exactly this ill-definedness — and the attempts to define the category at all costs — that reveals its ambiguities and, as a corollary, reveals the social dynamics that make it so difficult to define. As this article shows, the study of middle classes is an all but equivocal endeavour. Locating the middle classes

in academic research, as well as in public discourse, is based mostly on a formalist approach that defines them by descriptive criteria. Drawing on anthropological debates on post-socialism and class, I advance the argument that this categorisation fails to provide an account of the different and contradiction-laden character of people's incorporation in socioeconomic dynamics. Vlad and Nastya's examples illustrate this problem empirically. Analysing the disparities and ambiguities of anomie, social mobility, and perceived injustice serves as a means to differentiate the heterogeneous configurations of the shifting relational interdependences of people's lived realities. In putting the empirical evidence into conversation with the current anthropological debates of class, I make the case for an approach going beyond conventional middle class ontologies. I argue that the formalist category of "middle class" is not only inherently imprecise, but also essentialises and overemphasises a neoclassical socioeconomic model, falling short of a complex and comprehensive analysis. Although parts of Russian society might fit into neoclassical models of "middle class", (even though they are not *middle* in Russian statistical terms), the concept distorts social dynamics and obscures other parts of society. Like the "guinea pig", it elicits certain associations by transferring a designation from a different socioeconomic system while disregarding its substantive contents. Drawing the formalist-substantivist debate in anthropology, the Polanyian notion of the economic fallacy

is still useful in grasping the axioms of a good deal of mainstream economic theory and their unwarranted application to empirical human economies universally. It does not help in providing a realistic account of any substantive economic worlds, either those of modern capitalism or of its erstwhile socialist rival (Hann, 2014: 646).

In place of checking off discrete markers of social "middle class", ethnographic examination in conjunction with anthropological theorizing can help point out blind spots in conventional class terminology.

After this discussion, Wacquant's general statement on the "middle class" character should not come as a surprise. While I made the case with regard to the supposed Russian middle classes, Wacquant's proposition is of a more general character. This is certainly a valid argument regarding the discussed debates in the anthropology of class: to find out about those at various points in the "middle" zones, it is "necessary to study dynamically the whole set of relationships that links them to those groups situated above and below" (Wacquant, 1991: 58). Thus, studying people of a middle income stratum may particularly help to elucidate processes of social classification. For the precarious proletariat on one side and the elites on the other, models of subsistence may be less ambiguous, but for the middle classes these dynamics are far less clear-cut. Due to their middle economic position, they are exposed to both upward and downward social mobility. Moreover, the middle classes in Moscow are particularly eminently situated at the conjunction of competing scales pointing to the dialectic between global capitalism on the one hand, and of state influences on the other. Hence, the Muscovite middle classes, based on an anthropological class understanding, represent a particularly productive analytical pivot for examining social dynamics in contemporary Russia, becoming a lens for relational interdependences. It is this lens that contributes to going beyond conventional class terms and to developing a new language for an analytical understanding of contemporary Russian society. This does not make the study of middle classes an easy endeavour. But, to cite Wacquant (*ibid.*) once more, the beauty of the study of class also lies in its difficulty.

Literature

Avraamova, E. M., Maleva, T. M. The Evolution of the Middle Class. Missions and Methodology // Russian Social Science Review. 2016. № 57 (6). P. 417–435.

Balzer, H. Russia's Missing Middle Class. The Professions in Russian History. Armonk: Sharpe, 1996.



Berdahl, D. Introduction. *After Socialism // Altering States. Ethnographies of Transition in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union* / Ed. by D. Berdahl, M. Bunzl, M. Lampland. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000. P. 1–13.

Burawoy, M., Verdery, K. Introduction // *Uncertain Transition: Ethnographies of Change in the Postsocialist World* / Ed. by M. Burawoy, K. Verdery. O: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999. P. 1–18.

Bridger, S., Pine F. *Surviving Post-Socialism. Local Strategies and Regional Responses in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union*. New York: Routledge, 1998.

Carrier, J. *The Trouble with Class* // *Archives Européennes de Sociologie*. 2012. № 3. P. 263–284.

Carrier, J. *The Concept of Class* // *Anthropologies of Class. Power, Practice, and Inequality* / Ed. by J. Carrier, D. Kalb. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. P. 28–40.

Carrier, J., Kalb, D. *Anthropologies of Class. Power, Practice, and Inequality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

Durkheim, E., Lukes, S. *The Rules of Sociological Method and Selected Texts on Sociology and its Method*. New York: The Free Press, 1982.

Écho Moskvy. *Srednyj Klass v Rossijskikh Regionakh [Middle Class in Russian Regions]* // Écho Moskvy. 2018. 19th June. URL: <https://echo.msk.ru/news/2224352-echo.html> (accessed 24 June 2018).

Fehérváry, K. *The Postsocialist Middle Classes and the New 'Family House' in Hungary* // *The Global Middle Classes. Theorizing through Ethnography* / Ed. by R. Heiman, C. Freeman, M. Liechty. Santa Fe: SAR Press, 2012. P. 117–144.

Fukuyama, F. *Das Ende der Geschichte. Wo stehen wir? [The End of History. Where Do We Stand?]*. New York: The Free Press, 1989.

Gerasimenko, T. *The Premier' 2017 Survey: Upper Middle Class Portrait in Russia* // IPSOS. 2017. 6th June. URL: <https://www.ipsos.com/en/premier-2017-survey-upper-middle-class-portrait-russia> (accessed 27 November 2018).

Gill, L., Kasmir, S. *History, Politics, Space, Labor: On Unevenness as an Anthropological Concept* // *Dialectical Anthropology*. 2016. № 40 (2). P. 87–102.

Giordano, C., Kostova, D. *The Social Production of Mistrust* // *Postsocialism: Ideas, Ideologies and Practices in Eurasia* / Ed. by C. Hann. London, New York: Routledge, 2002. P. 74–92.

Gontmakher, E. *Srednyj Klass kak Rezul'tat Razvitiya Obshchestvennykh Institutov [The Middle Class as a Result of the Development of Social Institutions]* // Institut Sovremennogo Razvitiya (INSOR). *Diskus-siya o Srednem Klasse. Srednyj Klass. Problemy Formirovaniya i Perspektivy Rosta*. Moscow, 2008.

Gontmakher, E. Ross, C. *The Middle Class and Democratisation in Russia* // *Europe-Asia Studies*. 2015. № 67 (2). P. 269–284.

Gorshkov, M. K., Tikhonova, N. E. *Srednyj Klass v Sovremennoj Rossii [The Middle Class in Contemporary Russia]*. Moscow: Institut Sotsiologii RAN, 2008.

Gorshkov, M. K. *The Middle Class as the Reflection of the Economic and Sociocultural Model of Russia's Development Today* // *Russian Social Science Review*. 2016. № 57 (6). P. 488–504.

Gudkov, L. Dubin, B., Zorkaia, N. *The 'Middle Class'. (If There Is Such a Thing)* // *Russian Education & Society*. 2009. № 51 (8). P. 34–69.

Hage, G. *A Not so Multi-sited Ethnography of a Not so Imagined Community* // *Anthropological Theory*. 2005. № 5 (4). P. 463–475.

Hann, C., Hart, K. *Economic Anthropology. History, Ethnography, Critique*. Cambridge: Polity, 2011.

Hann, C., Humphrey, C., Verdery, K. Introduction. *Postsocialism as a Topic of Anthropological Investigation* // *Postsocialism: Ideas, Ideologies and Practices in Eurasia* / Ed. by C. Hann. London, New York: Routledge, 2002. P. 1–30.

Hann, C. *The Economistic Fallacy and Forms of Integration Under and After Socialism* // *Economy and Society*. 2014. № 43 (4). P. 626–649.

Heiman, R., Freeman, C., Liechty, M. Introduction. *Charting an Anthropology of the Middle Classes* // *The Global Middle Classes. Theorizing through Ethnography* / Ed. by R. Heiman, C. Freeman, M. Liechty. Santa Fe: SAR Press, 2012. P. 3–30.

- Humphrey, C. *Marx Went Away — But Karl Stayed Behind*, Updated Edition of Karl Marx Collective: *Economy, Society and Religion in a Siberian Collective Farm*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1998.
- International Labour Organization. *World of Work Report 2013. Repairing the Economic and Social Fabric*. Geneva: International Labour Office, 2013.
- Kalb, D. *Afterword: Globalism and Postsocialist Prospects // Postsocialism: Ideas, Ideologies and Practices in Eurasia / Ed. by C. Hann*. London, New York: Routledge, 2002. P. 317–334.
- Kalb, D., Tak, H. *Critical Junctions. Anthropology and History Beyond the Cultural Turn*. New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2005.
- Kalb, D. *Introduction // Anthropologies of Class. Power, Practice, and Inequality / Ed. by J. Carrier, D. Kalb*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. P. 1–27.
- Klein, C. H., Mitchell, S. T., Junge, B. *Naming Brazil's Previously Poor: 'New Middle Class' as an Economic, Political, and Experiential Category // Economic Anthropology*. 2018. № 5 (1). P. 83–95.
- Kolesnikov, A. Michail Dmitriev: *Peremeny neizbezhny i istoricheski neovratimy [Changes are inevitable and historically unavoidable] // Novaya Gazeta*. 2011. 31. August. URL: <https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2011/08/30/45676-mihail-dmitriev-171-peremeny-neizbezhny-i-istoricheski-neotvratimy-187> [accessed 27 March 2018].
- Kordonskij, S. *Soslovnaja Struktura Postsovetskoj Rossii [Estate-based structure of Post-soviet Russia]*. Moscow: Institut Fonda Obshestvennoe Mnenie, 2008.
- Lawler, S. *Afterword. Thinking and Rethinking Class // Rethinking Class in Russia / Ed. by S. Salmeniemmi*. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2012. P. 257–266.
- Ledeneva, A. V. *Can Russia Modernise? Sistema, Power Networks and Informal Governance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.
- Lipset, S. M. *Some Social Requisites of Democracy. Economic Development and Political Legitimacy // American Political Science Review*. 1959. № 53 (1). P. 69–105.
- Maleva, T. M. *Rossiyskiy Sredniy Klass. Vchera, Segodnya, Zavtra [The Russian Middle Class: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow] // Institut Sovremennogo Razvitiya (INSOR). Diskussiya o Srednem Klasse. Sredniy Klass. Problemy Formirovaniya i Perspektivy Rosta*. Moscow, 2008.
- Marx, K. *Das Kapital: Kritik der politischen Oekonomie. Buch I: Der Produktionsprozess des Kapitals [Capital. A Critique of Political Economy. Vol. I: The Process of Production of Capitals] // Marx Engels Werke*. Bd. 23. Berlin: Dietz, 1962.
- Marx, K. *Theorien über den Mehrwert. Vierter Band des 'Kapitals' [Theories of Surplus Value. Vol. IV of Capital] // Marx Engels Werke*. Bd. 26/2. Berlin: Dietz, 1967.
- Medvedev, D. A. *Poslanie Prezidenta Federal'nomu Sobraniju Rossiskoj Federacii [Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation] // 2008*. URL: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/1968> [accessed 15 November 2018].
- Moore, B. *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*. London: Allen Lane/Penguin, 1966.
- Moshaew, P. *Regionen Rußlands. Gewinner und Verlierer im Transformationsprozeß im Zuge der Globalisierung [Winners and Losers in Global Processes of Transformation.] // Forschungsstelle Osteuropa Bremen: Arbeitspapiere und Materialien. Gewinner und Verlierer post-sozialistischer Transformationsprozesse. Beiträge für die 10. Brühler Tagung junger Osteuropa-Experten*. 2002. № 36. P. 101–105.
- Mrowczynski, R. *Im Netz der Hierarchien. Russlands Sozialistische und Postsozialistische Mittelschichten*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2010.
- Müller, M. *In search of the Global East. Thinking between North and South // Geopolitics*. 2019, forthcoming.
- Piketty, T. *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*. London, Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014.
- Polanyi, K. *The Great Transformation. The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2001 [1944].
- Putin, V. V. *Poslanie Prezidenta Federal'nomu Sobraniju Rossiskoj Federacii [Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation] // 2007*. URL: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24203> [accessed 15 November 2018].



Putin, V.V. Poslanie Prezidenta Federal'nomu Sobraniju Rossiskoj Federacii [Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation] // 2012. URL: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/17118> [accessed 15 November 2018].

Putin, V.V. Poslanie Prezidenta Federal'nomu Sobraniju Rossiskoj Federacii [Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation] // 2018. URL: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/56957> [accessed 15 November 2018].

RIA Novosti. Rejting Regionov Rossii po Zarplatam 2017 (Income Rating of Russian Regions 2017) // RIA Novosti. 2017. URL: <http://riarating.ru/infografika/20171207/630078217.html> [accessed 15 November 2018].

Remington, T.F. The Russian Middle Class as Policy Objective // *Post-Soviet Affairs*. 2011. № 27 (2). P. 97–120.

Rosenfeld, B. Reevaluating the Middle-Class Protest Paradigm. A Case-Control Study of Democratic Protest Coalitions in Russia // *American Political Science Review*. 2017. № 111 (4). P. 637–652.

Salmenniemi, S. Introduction. Rethinking Class in Russia // *Rethinking Class in Russia* / Ed. by S. Salmenniemi. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2012. P. 1–22.

Samson, I., Krasnikova, M. The Middle Class in Russia. An Emerging Reality or an Old Myth // *Russian Social Science Review*. 2014. № 55 (5). P. 42–64.

Shkaratan, O., Yastrebov, G. Russian Neo-etacratism and its Stratification // *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*. 2010. № 26 (1). P. 1–24.

Sibirskaya, E., Khokhlova, O., Eldyaeva, N. Statistical Evaluation of Middle Class in Russia // *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*. 2015. № 6 (36). P. 125–134.

Siegert, J. Abseits von Moskau — die etwas andere Mittelschicht // *Forschungsstelle Osteuropa Bremen: Russlandanalysen*. 2013. № 267. P. 29–31.

Seidl, G. Die neuen Mittelklassen in Ecuador und ihre Rolle im gesellschaftlichen und politischen Transformationsprozess [The New Middle Classes in Ecuador and their Role in Social and Political Processes of Transformation]. Vienna: Masterarbeit an der Universität Wien, 2017.

Smith, G. Through a Class Darkly, but then Face to Face: Praxis Through the Lens of Class // *Anthropologies of Class. Power, Practice, and Inequality* / Ed. by J. Carrier, D. Kalb. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. P. 72–88.

Thelen, T. Privatisierung und soziale Ungleichheit in der osteuropäischen Landwirtschaft [Privatisation and Social Inequality in Agriculture in Eastern Europe]. Frankfurt am Main: Campus-Verlag, 2003.

Tikhonova, N.E. Model' Subjektivnoj Stratifikacii rossijskogo obshchestva i ee dinamika [A Model of Subjective Stratification of Russian Society and its Dynamics] // *Vestnik obshchestvennogo mnenija* [The Russian Public Opinion Herald]. 2018. № 1–2 (126). P. 17–29.

Trading Economies. Russia Home Ownership Rate // *Trading Economies*. 2016. URL: <https://tradingeconomics.com/russia/home-ownership-rate> [accessed 15 November 2018].

Verdery, K. What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next? // *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* / Ed. by K. Verdery. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996. P. 330–337.

Wacquant, L. Making Class: The Middle Class(es) in Social Theory and Social Structure // *Bringing Class Back In: Contemporary and Historical Perspectives* / Ed. by R. Levine et al. Boulder: Westview, 1991. P. 36–64.

Wimmer, A., Glick Schiller, N. Methodological Nationalism and Beyond: Nation-state Building, Migration and the Social Sciences // *Global Networks*. 2002. № 2 (4). P. 301–334.

Wolf, E., Eriksen, T. *Europe and the People Without History*. With a New Preface. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010 [1982].

Yeltsin, B. Poslanie Prezidenta Rossii Borisa El'cina Federal'nomu Sobraniju RF [Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly] // 1995. URL: http://www.intelros.ru/2007/02/05/poslanie_prezidenta_rossii_borisa_elcina_federalnomu_sobraniju_rf_o_dejstvennosti_gosudarstvennoj_vlasti_v_rossii_1995_god.html [accessed 15 November 2018].

Yurchak, A. *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005.

DOI: 10.19181/inter.2018.16.1

В поисках «морской свинки»? Проблемы исследования «среднего класса» в России

Бернард Бегеманн*

*** Бегеманн Бернард — аспирант Венского университета, Департамент социальной антропологии, a1408333@unet.univie.ac.at**

После распада Советского Союза российское общество претерпело многие исторические изменения. После переломов 1990-х, начало 21-го столетия можно описать как время экономического роста и стабилизации. Этот период социально-экономических перемен часто интерпретируется как время зарождения «среднего класса», ускоряющего переход от социалистического общества к капиталистическому. Однако, в то время как некоторые исследователи выделяют неопределенный сегмент общества, относящийся к «среднему классу», опираясь на описательные критерии, другие ставят под вопрос применимость аналитической категории «средний класс» к современному российскому обществу в принципе. В данной главе, основанной на материалах продолжающегося в г. Москва исследования, рассматривается конвенциональная онтология класса и указывается на неопределенность этого понятия, основанного преимущественно на результатах антропологических полевых исследований. В качестве продуктивного для выявления социальной динамики подхода в статье проводится различие между формалистским и субстантивистским использованием термина «средний класс», и демонстрируется необходимость нового языка описания, который бы отражал это различие. Эти аргументы иллюстрируются двумя этнографическими примерами. Данное исследование призвано внести вклад в текущие антропологические дебаты по поводу классов в постсоциалистических обществах.

Ключевые слова: средний класс, российское общество, классовая антропология, постсоциализм, социальная мобильность.