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Chapter Author(s): Zoya Kotelnikova and Vadim Radaev

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Introduction

Zoya Kotelnikova and Vadim Radaev

How are power and economy interrelated in modern state capitalism, and why does their association contain a great deal of ambivalence? These are the major questions addressed in this book. Let us start with three different cases.

An authoritarian state controls immense resources and exercises its power at different levels of the economy. Such a state imposes effective restrictions over the activity of any counteracting interest groups and is therefore able to implement large-scale centralized reforms in the economy. However, it uses its almost monopolistic power and consolidated resources to maintain an existing order and avoid any serious transformations. Such policy aimed at strengthening the authoritarian power produces controversial results, undermining the economic foundations of the state in the future.

A global producer of consumer goods uses its significant economic power to exercise the rules of the game and promote its exclusive brands in the emerging consumer markets. As these brands grow popular, they become subject to counterfeiting. When the global producer starts protecting its intellectual property rights, the company is confronted with an increasing risk of attracting public attention to the fakes and damaging its original brands even more in the eyes of the disloyal final consumers. Besides, the global producer acknowledges a contradictory impact of counterfeited goods, meaning that sales of these goods reduce its market share but at the same time contribute to the recognition and expansion of original brands in the local markets.

An active young urban resident feels powerless and deprived of opportunities to participate in political life. Instead of engagement in direct political struggles, (s)he turns to the issues of environmental protection

which could be perceived as 'non-political'. Joining the ecological movement and taking care of the degrading environment, (s)he becomes empowered and finds a path to civic and political representation.

All three cases occur in diverse areas and at different levels of society. However, they have a lot in common. These cases illustrate the ambivalent nature of power, which represents the main subject of this volume, using the notion of ambivalence as an integrative category for a number of interrelated studies. Ambivalence is defined as a bipolar concept, where the poles are clearly defined as incompatible alternatives and coexist without the possibility of their synthesis (Ledeneva 2014). Ambivalence is categorized as a form of oscillating behaviour, where the actor is unable to make an ultimate choice and is involved in the interplay of opposing options (Merton and Barber 1963; Smelser 1998). Ambivalence reflects competing perspectives oriented towards one and the same object, opposite parts constituting a whole and polarized forces that cannot be fully reconciled (Lüscher 2002; Hillcoat-Nalletamby and Phillips 2011). In this sense, the notion of ambivalence is distinguished from the concept of ambiguity, which presumes multi-polarity and multifaceted phenomena.

The notion of ambivalence originated from psychology and psychoanalysis and was initially connected to the constitution of personal identity. The term was coined by Eugen Bleuler, who looked for the source of ambivalence in the emotional conditions relating to the splitting or even disappearance of strong associations (Bleuler 1911/1950). Bleuler referred to contradictory affective orientations within the same person as one of the symptoms of schizophrenia. He also delineated affective, volitive and intellectual ambivalence. The concept was popularized by Freud (1948, 54–8) as alternating polarities of love and hate and of life and death urges.

Later this concept was borrowed by sociology, emphasizing that ambivalence did not reside within the individual and was not confined to the mixed feelings of a person but was embedded into social relations based upon continuous interactions (Merton 1976). Within this 'relational turn' in the social sciences, firstly, the notion of ambivalence has been transferred from personal identity to social relations. It can be minimized or temporarily resolved, but it can never be completely eliminated. It is both normal and paradoxical (Hajda 1968). Secondly, the category of ambivalence has been extended from the level of interpersonal relations to those of social norms, groups and organizations, which encourages scholars to provide broader socio-structural explanations (Hillcoat-Nalletamby and Phillips 2011). Thirdly, it has been pointed out that

ambivalence not only reflects conflicting norms but also presents an ongoing situation based upon continuous transactions and the controversial interplay of agency and structure. Thus, use of the concept of ambivalence leads to the recognition of analysis of social processes rather than social structures as the core of theory and research in social sciences (Hajda 1968; Room 1976). This approach is based upon the assertion that change is perpetual and that any social system is a temporal construction. It implies that ambivalence is generated simultaneously by change and resistance to change (Hajda 1968).

Basically, this kind of oscillating behaviour results from the increasing complexity of the contemporary world. The notion of ambivalence has been defined as a characteristic of modernist and postmodernist societies by Bauman, Giddens and other theorists (Giddens 1990; Bauman 1991).

A great diversity of types of ambivalence is presented in the literature. For example, Ledeneva (2018) suggested a useful taxonomy, including substantive ambivalence (double thinking), normative ambivalence (double standards), functional ambivalence (double deed) and motivational ambivalence (double purpose). The consequences of ambivalence also vary considerably in scale and scope. Ambivalence may provide flexibility, which is necessary for socially accepted human behaviour. Some research perspectives imply that actors are able to do more than just strictly comply with normative prescriptions (Merton and Barber 1963). Other authors emphasize that ambivalence is associated with abusive and deviant behaviour (Room 1976). Overall, ambivalence produces paradoxes that are not easy to resolve. At the same time, ambivalent practices (many of which are informal) fill the gaps produced at different levels of society and maintain the legitimacy of the existing social order.

In previous literature, the sociological concept of ambivalence was applied to a broad variety of areas from family studies (Lüscher 2002; Hillcoat-Nalletamby and Phillips 2011) to scientific knowledge production (Arribas-Ayllon and Bartlett 2014). This volume is focused upon the economic relationships and uses the analytical tools provided by contemporary economic sociology and political economy. Given a great diversity of economic phenomena, ambivalence is also multiple, involving relationships between the state and market actors, inter-firm ties, labour relations within the firm and relations between market sellers and the final consumers.

Particular emphasis in this volume is placed on the use of power as an important source of ambivalence in the economy. Previous studies

have shown that ambivalence comes to the fore in 'situations in which actors are *dependent* on one another' (Smelser 1998, 8), varying from so-called half-voluntary emotional dependence to 'total institutions' where participants are 'locked-in'. In this sense, ambivalence is inherent to power relations regardless of what theoretical approach to the concept of power that we adhere to. Nevertheless, it is common to view ambivalence as a characteristic of the behaviour of powerless actors, particularly in formal hierarchical organizations and authoritarian regimes. It implies that the behaviour and attitudes of subordinated actors deprived of essential resources and facing institutional constraints become ambivalent in relation to powerful/incumbent actors (see, e.g., Room 1976, 1056–7; Smelser 1998; Lorenz-Meyer 2001). We would like to highlight that governments and incumbent actors that dominate in organizational fields are also involved in ambivalent practices. Their power never becomes absolute and undisputable. To gain legitimacy and retain their power, even the most powerful actors have to impose self-constraints and set limits to the pursuit of their interests (see, e.g., Haugaard 2012). To avoid pressure from below, they also have to delegate their controlling functions to impersonal structures and new technologies that mediate potential and actual conflicts.

This volume contributes to our understanding of the ambivalent nature of power, oscillating between conflict and cooperation, public and private, global and local, formal and informal, and it does so from an empirical perspective with regard to the economic field. It offers a collection of country-based case studies, representing different political and economic regimes, and it critically assesses the existing conceptions of power from a cross-disciplinary perspective. The diverse analyses of power at the macro, meso and micro levels allow the volume to highlight the complexity of political economy in the twenty-first century. Each chapter addresses key elements of political economy (from the ambivalence of the cases of former communist countries that do not conform with the grand narratives about democracy and markets to the dual utility of new technologies such as facial recognition), thus providing mounting evidence for the centrality of ambivalence in the analysis of power.

Classical mainstream sociologists from Max Weber and Talcott Parsons to Steven Lukes and Anthony Giddens tend to conceptualize power as a multifaceted phenomenon. Recent advances in the theorization of power explore various types of power, identifying additional dimensions (Dobbin and Jung 2015; Granovetter 2017; Haugaard 2020; Tenenbaum 2020; Ledyaeu 2021). Dobbin and Jung (2015) drew attention to the capacity of various experts to define social group interests

as a new form of power. Haugaard (2020) distinguished a fourth dimension of power, suggesting techniques for creating social subjects. Research focuses on varieties of power, turning power into an all-embracing notion, which makes it harder to compare findings and maintain a meaningful dialogue among researchers (McNamee and Glasser 1987–8; Ledyaev 2021).

Most recent sociological studies focus on varieties of power. Thus, considerable effort is expended into revealing and defining new aspects of power relationships. We suggested switching this focus towards the mechanisms through which power is implemented in the modern economy. We believe that research efforts will be more fruitful if they switch attention from the multifaceted nature of power to its ambivalence.

Our volume sets itself apart from the wealth of previous studies. Firstly, most of the extant literature tends to discuss power in the political field, while the chapters in this volume primarily are about how power is practised in the economy. Secondly, despite recent progress in theorizing power which primarily explores different varieties of power, identifying additional dimensions, this book focuses on the ambivalent nature of the power. Thirdly, instead of analysing the conflict potential of power distributions – the traditional focus of the literature – a bulk of the chapters included in this volume stress the integrative properties of power in the economy. Fourthly, the book discusses power at all levels, combining macro and micro realms of study. Fifthly, contributors suggest that the ambivalence of power can be effectively observed and explained when studied empirically. Finally, the volume focuses mainly on Russia as a vanguard of state power-driven capitalism and an example of emerging markets. In this sense, this intervention differs from the studies mainly focusing on the Western developed democracies and using the approaches of the Eurocentric political economy. Russia presents a case in which an authoritarian state consolidates a large amount of political and economic power used for active intervention at all levels of the economy. This intervention goes far beyond a conventional industrial policy and includes continuous attempts to regulate inter-firm contractual relations (Radaev 2018) and impose restrictions on the retail pricing of basic consumer goods. State intervention is often contradictory in nature and leads to controversial outcomes. This post-communist experience could provide the grounds for valuable lessons that are relevant for the world outside a particular country. A recent book on an ambivalent state exploring the case of Argentina may serve as another illustrative example (Auyero and Sobering 2019). The main argument of this book is that, in the modern economy, power is closely associated with a variety of ambivalent

practices at different levels of society. To develop this argument, a number of data sources and research methods are applied by the team of authors including statistical analysis, standardized surveys, in-depth interviews and ethnographic observations.

In [Part I](#) of this volume, we discuss how political power and economic governance are intertwined at the macro level. We explain how the concentration or decentralization of power stimulates diverse trajectories of economic development. Depending on the tools used by powerful groups (the state, corporations and communities) to resolve the problem of their legitimacy, some novel and symbiotic models of interaction may evolve to account for the intricate ways in which production and livelihood are intertwined.

Starting from the macro level, the authors of this volume approach ambivalence from very different angles. Marek Dabrowski tries in [Chapter 2](#) to determine whether the market economy and democracy can support or even reinforce each other. Taking the case of post-communist countries, he found that economic governance and the system of political power are interdependent. This interdependence works in both directions due to its having a non-linear character and being implemented with a certain time lag. We would point to the existence of ambivalence emerging in relations between the political regime and economic policy, particularly in the case of more authoritarian states. Formally, authoritarian rule provides more space for centralized reforms compared with democratic rule with its many counteracting interest groups. However, factually, very often authoritarian power is not used for the implementation of serious transformations. The absence of reforms leads to stagnation and decreasing competitiveness.

Following this macro perspective, in [Chapter 3](#) Alexei Pobedonostsev reveals the pitfalls of rent-seeking in Russia and Venezuela. The ambivalence of power in these two oil-producing countries derives from the controversial nature of resource rent, which is both a source of power and a major threat to its retention. In the broader context, Russia and Venezuela face the well-known resource curse, or paradox of plenty, when reliance on the extraction of cheap natural resources strengthens the power of the state in the medium term but tends to undermine it in the long run.

In [Chapter 4](#), Alexander Nikulin and Alexander Kurakin address the controversies of power centralization observed in the interaction of Russian rural communities with the government and large agribusinesses. The expansion of large agribusiness companies is able to increase the effectiveness of rural production. Moreover, local communities and

households are often unable to make use of power opportunities and are ready to accept someone else assuming power and responsibility. They often do not resist the power of agribusinesses and are ready to delegate their rights, and therefore to support power centralization. At the same time, the sustainability of rural economic development is often undermined in the medium term. Overall, it demonstrates deficiencies of centralized power.

Leonid Kosals in [Chapter 5](#) examines the influence of new technologies on society and its core values. At the heart of the investigated problem is the ambivalent relationship between pragmatic and moral legitimacies, where pragmatic legitimacy can be achieved without the moral legitimacy associated with the threat of potential or real harm to higher social goals. The ambivalence of power reduces the efficiency of social mechanisms and produces various negative social effects, when powerful actors try to push through technological innovations with contested legitimacy.

[Part II](#) of the book focuses on power struggles at the meso level, observed within both historically established and emerging areas of study, including supply chain management, labour relations, the freelance economy, rental housing, natural resource industries, healthcare, higher education and so forth. The contributors explore the relationship between public and private, global and local and formal and informal modes of influence. The chapters in this section highlight conditions that create gaps, overlaps and grey zones between legality and legitimacy. They also discuss alternative mechanisms for establishing control over markets and the role of private authorities in market regulation. The authors identify the empirical conditions under which dominant discourses and hierarchical structures emerge and become habituated or socially contested.

Coming down to the level of inter-firm ties, in [Chapter 6](#) Vadim Radaev explores the 'dark side' of inter-firm cooperation and the ambivalent relations between the bargaining power of market sellers and the practices of contract infringement. Inter-firm opportunistic behaviour is considered a manifestation of the power of non-compliance. Empirical data show that breach of contract more often indicates an abuse of market power by dominant firms rather than resistance to pressures from the firms possessing less bargaining power. This abuse of market power tends to become normalized over time and to reinforce inequality among market actors.

In [Chapter 7](#), Evgeniya Balabanova examines the functional and motivational ambivalence of power in economic organizations. She

demonstrates the 'dark side' of managerial power and shows how the abusive power of managers may lead to the rise of voice strategies on the part of dependent employees instead of the expected loyalty, obedience and conformity that are the aim of managerial efforts.

Andrey Shevchuk and Denis Strebkov analyse in [Chapter 8](#) how digital platforms that claim to organize the gig economy subordinate an increasing number of online freelance contractors and even try to substitute the state in regulating the expansion of new labour markets. However, the ambivalent nature of freelance contracting and online work undermines the power of digital platforms and moves an increasing number of transactions outside these platforms.

Studying the market for municipal rental housing in Sweden, in [Chapter 9](#) Elena Bogdanova examines the ambivalence of consultation practices in housing renovations. Empirically, ambivalence reveals itself in two different domains: firstly, in the simultaneous empowerment and disempowerment of tenants in decision-making, and secondly, in the controversial ways 'quality' and 'standards' of housing are defined. The consultation process with tenants presumes that they should have the power to participate in decisions about their future housing. However, dividing the most disputed issues in time and content, the housing companies reduce tenants' power to make judgements about the quality of the interior finishings and exclude them from a whole range of decisions regarding hardware (pipes, electricity and water) and economic sustainability. Tenants are empowered and disempowered at the same time, and therefore decisions are often not taken, whereas the consultation process is dominated by circular arguments.

Maria S. Tysiachniouk and her co-authors in [Chapter 10](#) focus upon governance generating network theory to explain power shifts within global institutions, civil society and company networks, fostering the implementation of sustainability standards in Russia. The presence of strong normative definitions is interpreted by economic actors as a type of *power over*, forcing them to comply, while at the same time representing *power for* Indigenous and local communities, providing a mechanism for the enhancement of their rights.

In [Chapter 11](#), Zoya Kotelnikova shows the ambivalent attitudes of brand holders towards counterfeit products. Firstly, these companies acknowledge that counterfeiters may harm their registered trademarks, but at the same time they make the brands more recognizable and more valuable among consumers ([Saviano 2008](#)), even when some people knowingly buy fakes ([Crăciun 2012](#)). Secondly, brand holders often have to hide the truth about the presence of counterfeit goods on the market to

avoid damaging their brands. Thirdly, the brand holders oscillate between attempts to combat counterfeiting as a private issue regulated by the Civic Code and continuous efforts to bring the state in and use public coercive resources to suppress those who infringe on their intellectual property rights by means of the provisions of the Administrative and Criminal Codes.

Turning to the field of global higher education, Ivan Pavlyutkin and Anastasiia Makareva argue in [Chapter 12](#) that the strategic positioning of leading universities also reflects the ambivalence of power. As soon as leading national and regional universities whose activities are embedded in various institutional contexts enter the global academic race, they experience incompatible normative expectations or double standards when managing their legitimacy. Since global academic rankings have become an influential strategic instrument, this has created an 'iron cage' for universities from different cultural localities and forced them to apply standardized governance and educational models, which has led to increasing homogenization in the whole field of higher education.

Addressing the activity of large pharmaceutical companies, Elena Berdysheva in [Chapter 13](#) develops the idea that markets for vital goods contribute to the economization of political life and thus produce both commodities and a political culture of demand for these commodities. Pharmaceutical companies attract significant resources for inventing, testing and manufacturing new medical products. At the same time, they use both productive and restraining definitional power to promote advanced cancer metaphors and cut off viable alternative solutions.

In [Chapter 14](#) Tamara Kusimova uses the case of Russian farmers to explore tension between the global and the local in conditions where international sanctions for some food products were imposed on Russia. Exploiting the idea of authenticity, local farmers produce unique products with their own *terroir* as part of the global industry. Extensive use of patriotic or nationalist rhetoric together with references to the quality of global products by local producers becomes an effective tool for attracting local customers and gaining state support.

In [Part III](#), the book addresses micro-level issues related to the strategies which individuals use to resist and contest the dominant order, work out alternatives and explore opportunities for gaining autonomy.

Regina Resheteeva in [Chapter 15](#) demonstrates how final consumers have reacted to the continuous increase in retail prices by powerful market sellers in the conditions of the economic crises of the 2010s. Consumers identify themselves as clearly disadvantaged parties lacking control over the situation. However, they do not become involved in political protests or economic boycotts. Instead, they express a kind of

consumer cynicism and proactively search for ways not to be deceived by the market sellers. Their grassroots practices lead to a partial disavowal of the power of the dominant market actors.

Masha Denisova, in [Chapter 16](#), examines the ambivalent nature of relationships between mothers-to-be and doulas. In contrast to professional doctors establishing their unilateral power over their patients, doulas exercise their professional authority by empowering women and extending their control over childbirth but without forcing them to align with the doulas' professional expertise and opinion. However, mothers' empowerment with doula support looks ambivalent. On the one hand, doulas advocate for women's centrality and empowerment, while on the other, they simultaneously shift the responsibility for decisions made to women. While doulas' assistance is not institutionally recognized, it also raises a question about the stability of the mothers' empowerment.

Finally, Daria Lebedeva ([Chapter 17](#)) shows how young people in Russia, being powerless in the dominant political discourse, become involved with ecological policies and calls for environmental protection. By taking care of the degrading environment, young people not only try to keep control over their personal and global futures, but also express and defend their rights as citizens. Engagement in the ambiguous ecological agenda becomes for them a tool of empowerment and political representation.

Overall, scholars in social sciences tend to see power as a 'salient' dimension in economic action ([Smelser and Swedberg 2005](#), 5), making power one of the more difficult notions to be incorporated into theoretical frameworks, especially when explaining how market economy really works. Exercising power through the implementation of control and so-called strategies of governance, to use Foucault's term ([Foucault 1980](#)), has grown, but the state and large corporate structures also seem to have outsourced more rights and responsibilities to autonomous entities and technical devices. Anchored in economic sociology and political economy, this book is aimed at making 'visible' the dimensions of power embedded in such novel economic practices.

To conclude, this book is predominantly based on post-communist practices, but we believe that this divergent experience would be relevant to comparative studies of power and economy and contribute to our broader understanding of their changing and ambivalent character.

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