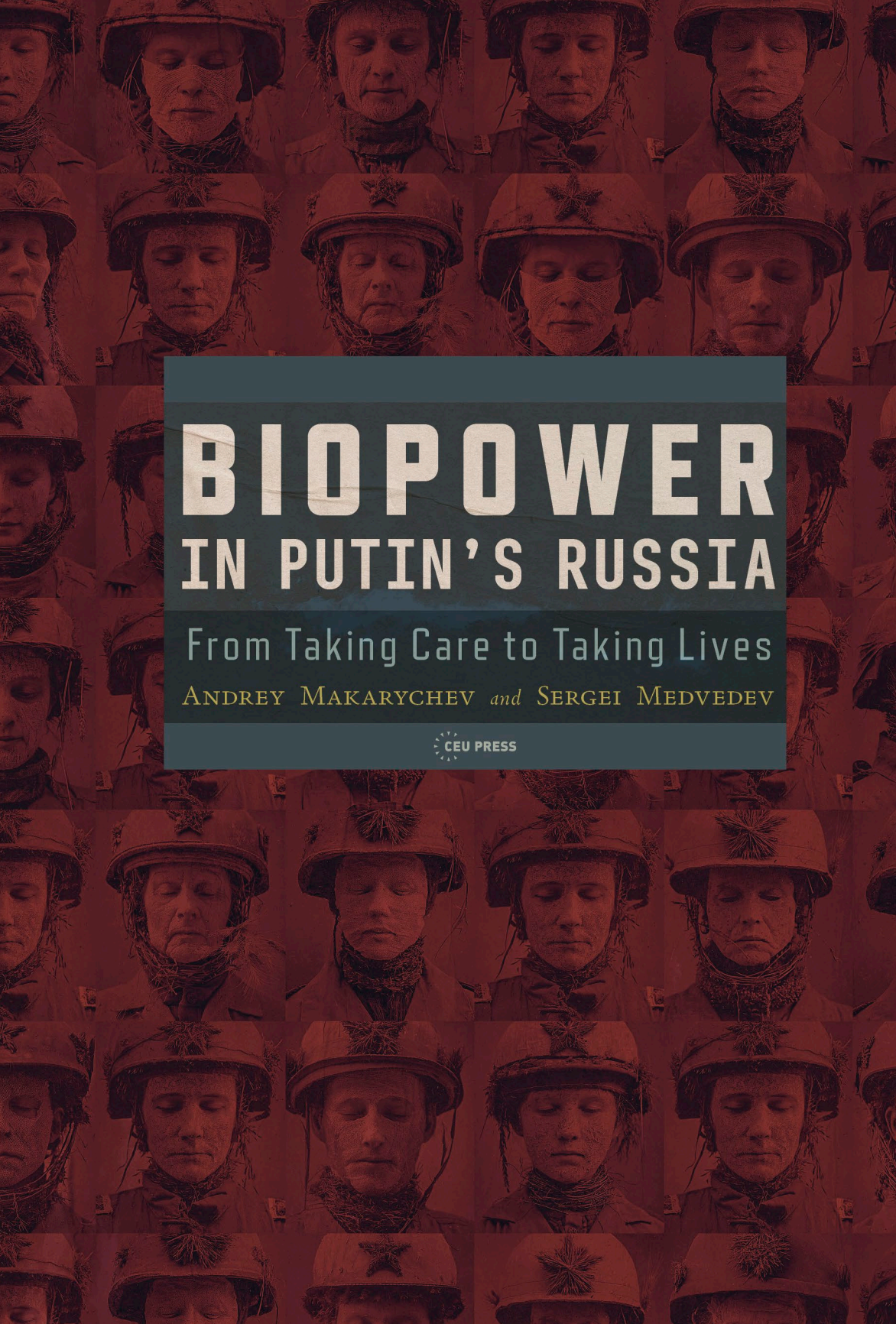
BIOPOWER
IN PUTIN'S RUSSIA
From Taking Care to Taking Lives
Andrey Makarychev and Sergei Medvedev
CEU PRESS

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## From Taking Care to Taking Lives

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# INTRODUCTION

There are different ways to characterize Vladimir Putin's rule. Institutionally, it is widely referred to as an authoritarian, dictatorial, repressive, and, in many cases, totalitarian regime of "personalist autocracy" (Frye 2022, 11). Ideologically, it can be categorized as a generally illiberal, conservative regime with a peculiar form of Russian populism. It is often referred to as nostalgic of the Soviet Union (Sharafutdinova 2020, 5). Its aggressiveness towards neighbors and disrespect for their sovereignty are also widely discussed in the literature (Shinar 2017).

However, there are more nuanced characterizations of the Russian state as a masculine or, as described recently by Marlene Laruelle, "male state" (Laruelle and Grek 2022), which seem to match more closely with our analysis. We consider Putin's rule through the more broadly understood politics of the body, including both biopolitical (life-centered and care-oriented) and necropolitical (repressive and life-taking) components. We claim that different modalities of political corporeality constitute the most understudied elements of the current Russian political regime. This book therefore aims to map the political genealogy of the body-centric structures of power and hegemony in Russia. In doing so, we unpack the transformation of power structures related to bio- and necropolitics as the core of Putin's rule over Russia and as a major factor behind the war against Ukraine launched by the Kremlin on February 24, 2022.

This book contributes to the growing discussions surrounding the new direction of Russia studies, which started after the eruption of the full-scale war against Ukraine. An example of this debate is the special issue in the journal *Post-Soviet Affairs* (Lankina 2023) where contributors considered whether we need new approaches, methodologies, and conceptualizations for studying Russia as we know it following the escalation of aggression in Ukraine. Thus far, however, this ongoing debate has remained within a rather traditional premise of political analysis that largely disregards or downplays politics related to human bodies as a powerful explanatory factor.

For a long time, in the development of political knowledge, studies on human corporeality were confined to disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, and cultural studies. Russian political science also inherited this disregard for human bodies; interest in them has been marginal in Russian academia since 1991. About ten years ago, the two co-authors of this book started a series of scholarly and educational projects aimed at filling this cognitive gap. We initiated a number of winter schools in Estonia under the title "The State and the Body" and published a series of academic and policy papers on biopolitics and biopower in Putin's Russia. Although this topic was marginal for or in Russian political science at the time and our research was limited to a few case studies, these studies were, in our opinion, illustrative of the evolution of Putin's illiberal biopolitical policies. Our hypothesis was that the emerging form of Russian authoritarianism included the sovereign appropriation of human lives and bodies as a state-owned resource as one of its major characteristics. Looking back at the initial point of our biopolitical inquiry, we clearly see today how biopolitics has moved from a marginal to a central and major component of the Russian political regime.

From passing the Dima Yakovlev law prohibiting the adoption of Russian children by foreign families to sending hundreds of thousands of Russians to battlefields in Ukraine as cannon fodder, the scale and scope of Putin's biopolitical transit in a matter of just a decade have been remarkable. Paradoxically, politics related to care and death seem to be two sides of the same biopolitical coin. In this respect, sovereignty might be reconsidered as the power to (re)define the spheres of care- and life-taking, the bio- and the necro-, and

to establish correlations between the two. Against this backdrop, we propose that the anti-LGBT campaign, the Orthodox Church's interference in family and private affairs, the mass-scale usage of illicit drugs in the Russian sports industry, the "foreign agents" legislation, and the forceful deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia after the February 24, 2022 invasion are all elements of the same biopolitical chain that require further scrutinizing research.

This book consists of five chapters. In Chapter One, we start with a theoretical outline to introduce our research vocabulary, which is grounded in, but not limited to, the plurality of versions and interpretations of biopolitical scholarship. More specifically, we discuss the opportunities and limitations of deploying the idea of biopower in non-Western and non-liberal political contexts, which remains a contentious and understudied issue. To address this, we develop and elaborate on the concept of authoritarian biopolitics as it has been applied to a variety of non-democratic illiberal regimes with post-socialist/post-communist political legacies. We engage with the discourses and policy practices of early Putinism, which focused on issues related to sexuality, reproductive behavior, adoption, fertility, family planning, public hygiene, and demography. These policies signify a biopolitical turn which has been exemplified by the application of a number of regulatory mechanisms to discipline and constrain human bodies. In this context, we introduce and explain the concept of "sexual sovereignty" and relate it to the emergence of a normative discourse promoting Russian "traditional values" as a favorable alternative to the "moral decay" of the West. Our main hypothesis is that this biopolitical turn marked an important shift in Russian domestic politics, one that involved a renegotiation of the borders of the Russian political community and the extension of state sovereignty into the private lives of citizens. This shift has been part of the strengthening authoritarian structures of the Russian political regime and marks a definitive rupture with international human rights standards. In other words, the biopolitical turn created a new disciplinary framework for the population and for the elite; biopolitical regulation, meanwhile, implemented through bans and restrictions, became one of the main tools for articulating the rules of belonging in the political community named Russia and

drawing its political boundaries. By the same token, biopolitical normalization can be approached as an expansion of the concept of sovereignty which has been at the ideological core of Putin's regime.

In Chapter Two, we turn to what might be dubbed performative biopolitics, which is a series of artistic performances with discernible political messages expressed through constitutive references to bodily life and corporeality. In the absence of significant political opposition and with the declining public sphere, many artists use their own bodies as a protest medium in acts of public revolt against the ruling authorities. Through these acts, the politicization of the human body is used to replace the political body of the nation by articulating and animating political protest. In the context of Putin's regime, we seek to analyze political art through the methodological paradigm of biopower and biopolitics, as outlined by Michel Foucault and further critically developed by Giorgio Agamben. We argue that this analysis can help to better understand the oppressive nature of the Russian state. We explore the ability of an individual "body in revolt" to express and represent collective meanings related to the nation and to politicize corporeality. Through public discussion of sexuality, domestic violence, and gender equality, we see how individuals reclaim their bodies in response to the Russian state's normalization of and regulatory mechanisms on the private practices of individuals. Thus, in this chapter we continue unpacking the politicization of the human body in Russia. Our main argument is that the phenomenon of bodily protest has to be understood within the context of the biopolitical paradigm established by Putin's regime, which evokes a cult of the "mighty," "sane," and "healthy" body as a key object of political assertions and investments. Against this backdrop, radical responses to the Kremlin's biopolitical regime reveal its dislocations and discrepancies. In our analysis, we show how the body can become a tool of protest and a site to aggregate collective meanings. The symbolic struggle for sovereignty has moved into the re-individualization and self-determination of the body, adversely achieved through the act of suffering and self-denial.

Chapter Three discusses the biopolitical dimensions related to the politics of sport mega-events in Russia. On the one hand, we identify and analyze the massive amount of symbolic resources the

ruling regime has invested in the Sochi Olympics, FIFA World Cup, two Universiades, and a plethora of other high-ranking sporting events. On the other hand, we scrutinize how, in the last few years, Russian policymakers have had to react to the negative publicity related to the doping scandal surrounding the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi and its aftermath. This scandal uncovered important aspects of Russia's vulnerability when it comes to the global sports arena. Our analysis is premised on the convergence of two forms of control and regulation: anatomopolitics, which, in Foucault's interpretation of the term, presupposes measures of control over individual bodies, and biopolitics, which refers to policy practices that target and concern the entire population. Their conflation in the Russian context results in a controversial effect; it strengthens hegemonic relations yet also exposes the sovereign power to the regulations of global sporting organizations.

In the domain of sports, biopower manifests itself as a productive force for establishing affective communities of fans and supporters who celebrate as collective biopolitical subjects and whose emotional investments are crucial for national identity-making. The creation and function of the emotive biopolitical community are possible only through representational relations in which sporting bodies play the anatomopolitical role of human signs and embody the spirit of nationhood. These are further associated with connotations of pride, glory, and muscular force. These inclusive relations of symbolic representation are politically constructed and manipulated as one of the key functions and conditions for the existence of sovereign power. The ensuing debate stretches far beyond sports and touches on deeply biopolitical issues related to the nature of power and sovereignty. Sports, therefore, appear to be a domain in which sovereignty constantly reasserts itself through sophisticated mechanisms of regulation and control over athletes' bodies.

In Chapter Four, we discuss the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic as a biopolitical challenge that may also be approached through the concepts of sovereignty and governmentality within the lines of the contemporary academic debate on biopower. Within this general framework, we look at the challenges Russia faced due to the corona crisis from the viewpoint of domestic transformations within

the ruling regime which demanded a stronger emphasis on governmentality. Against this background, sovereignty revealed itself as a precarious and vulnerable construct due to its high dependence on multiple actors and factors beyond the direct reach of the central government: healthcare infrastructure, medical expertise, volunteering, and corporate and individual responsibility. However, as a country with strong illiberal traditions, Russia ultimately became even more authoritarian and dictatorial during the pandemic as its ruling elites intentionally used sanitary restrictions to prevent people from protesting publicly.

The concluding Chapter Five is meant to explain how Putin's biopolitical policies fueled confrontation with the West and escalated into the war against Ukraine. The construction of a political community necessitates external othering, that is, the portraying of certain outsiders as threatening to the normative coherence of the ingroup. As the anti-adoption and antigay laws reveal, the function of external biopolitical others is often ascribed to the collective West as representing the liberal emancipatory agenda, with feminism, moral relativism, sexual freedom, and the alleged erosion of the institution of marriage as its key elements. Hence, biopolitical discourses, including different interpretations of the whole set of relationships between the state and human beings, are at the core of the Russian identity-making narrative. These discourses work to contrast a positively "conservative Russia" with a supposedly malign "liberal West." The current conservative wave in Russia, largely grounded in the biopolitical regulation of corporeal practices, uncovers a deep value gap between Russia and the West. In particular, Russian antigay legislation can be viewed as a response to the normalization of homosexuality in the West. The normative gap is underpinned by the Orthodox Church, which lambastes feminism as a dangerous ideology that has no connection to women's emancipation. By claiming that there are "traditional roles" for women to play, the Orthodox Church uses biopolitical arguments to define what the Russian political community should look like.

Kremlin-imposed biopolitical bans have further deteriorated the Kremlin's reputation in the West, demonstrating the growing normative distance between Russia and Europe. Biopolitical arguments

and regulations are instrumental in shaping and deepening the normative gap between Russia and mainstream liberal Western discourses; however, these discourses are employed by both sides. On the Russian side, we see a conscious and consolidated effort to build a sort of "sexual sovereignty" of the nation and othering of the West on biopolitical grounds. This became extremely topical in the context of the sharp aggravation of Russia's relations with the West over Ukraine, which started in 2014 and reached its dramatic peak in 2022. Finally, the extensive use of biopolitical regulation in Russia and the anatomopolitics and thanatopolitics of domestic violence have informed and shaped Russia's war in Ukraine, which restarted on February 24, 2022, and has quickly become the biggest armed conflict in Europe since World War II. This war can be analyzed from many perspectives: realist (as a battle for territory and geopolitical influence), institutionalist (a war for a new world order), or constructivist (a war of a new Russian identity based on revanchism and post-imperial *resentment*). In addition to these perspectives, the analysis presented in this book applies the paradigm of body politics to provide a novel interpretation of this bloody conflict.

Indeed, Russia's assault on a neighboring sovereign state takes on distinctly physiological and biological forms. There are numerous reports of the assassination, execution, and torture of civilians, and the mass rape of girls, women, and men of all ages. Russia has established so-called "filtration camps" for hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian refugees on the Russian border, where civilians are exposed to humiliating forms of examination. This examination includes forcing victims to undress to have their bodies examined for tattoos that can be deemed nationalist or Nazi; suspects are then incarcerated or executed. Likewise, teachers of Ukrainian language and history are also singled out during filtration in an attempt to eradicate any reproduction of Ukrainian culture. In a policy reminiscent of Nazi Germany's *Ostarbeiter*, many Ukrainian refugees are also deported to remote regions in Russia, such as Siberia and the Far East. As a matter of fact, the construction of the biological concept of the "Russian world," with its own "blood and soil," has led to the ethnic cleansing of the Ukrainians, denying them their national sovereignty, identity, history, language, and ultimately, physical existence.

There are clear similarities and parallels between the deeply rooted practices of physical violence inside the Russian repressive apparatus, which have been widely exposed in the past decade (police terror, regular torture of suspects and prisoners), and Russian war crimes in the cities and villages of Ukraine; the necropolitics of the repressive regime has been exported and applied on the body of the neighboring nation. In this sense, the biopolitical core of Putin's regime, Russia's "politics of the body," has naturally led to the emergence of a specific Russian Nazism based on the ideas of "blood and soil," the racial inferiority of the Ukrainians, and the glorification and legitimization of violence. This elicits comparisons with the "original" German Nazism, which was profoundly biopolitical. Thus, this book tracks Russia's politics of the body over the past decade, from the first biopolitical manifestations in the early 2010s, to the increasing violence of the state over the body, to the war in Ukraine taking on distinctly physical and biological forms, and finally, to the emergence of Russian Nazism.

Methodologically, we embrace a discursive perspective in our analysis. Following Jennifer Milliken (1999, 241–242), we identify and use four major methodological approaches to discourse analysis. First, we use the *deconstructive method*, which reveals the contingent nature of a discourse. While biopolitical discourses are not necessarily deconstructive, scholarship in critical biopolitics has the potential to challenge what we see as simplifications of the plurality of societal issues facing Russia due to the characteristics of Putin's regime. A biopolitical perspective might be helpful to deconstruct the narrative of "Putin's war" and highlight the roles of Russian "pastoral power," the cult of masculinity, and different forms of appropriation of human bodies by the state. Biopolitics is also instrumental in deconstructing the hegemony of geopolitical narratives by demonstrating the bodily and corporeal components of strategic constructs such as the Russian world.

Secondly, discourse analysis includes *methods of juxtaposition* that compare narratives to find alternative assumptions and meanings. In our study, we juxtapose three discourses as intersecting and mutually reinforcing elements of one discursive chain: biopolitical, zoepolitical, and necropolitical. The idea is not to strictly differentiate

these discourses from each other, but rather to find out how they merge and intersect. For instance, through anti-LGBT discourses, anti-abortion campaigns, protests against sexual education at schools, etc., we see how biopolitics (in the form of the "good family" discourse) and zoepolitics overlap.

Thirdly, we used the *genealogical method* aimed at identifying multiple dependencies of concepts on antecedent meanings and contexts. In this regard, the book presents the biopolitical genealogy of Putin's regime and its retroversion away from the politics of care and protection and turn toward the politics of death. To do so, we engage with the previously coined meanings of our key concepts and work to reevaluate some within the current context. For example, while zoepolitics may be connoted with "the bare life of the person outside the state" (Schinkel 2010, 156), in our interpretation it is the state itself that produces bare lives as an indispensable condition of its functioning.

A fourth method works to highlight *subjugated knowledge* that may challenge and resist hegemonic discourse. We address various vernacular, performative, and seemingly marginal narratives that have either been repressed by the state or completely expelled from the Kremlin-constructed semiotic mainstream. This method might be supplemented by approaches borrowed from cognitive narratology, a subdiscipline that studies "mind-relevant aspects of storytelling" (Herman 2009, 32), in popular genres such as public speeches, social media narratives, blogging, cultural texts, and imageries. Although cognitive narratology involves sense-making that might be subjective, biased, amateurish, stereotypical, or propagandistic, all of these interpretations have preferred plots, scripts, or scenarios which are attractive for particular audiences.

This typology of methods describes how discourses construct, transform, and alter meanings, and considers which factors constrain or restrain these transformations and alterations. In discourse analysis, constraining factors might be both endogenous, stemming from the social/political status of the speaking subjects and the scale/scope of their audiences, and exogenous, being influenced by the existence of counter-discourses or alternative narratives. However, when it comes to biopower, another important factor must be iden-

tified: the physicality of human bodies and their corporeal experiences, which shape and produce biopolitical discourses through experiences and practices of mobility, imprisonment, sickness, sexuality, domestic violence, or war atrocities.

Following the Foucauldian tradition, we adhere to the interconnectedness of spaces related to language, body, and governmental practices (Carta 2019, 92). We see biopolitical discourses not as fragmented collections of individual speech acts and dispersed narrations, but as networked systems of interconnected nodal points operating in conjunction with the ensuing policy practices. For us, biological matters are constantly signified and resignified as discursive objects (Banta 2013, 382). In other words, physical and material matters "only make sense in terms of the concepts that are applied to them" (Hardy, Palmer, and Phillips 2000, 1234).

In the meantime, discourse analysis "is not just a 'method' but 'also a perspective'" and a philosophical stance (Carta 2019, 82). We presuppose the approach to political actors as subjects and objects of biopower which are motivated or incentivized either by ruling through physical oppression or by surviving in a world shaped by force. This methodological stance includes a specific type of intentionality, logic, and rationality that might differ from economic and financial calculations or normative commitments. By characterizing policy actorness as biopolitical, we thereby differentiate it from ideological and institutional terrains, and explain political actions as being grounded in various forms of care, protection, or intervention in human lives and control over bodies.

As for our research vocabulary, it consists of the conceptual triad of biopolitics, zoepolitics, and necropolitics. From a theoretical perspective, *biopolitics* constitutes the sphere of "politically qualified life." Key domestic elements of Russian biopower are a "natural" and "organic" understanding of life; a family-centric and corporeal ("collective body" of the nation) outlook; possessive management, administration, and control over human bodies; the "normalization" of sexuality and reproductive behavior; illiberal attitudes toward lifestyles, feminism, and gender emancipation; and a strong sub-culture of incarceration, from GULAG to anti-Putin opposition. At the same time, Putin's biopolitical regime is insensitive to issues such as poor

demographic conditions, outmigration/brain drain/loss of human capital, decaying educational standards, and underfunded public medicine. This lack of sensitivity produces what might be dubbed, in the language of Giorgio Agamben, as "bare lives." This metaphor for the radical expression of inequality and exclusion is nicely illustrated by debates related to sexuality, family, or immigration in many contemporary societies. In Russian foreign relations, biopolitics boils down to a policy of "care-taking" and "protection" of "compatriots" beyond national borders.

*Zoepolitics* understands political life as being reduced to a physical, material, and bodily existence. Zoepolitics presumes that society is based on the laws of nature (physical force) and signifies a type of political structure which depends on the struggle for the physical survival of biological bodies. These bodies are assumed to be endangered by natural instincts of destruction and the perennial domination of the strongest versus the weakest. The domain of zoepolitics is shaped by muscular force and includes death as a probable outcome. By the same token, zoepolitics is susceptible to the rhetoric of "racial hygiene" and ethnic cleansing.

*Necropolitics* factors death into the political calculus and includes appeals to sacrifice life for the state. As the politics of death, the way necropolitics is integrated into political calculations and agendas might take different forms. These forms range from symbolically including the dead in contemporary "regimes of truth" and rationalities of governance to supporting the acceptance and legitimation of mass killings and war atrocities.

As an auxiliary category we also include the concept of *anatomopolitics* to refer to individual human lives, presuming that this makes sense only in close conjunction with a biopolitical theoretical framework. We find that anatomopolitics tends to merge with and transform into biopolitics through the way in which singular bodies are identified and associated with collective bodies of larger political groups, including "the nation." Anatomopolitics refers to individual lives either as objects of state policies (in sports, for example) or as sources of and triggers for practices of resistance to totalization policies and disciplinary power.

CHAPTER ONE

# THE BIOPOLITICAL GENEALOGY OF PUTIN'S REGIME

> "Illiberal regimes inevitably usher sovereignty into the sphere of biopolitics, through the deployment of biological, corporeal, or even carnal regimes of power, rule, and force that place the management of life and death (and the organization of secure or vulnerable bodies in time and space) at the very center of the sovereign's political design."
>
> (*Francois Debrix, 2015*)

## INTRODUCTION

Contemporary academic debates on authoritarian regimes are marked by eclecticism and remain rather fragmented in their ideational basis. Indeed, the ideological constructs of dictatorial rule are often relational, contextual, and normatively flawed. What at a distance seems to be a value-based policy of conservatism or traditionalism, under closer scrutiny appears to be a blend of manipulative narratives only loosely connected to each other. For instance, some authors (Kolesnikov 2022a) prefer to label Putin's regime as an example of "hybrid totalitarianism," where the discursive base is replete with multiple inconsistencies, including but not limited to a mixture of Soviet nostalgia and Orthodoxy or Russian nationalist patriotism and imperialist affection. Russia's war against Ukraine has added yet another profound rupture to the Kremlin's ideational constructs. This rupture can be seen through an unwavering declaration of the preference for stability at the same time as the launch of a full-scale foreign invasion and subsequent domestic mobilization.

These fluctuations in the trajectories of the mainstream discourse challenge the use of simplistic explanations and traditional lenses, such as nationalism, conservatism, traditionalism, or patriotism, to understand the ruling regime. This complexity requires new approaches within the academic apparatus that Russia scholars use to

characterize Putin's rule. Putin's regime remains grossly misrepresented as being a typical illiberal regime that can be easily juxtaposed with other examples of dictatorship in the world. These delusions and misperceptions about the nature of the regime might lead some scholars to see Russia not as a dictatorship but as a country going through a temporarily unstable nation-building process similar to many other nations (Shlapentokh 2020).

There are several factors that might shed some light on a variety of simplified interpretations of the Russian political regime. One is an over-reliance on studying official discourses that are more visible and easier to deal with yet do not provide a comprehensive picture of Russia's political landscape. In other words, studying Putin's regime based on what he or his subordinates say about themselves makes little sense; rather, a deeper immersion is required into the hidden practices of control and subjugation, including those emanating from the sphere of cultural production, which are key terrain in generating the political meanings appropriated by the Kremlin.

Misconceptions also come from the search for consistent ideological platforms within the Russian elite. The futility of these endeavors has led some authors to neglect the salience of utopian thinking and imagery among a large group of public intellectuals, cultural producers, and pro-Putin activists and journalists. For example, commentators and observers who reject the existence of fascist elements in the Russian ruling regime, even when it comes to the war against Ukraine, appeal to the fuzzy and incoherent ideological basis of Putin's illiberalism. However, what is missing in their purview is due attention to highly mythologized and largely irrational visions, worldviews, and mindsets, from the Eurasianist mystique à la Dugin to the biopolitical utopia of the Russian world. Attempts to "normalize" Russia by turning a blind eye to the regime's potential to drastically radicalize these utopian ideas to the point of committing war crimes and acts of genocide contribute to embellished and whitewashed narratives of normalization and rationalization.

Yet another more distorting factor is the unfortunate tendency to exceptionalize Russian acts that do not fit within approaches to normalize and rationalize the policies of Putin's regime. For instance, it is quite rare that an analysis of Russia's attack on Ukraine is di-

rectly connected with the earlier de facto occupation of the two Georgian territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. This disregard for the entire genealogy of Putin's regime results in an understanding of the annexation of Crimea as an exception or deviation from the general pattern. The tendency to exceptionalize the annexation of Crimea and the proxy wars in Donbass has created fertile ground for overlooking the systemic role of violence in Russian foreign policy. Furthermore, this has prevented many scholars from making logical connections between the cultural legitimation of violence within the country and beyond its national borders. Even those who *do* make these connections seem to ultimately end up arguing that the annexation of Crimea grew not out of the regime's repressive nature, but was instead provoked by another "state of exception," namely the mass-scale anti-regime demonstrations in 2011–2012 at Bolotnaya Square in Moscow (Radio Svoboda 2022a).

Another key point is the general disregard for the dehumanizing potential of Russian militarism. Even after the atrocities committed by the occupying forces in the Ukrainian cities of Bucha, Gostomel, Izyum, and Mariupol, Marlene Laruelle claimed that "there is no political necrophilia in the regime's ideology" (Laruelle et al. 2022). We argue the exact opposite: in our opinion, necropolitical practices are pivotal in understanding the basis for Putin's sovereignty as a supreme transgressive power that claims the right to take lives and deploys the symbolization of death at the very core of its illiberal utopia.

## FRAMING THE BIOPOLITICAL DEBATE

It is against this backdrop that the concept of biopolitics emerges in scholarly debates as an alternative explanatory tool, offering new possibilities to identify points of cohesion and continuity in the regime's discourses and practices. There are multiple polymorphic (Gratton 2006, 447–448) modalities of biopolitics that uniquely shape the entire spectrum of both liberal and illiberal political institutions and practices.

In this chapter, we argue that a biopolitical lens can be academically helpful to better understand the multiple names and categori-

zations of the genealogy of Putin's regime. We assume that biopolitical discourses, which are produced at the intersection of body and politics, are always open-ended and consist of a variety of forms and functions. Rather than involving a set of well-established characteristics of a certain regime of power, biopolitics consists of a constantly evolving and transforming sphere of regulative discourses and instruments, in which the scale and scope of this evolution may depend on many endogenous and exogenous factors, mostly pertaining to sovereign power. The concept of sovereignty, which is central to our reading of biopower, should be re-signified through the biopolitical lens of sexuality, bodily control, corporeality, and reproduction. Russia's shift towards the politics of the body in its most illiberal forms is based on two pillars: the transformation of the population into a biological resource for the sovereign power and the reduction of public politics to the physical body of Putin as the holder of supreme power.

Currently, Putin's project of illiberal sovereignty reveals a double nature. On the one hand, it is grounded in the legal system with references to laws and legislation that have traditionally constituted the essence of sovereignty. On the other, it is based on biopolitical discourses and practices with an appeal to the "natural" instincts and predestinations of human beings. Putin's terms in office have marked a clear shift from a predominantly legal definition of sovereignty towards a more bio-, zoe-, and necro-politicization. Thus, the "paradoxical structure of sovereignty that operates by a suspension of law" (Lemke 2005, 4) and, as a result, exposes a peculiar sense of freedom might serve as a reference point for approaching the Russian case from a biopolitical perspective.

Since the academic genealogy of the concepts of biopolitics and biopower is ostensibly Western-centric, there has been a heavy emphasis on critical engagement with liberal political regimes and less attention paid to illiberal autocracies. In the original interpretation, biopolitics is an inherently European concept that makes sense in a liberal type of society and connotes a broader conceptual chain containing the ideas of productive power, responsibilization, and governmentality. This liberal pedigree created an imbalance in conceptualizing biopower since its harshest characteristics, including

the "carceral state" or targeted killings, were predominantly attributed to neoliberal governments, which were lambasted for resorting to suppressive instruments of power. Michel Foucault's interpretation of sovereignty as the right to take lives laid the groundwork for claims that all sovereignties, whether liberal or illiberal, share similar traits. As a result, questionable allegations of a diminishing distance between liberal democracy and its illiberal opposite were intruded into biopolitical literature.

Against this background, distinctions between biopolitics as a product of European regimes of power and its illiberal reinterpretations ought to be clearly established. While liberal regimes can indeed take lives (for example, through capital punishment or waging wars), illiberal regimes systemically practice physical violence towards political opponents and glorify the sacrifice of life for the sake of the nation. The main pillars of liberal biopolitics are the production of care, responsibilization, and governmentality. Conversely, the way in which illiberal regimes vacillate between bio- and necropolitics makes the boundaries between the two precarious, contextual, and ultimately uncertain. Since Foucauldian biopolitics is explicitly rational and law-centric, violence is not a central category of analysis, remains hidden and often invisible, and functions mainly at the symbolic level. From the liberal perspective, biopolitics can be contrasted with necropolitics as two diametrically opposed models of power relations; yet, in an illiberal environment, necropolitics appears in biopolitical regimes of power relations. Therefore, the illiberal version of biopolitics is heavily contaminated and polluted with strong necropolitical elements. Furthermore, illiberal biopolitics contains components that have ultimately de-actualized the main object of biopolitical regulations: the population as an object of care and protection. The political body of the nation is invested in the political body of the sovereign. This is nicely reflected in the maxim "no Putin—no Russia," which was coined by Viacheslav Volodin, first deputy head of the presidential administration.

In the meantime, it is illiberal regimes that expose and explore the most violent uses of biopower. Illiberal systems have taken the "zoefication" (the reduction of *bios* as politically qualified life to its zoological physicality) of humans to the extreme, stripping critically

minded people of their civil rights, social positions, and political status. From the perspective of illiberal regimes, the idea of a single collective body is the crux of organic sovereignty, and individual bodies matter only as a small part of this single unit. This biopolitical strategy implies the elimination of "internal others" and makes the lives of non-conformist dissenters expendable and dependent on the selective political will of the holder(s) of sovereignty. Thus, the "state-occupied body" is the biopolitical ideal of dictatorial biopower and is meant to ignite feelings of vulnerability, physical pain, despair, and confusion.

While some authors have engaged with Foucault's biopolitical insights applied to Russian studies (Stella and Nartova 2016, 20), we maintain that since these insights were specifically designed for Western modernity, the Foucauldian understanding of liberal biopolitics cannot be applied to the study of non-democratic regimes. "Foucault conflates sovereignty with the functioning of the law, rather than recognizing that the very concept of sovereignty puts it above or outside the law" (Gratton 2006, 446). This conflation neglects aspects of violence and physical domination, as elements typically not present in the interpretations of political actions in liberal regimes, from the scope of biopolitics. The gradual replacement of sovereign power with the governmentality that Foucault spoke of does not match the reality in non-Western illiberal regimes. Rather, non-western, illiberal regimes remain deeply sovereignty-centric and use governmental technocracy at their discretion as a tool of control rather than letting it function as a power of its own. In particular, the idea of "sexual sovereignty" reflects the emergence of a normative, moralizing, and corporeal (Kolesnikov 2022b) discourse promoting Russian "traditional values" as opposed to the alleged "moral decay" of the West.

The case of Russia demonstrates the reversal of the Foucauldian paradigm which assumed a shift from a pre-modern model of power, based on control for the sake of preserving hierarchical relations, to a biopolitical model of life enhancement through rationality and ordering. Putin's Russia has abandoned the latter in favor of the former. In doing so, it has moved from a society motivated by incentives, in which force is less important and useful, to a regime where

violence and muscle are key elements used to provoke international insecurity. Without attributing it to their own country, some Russian authors *do* see the nexus between biopolitics and necropolitics. This can be seen in how these authors accept the validity of understanding nation-building as a series of violent transgressions and appropriations that often treat many groups within societies as nonhumans (Yarkeev 2021).

In comparison with Foucault, Agamben's approach to biopolitics is more applicable in the case of illiberal regimes: Agamben "asserts that biopolitics is an effective method of empowering the sovereign. Arguably, it provides the fundamental basis for the sovereign, in the first place. Putin seems to know this all too well. Since Putin is the sovereign, he can decide which groups of people 'fit' in the nation's identity and instill within them specific fears of who the enemy is and what to do about them" (Langdon and Tismaneanu 2020, 131). However, we disagree that "power of the sovereign is always potential, for the sovereign never exhausts itself in its actual use of power" (Gratton 2006, 454). On the contrary, sovereign power that degenerates into zoe- and necropolitics becomes a self-destructive machine that ruins its own legitimacy and diminishes the security of the entire political community it is supposed to cement, govern, and represent.

In this chapter, we contribute to the debate on the genealogy of Putin's regime through the prism of three interconnected concepts: civilizational biopolitics, zoepolitics, and necropolitics. We conceptually unpack and juxtapose each of them as elements of one bio-, zoe-, and necropolitical chain, which we contextualize within a dialogue of the ongoing debate related to the fascist characteristics of the Kremlin's regime. This approach is instrumental in identifying and explaining the trajectory of Putin's rule, from the initial ideas of taking care of the bodily life of the Russian population and protecting the so-called "compatriots living abroad" to systematic domestic repressions and violent projections of force beyond national borders. From this, we proceed to discuss the foreign policy implications of the above-mentioned categorization of the Russian political system. This has gained particular salience and deserves further consideration in light of the invasion of Ukraine that restarted on February 24, 2022.

## THE RUSSIAN BIOPOLITICAL DEBATE: AN OUTLINE

We continue this chapter with a concise introduction to the recent Russian academic debate framed by biopolitical categories of analysis. In Russian academia, biopolitics is usually discussed as a Western concept and is only rarely referred to as a useful tool for studying Russian politics. Some Russian authors have tried to apply biopolitical scholarship to different fields of research, from public management to trauma studies. These authors discuss biopolitics as a research lens and a practical tool that, from the viewpoint of biological instincts and properties of human beings, helps explain important categories of political analysis: aggression, violence, submission, isolation, loyalty, cooperation, and so on (Oleskin 2002). In this interpretation, politics is seen as an extension of biologically determined reflexes and habits grounded in the irremovable physicality of human social existence (Bryzgalina 2018), which in the Russian context might have strong religious connotations (Tkachov 2020).

An alternative reading argues the opposite—that politics is a sphere of immanent struggles for framing, enhancing, and/or limiting the possibilities of different forms of interventions in and regulations of human corporeality. Seen from this perspective, socialism, capitalism, liberalism, conservatism, or "techno-nationalism" (Barbashina and Ablazhey 2021) are different modes of biopolitical management balancing individual choices with state interventions in different ways (Nizhnik and Prokuronov 2022).

During the pandemic in particular, as Konstantin Gaaze (2020) noted, the healthy and the sick became political categories, while the state acted as the producer of a "healthy" population and protector against external threats; this created the basis for crisis-ridden exceptionalism. Some Russian authors evoked Foucault in their portrayals of liberalism as the most effective antidote to the practices of biopolitical suppression of human bodies. Others borrowed from Western debates by considering the characteristics of biopower as an inherent system of control and surveillance (RGMB 2023) and referencing a struggle for survival in a loosely defined "global civil war" (Filosofskiy MGU 2020).

However, as previously mentioned, the Foucauldian approach is hardly adaptable to the sovereign-father model of power inherent in Putin's regime. Political commentator Alexandr Baunov cited Roberto Esposito's immunization theory to indirectly suggest that, unlike in Germany, "authoritarian inoculation" has not made Russia immune to a dictatorial power that is accepted and even perceived as legitimate by the bulk of the population (Baunov 2022). By the same token, political analyst Vladimir Pastukhov compared Putin's role in cementing an intra-elite foreign policy consensus to "connective tissue" that revitalizes Russian body politics (Pastukhov 2022).

The most important takeaway from the Russian debate is the conflict between two operational blocs of the state: governmental capacity (or the technology of administering material resources with its machinery and apparatuses) and the sovereign logic of power that produces its narratives aimed at reducing complexity and restoring a state of normalcy. The opposition between governmentality and sovereignty appears to be crucial for a discussion on Putin's regime.

In our previous research, we concluded that biopolitics places a blurred distinction between physical corporeality and the social and cultural conditions of its functioning at the center of analysis. This allowed us to identify elements of totalization (that is, the submission of the individual to a common or collective set of norms) in each type of regime. The biopolitical approach also offers a toolkit for understanding why practices of totalization are so recurrent and self-reproducing, despite being embedded in a plethora of institutions that are supposed to produce liberal effects through encouraging de-bordering, supranationalism, and multiculturalism. As the historical experience of totalitarian regimes such as Hitler's Germany and Stalin's USSR demonstrated (Dickinson 2004), in the absence of political pluralism and a viable civil society, biopolitics is likely to turn into a series of top-down oppressive regulations that incorporate the ideas of racial or class hygiene and repress "deviant" bodily practices.

Our earlier contribution to the ongoing scholarly debate offered a biopolitical perspective for understanding the Russian hegemonic discourse. The shift from the relatively permissive 1990s to Putin's reign is a remarkable phenomenon that is crucial for unpacking the

evolution of the Russian political regime over the last three decades. As we have previously argued, in Russia, biopolitics gives an additional set of power tools to the authoritarian regime by defining the essence and the boundaries of the Russian political community, a community shaped culturally by loyalty to biopolitical regulations, bans, and restrictions in such diverse spheres of cultural policy (Romashko 2018) as fashion design (Kalinina 2017), cinematography (Akopov 2023), or the sports industry. Therefore, biopolitics is a particular instrument for suturing the hegemonic discourse that has, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, lacked coherence and consistency. The idea of biopolitical normalization, being the epitome of Putin's understanding of conservatism, is meant to stabilize this discourse as the pivotal hegemonic strategy of power. Biopolitics became popular among Russian politicians due to its ability to consolidate the dispersed Russian identity without resorting to ideologically divisive clichés. The traction of biopolitics lies in its ability to play the role of a post-ideological and post-political substitution for public politics (Makarychev and Yatsyk 2017b, 105–111).

With this in mind, we presumed that Russian conservatism emerged from the idea of biopolitical regulation which has become part of the political and cultural mainstream in Russia. We specifically proposed the concept of biopolitical conservatism to grasp the core of the ideology of officialdom which is often formulated in cultural terms. Despite multiple domestic consequences, we claimed that biopolitical regulation tends to correlate with the steady trend in Moscow to negatively portray Europe as the epitome of liberal emancipatory practices which are unacceptable and alien to Russia's collective mindset. This conservatism is totalizing since "biological life enters directly into politics as its privileged object, causing the transition from the immunitary preservation of individual life to the autoimmunitary killing of life and destruction of immunitary devices in the name of preserving the life of a 'race' and a 'people.'" (Lemm 2013, 7–8).

The biopolitical turn can be seen through a number of regulatory mechanisms to discipline and constrain human bodies. This turn, which is part of a drift towards authoritarianism by the Russian political regime, is meant to renegotiate the borders of the Russian po-

litical community and extend state sovereignty into the private lives of citizens. This is marked by a definitive rupture with the international standards of human rights. Thus, the biopolitical turn has created a new disciplinary framework for the population and the elite, implemented through bans and restrictions, which has become one of the main tools for articulating the rules of belonging in the Russian political community.

This leads to two important assumptions that can be used to frame the following discussion on the nexus between civilizational biopolitics, zoepolitics, and necropolitics. First, these concepts represent three characteristics of sovereignty whose common denominator is the power of transgression. As described by the French philosopher George Bataille long ago, sovereignty cannot be reduced to a juridical configuration and comes into being when all meaningful limits are trespassed. In his interpretation, sovereignty implies:

> "life beyond all utility," that which cannot be reduced to logic, rational calculation or use-value. Indeed, sovereignty is by definition a waste of all that... Sovereignty can only take place, in other words, when rational processes of thought and calculation are deferred and self-consciousness itself hangs interrupted... Such sovereignty can be accessed only when we act without reference to that which decisionism tacitly depends upon: utility, calculation and rationality (Hirsch 2013, 291–92).

This radical deconstruction of sovereignty by detaching it from the sphere of rational governance and public good and reducing it to an un-normative war against imagined enemies should be given due attention when analyzing the genealogies of Putin's regime.

Secondly, these concepts represent three different forms of interconnection between what Giorgio Agamben dubbed "law and fact." The mutual transfusion between these is a precondition for the very functioning of the self-reproductive machine of sovereign power. The indistinction of fact and law is particularly visible in zoe- and necropolitical contexts where the legal foundations of power are shaped by a de facto status quo. One clear illustration of this is the passportization campaigns in the Russian-occupied or annexed ter-

ritories of neighboring countries and the biopolitical conversion of their residents into Russian citizens.

## THE "RUSSIAN WORLD" AND CIVILIZATIONAL BIOPOLITICS

This section applies a biopolitical lens to considering discourses on Russian civilization. A biopolitical viewpoint can help us gain a proper understanding of not only traditionalism and conservatism but also of illiberalism in a broader sense, as corporeal categories of biopower. This research lens focuses on the organicist interpretation of Russian identity. This interpretation includes a reference to the constitutive metaphor of the family and, along with it, unsolicited care monopolized by the state. The particular political aesthetics of this discourse, which are composed of literary constructs rather than clear political categories, make it metaphorical, symbolic, and easy to ground in Russian mass culture. The concept of the Russian world (RW) is a clear example of the civilizational mythology of a "vital idea" that "makes blood circulate in our bodies" (as Aleksandr Dugin once put it) and that, in the Slavophile language, goes through "times of sickness" and "recoveries." The RW is defined through two key categories which are the source of the Russian civilizational project: kinship, or belonging to a family-type pastoral community, and an imagined collective "We," with a key distinction between "a population" (a statistical entity unable to properly articulate its needs) and "the people." Subjected to biopolitical scrutiny, the over-emphasis on "spirituality" and "historical values" in the narrative on Russian civilization unveils a deeply corporeal and bodily mentality that is embedded in a masculine culture through its different normalizing interpretations and projections.

In the Kremlin discourse, the RW is imagined as a transnational diasporic community of Russian speakers who allegedly share similar cultural codes and values and can translate them beyond the collective body of the Russian nation. The biopolitical normalization and medicalization of political discourses and the policy of caretaking and protecting against imagined threats emanating from the outside are key in the discourses related to the RW. An important

component of the RW is what might be dubbed the "production of depoliticized" non-subjects (Gržinić 2018) or "bare lives" in the vocabulary of Giorgio Agamben. In other words, the utopian imagery of the RW rejects any individual or group agency that has not been produced and supervised by the state. The state imposes one single vision of a normalized society functioning as an extended version of a large family ruled not by institutions but through obedience and submission to the sovereign power.

The RW discourse is marked by medicalized metaphors such as social hygiene and the purification of the civilizational self. This suggests an allegedly "clean" ("holy") Russian collective body which is distinct from the "deviant" and "sinful" West in terms of civilization since, in radical interpretations, the West is an example of contemporary barbarity. Russia's alleged immunity and resistance to the social pathologies of liberalism are portrayed as a sign of a "healthy" civilizational body. A good example can be seen through Russia's actions during the Covid-19 pandemic. These included an assistance mission to Italy in March-May 2020 and subsequent notes of civilizational superiority in Russian mainstream discourse about the Sputnik V vaccine as an alternative to "Western" solutions.

The idea of biopolitical primordialism, which is central to the RW mythology, has been overtly articulated by Sergei Karaganov:

> What kind of national idea are you talking about? We are normal. We stick to the old-style humanism. We want children to be born. We know the meaning of human life, as acknowledged in all religions and civilizations: service to your family, country, the world, and God, as opposed to self-servicing. Such simple things. ... We are the victorious people of strong and beautiful women and brave men who have saved our country more than once in its difficult history (Skorobogatiy 2021).

Other RW zealots have added cultural, artistic, aesthetic (in the categories of Roland Bleiker), and performative (in Judith Butler's vocabulary) elements to Russian civilizational biopolitics. This has made the RW a part of "popular biopolitics." Figures such as the novelist Zakhar Prilepin, the biker Alexandr Zaldostanov and his group

"Night Wolves," as well as several politicized artists (Yulia Chicherina, Gleb Kornilov, Iosif Kobzon, Ivan Okhlobystin, etc.) have made the RW narratives highly metaphorical. This has helped turn metaphors related to the RW into generalizable and simultaneously deeply essentialist and reductionist constructs grounded in the biopolitical presumption of the "organic unity" of the Russian imperial nation.

Biopolitical caretaking, which is inherent in the RW utopia, is manifested through references to family and kinship. There is a major political divide between those who stick to a feeling of kinship and a sense of belonging to a family-type community—"ours" or an imagined collective "we"—and those whose regimes of belonging stretch beyond national boundaries. The definition of "the people," which is the source and generator of Russian civilizational biopolitics, requires biopolitical bordering and pastoral biopower. Although both biopolitical bordering and pastoral biopower are known for their liberal academic pedigree, they are drastically altered through Russian illiberal biopolitical practices.

*Pastoral biopolitics* is a concept that dates back to the works of Michel Foucault and denotes a type of power relations "stressing the value of man's obedience rather than the presupposition of human liberty" (Cooper 2019, 15). "Pastoral power" characterizes a technique of power that has religious roots and implies individual and collective stewardship, spiritual guidance, and bodily discipline. In the existing biopolitical scholarship, a pastorate is largely discussed as a type of shepherding, steering, and guiding of souls that has been used by governments as an important instrument of managerial and administrative power known as governmentality (Ojakangas 2012). In other words, contemporary governmental power in liberal democracies implies that citizens voluntarily submit to a set of consensually accepted rules, regulations, and restrictions, which preface the acceptance of and obedience to theological norms and the consequent limitations imposed by belonging to a religious community.

In illiberal regimes of power, pastoral biopolitics function quite differently. As a key biopolitical institution supporting the RW doctrine, the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) claims to take care of human lives (rather than territories). The ROC is known for harshly lambasting multiculturalism and providing moral support to homo-

phobic actions (for example, anti-LGBT initiatives). There is strong support within the ROC for a ban on abortion, the decriminalization of domestic violence, and support for antiquated religious practices such as splashing holy water on computers to fend off viruses. Some ROC priests are also openly sympathetic to Stalinism. One example is the archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin, who openly dubbed the Soviet dictator a "divine servant."

Domestically, the ROC is a key component of Russia's conservative turn. From a foreign policy perspective, the ROC's pastoral power can be characterized through the lens of conservative rhetoric that blames the West for imposing its liberal emancipatory lifestyles on Russian society. Thus, Russia's protection of the Orthodox identity is portrayed as an alternative to the West. This contributes to the distinction between "traditional," and therefore authentic, and "non-traditional," and thus unacceptable, forms of life. Consequently, distinctions between a "conservative" and "holy" Russia and a "liberally emancipatory" and "sinful" Europe are central to Russian Orthodox biopolitics and make the voices of the ROC important in the debates on biopolitical inclusion and exclusion and bordering and de-bordering.

In the extant literature, *biopolitical bordering* is described as practices of delineation between different populations (Scheel 2020, 576–77). In critical studies, borders are treated as spatial constructs combining two distinct yet mutually correlative logics, one which is geopolitical and the other biopolitical. Borders are "theorized as portable machines of sovereign power that are inseparable from the bodies they performatively produce and sort into different categories" (Vaughan-Williams 2009, 39). The correlation of geo- and biopolitical conceptualizations of boundaries, frontiers, and borderlands is part of the ongoing academic debate (Deleixhe 2019) that focuses on "dual technologies of geopolitical and biopolitical (b)ordering" (Nayar 2014, 136). Vaughan-Williams (2015, 6) speaks of a "paradigm shift from a geopolitical to a biopolitical horizon of analysis," while M.G.E. Kelly hypothesizes that the multi-layered biopolitical order "increasingly replaces the older, 'geopolitical' border," and in doing so is "classifying different kinds of residence and citizenship" (Kelly 2010, 6). In our opinion, the two horizons are not opposing alternatives but rather mutually correlative and co-constitutive.

When it comes to Russian illiberalism, biopolitical bordering once again has a distinct function. The biopolitical content of Russia's stand vis-à-vis the Euro-Atlantic West is manifested through policies of self-detachment, self-distancing, and self-isolation from what is discursively imagined and constructed as a space with radically dissimilar lifestyles of improper liberal emancipation, sinful sexuality, and disdain for what are considered "traditional" family relations and reproductive behavior. This biopolitical alienation between Russia and the West, including the EU and NATO, results from Russia's unsuccessful attempts to find its place within the liberal international system, followed by Putin's conservative resistance to Western normative hegemony.

By the same token, the biopolitical reasoning of "taking care" and "protecting" Russophones and Russia-sympathetic minorities in the so-called "near abroad," particularly in Georgia and Ukraine, created preconditions and justified a chain of events to attempt to redraw borders. This has been exemplified by Moscow's unilateral recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the annexation of Crimea, and the proxy wars in Donbas from 2014–2022, followed by the annexation and incorporation of four Eastern Ukrainian *oblasts* (Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia) into Russia in October 2022. These cases of territorial reshuffling, which are illegal under international law, were preemptively justified as "caretaking" and in accordance with the Russian version of the "responsibility to protect." They were further followed by either the mass-scale biopolitical conversion of the local population through passportization or simply by the physical occupation by the Russian Army during the war against Ukraine. The institution of citizenship has been used by the Russian government as an instrument to attach a biopolitical significance to what otherwise might be seen to be an unlawful geopolitical enlargement.

## PUTIN'S ZOEPOLITICS

Some interpretations of biopolitics in Russia assume that relations of domination are biologically predefined by certain physical characteristics inherent to human beings which determine communica-

tion between them. This outlook allows for the legitimation of muscular force and suggests an inevitable corporeal supremacy of the strongest bodies, similar to the animal world, as the basis for social and political hierarchies. This vision also implies that biopolitical dominance might be requested and even enjoyed by dependents and subalterns who prefer to be taken care of rather than practice individual freedoms (Oleskin 2016). Within this interpretative framework, bare life is not an effect produced by the sovereign power, as presumed by Agamben, but its existential precondition.

This reading of biopolitics differs from ours since it seems to ontologize the biological determination of politics and power. In our conceptual glossary, such an essentialized and reductionist vision of biopolitics better corresponds to the concept of zoepolitics. In this section, we argue that civilizational narratives reveal their zoepolitical basis in the form of the grounding of politics in the laws of wild nature and physical force. The "clash of civilizations" might be redefined as a battlefield between "animal states" eager to destroy each other, or, in a Darwinian reading of geopolitics, "the survival of the fittest." Indeed, it is within this zoepolitical context that biopolitics meets geopolitics in its most primitive and physical sense. This resignification has far-reaching foreign policy consequences. As the war against Ukraine has shown, the Russian civilizational "mission" can be conceptualized as "zoepolitical regionalism." This involves reshaping spaces and redrawing borders based on an understanding of the international arena as a violent battlefield of all against all and constitutes a major challenge to the liberal conceptualization of international society.

In biopolitical vocabulary, *zoe* is not a "pure" body but a body exposed to relations of power as their object or target. Zoepolitical sovereignty cannot think of itself other than as animality or even bestiality—that is, as the institution having a monopoly on physical and symbolic violence against all the living beings that it subjects and whose lives it constantly appropriates. For sovereignty to exist, it must appropriate the lives of nonhuman living beings (Llored 2014, 117–20).

A state claiming uncompromised and undivided sovereignty is bound to resort to an organicist discourse with zoepolitical catego-

ries at its center, defining politics through "natural" and "organic" predispositions. Thus, a combination of biopolitics and zoepolitics becomes one of the sources sustaining discourses and practices of sovereignty aimed at the illiberal normalization and even rationalization of violence, coercion, and death.

In particular, Putin's zoepolitics anchors sovereignty in a traditionalist and deeply patriarchal matrix of power relations. This matrix serves as a domain for physical survival and the inevitable application of muscular force as a key political resource. Zoepolitics offers a series of nodal points for cementing dispersed hegemonic discourses without resorting to ideological clichés. The traction of zoepolitics lies in its ability to serve as a trans-ideological and post-political substitution for public politics proper, beyond traditional left–right, conservative–liberal, or democratic–autocratic dichotomies. Zoepolitics substitutes ideologies with references to the "natural state of affairs," be it the physiology of the leader's body or comparisons between the sphere of international relations and the realm of wildlife. From this perspective, Russia's alleged return to geopolitics is, in fact, a return to zoepolitics as a battlefield for "living spaces."

Putin's metaphor of Russia as a "bear in the taiga" reveals the hidden logic behind his seemingly geopolitical actions, where the "struggle for survival" prevails over rational calculations related to long-term national interests and cost-benefit analyses. The Kremlin has returned more to social Darwinism than the commonly referenced Cold War geopolitics would imply; people are treated as zoepolitical animals, and states are believed to be able to survive only if they kill or injure other states. This zoepolitical mindset makes comparisons between Putin's regime and Nazi rule possible. In the words of Timothy Snyder, Hitler believed that human nature is defined exclusively by biological laws and that human beings are a species that identifies with similar species and kills dissimilar creatures to grab their territory and food. Within this zoepolitical thinking, the population, which is a key biopolitical category, is an "obedient biomass," rather than a nation in the European sense.

The zoepolitical perspective creates and justifies hierarchies based on masculine supremacy. An example of this can be seen in Putin's reference to his policy towards Ukraine through the folkloristic

trope: "You may like it or dislike it, my beauty, but you need to accept it." Zoepolitical logic also accepts and legitimizes a type of in-group identity that rejects normative, cultural, or ideological foundations and recognizes belonging to a human flock defined as "ours" as the crux of social interaction and cohesion. The slogan "We don't abandon ours," which since the restart of the war in Ukraine can be seen on posters all across Russia, is semantically hollow; yet it is exactly this emptiness that reflects the practical operationalization of biopolitical meanings in Russia. In the performative genre we previously dubbed "popular biopolitics" (Makarychev 2021), these posters function as floating signifiers of unity and uniformity deprived of ideational content. They are signs of bare corporeality which exceed political rationality and governmentality and, in this capacity, are normatively bare objects of transgressive and manipulative sovereign power.

One public intellectual whose interpretations of Putin's regime epitomize zoepolitical logic is Ilya Kolmanovsky, a biologist by education who systematically discusses politics through biological and zoological prisms. He explains the mass-scale inclination for violence in Russia as the result of the dehumanization and animalization of social relations under the pressure of Russian propaganda (Kolmanovsky 2022a). The widespread trope of "staying beyond politics" is, in his view, a type of voluntary and illusory self-immersion in the world of biological instincts. This ultimately creates a traumatic reluctance to accept reality. Kolmanovsky explains the proliferation of anti-Ukrainian attitudes in Russian society through the zoological hatred towards those who left "our" group and joined a different one. A similar logic applies domestically to those called "liberasts" (a derogative combination of "liberal" and "pederast") and "foreign agents." These humiliating labels are not simply language games but work to dehumanize opponents and prepare for their radical exclusion. The anti-LGBT campaign was one of the first examples of planting and inciting the further escalation of domestic hatred as a core part of a zoepolitical strategy to consolidate the in-group (Kolmanovsky 2022b). The sense of uncertainty in the case of the war against Ukraine has enhanced the state of moral panic which, in turn, has led many Russians to find refuge in soli-

darity with physical force (Kolmanovsky 2022c) as a major political argument.

## THE NECROPOLITICAL TURN

It is within the zoepolitical order that the idea of killing without committing homicide has emerged and matured, having found its academic formulation in the concept of bare life. This is not simply a life without institutional or legal protection; it is a form of life that can be terminated without consequences since impunity is integrated into and approved by the existing (bio)political order. In addition to taking biological life, stripping people of anything beyond their flesh and taking their expendable lives has become an important component within illiberal regimes. This is in part because manipulating meanings is easier among people who are politically exposed and therefore more susceptible to malign intervention. If individual life has no meaning, then the only decent and secure form of existence is membership in a biopolitical community, either national or imperial.

The "politics of the body" includes necropolitical (repressive and life-taking) components as the critical elements of the current Russian political regime. Necropolitics operates beyond institutional or administrative policies and "induces precarity as a mode of existence" (Emerson 2019, 5). The nexus of bio- and necropolitics has been explored by Achille Mbembe, who claimed that "to exercise sovereignty is to exercise control over mortality and to define life as the deployment and manifestation of power… War, after all, is as much a means of achieving sovereignty as a way of exercising the right to kill" (Mbembe 2003, 12).

Mbembe first conceived the notion of necropolitics in 2003 with an essay of the same name. In 2016, Mbembe further expanded on the concept in his book *Politiques de l'inimitié*, which was translated and published in English in 2019 as *Necropolitics* (Mbembe 2016, 2019). In defining necropolitics, Mbembe has radicalized Foucault's concept of biopolitics. In the last chapter of *The History of Sexuality (vol.1)*, Foucault noticed how biopolitics, that is, the positive power over

life, can become a deadly form of power. It is not only the "calculated management of life" (Foucault 1978, 137) but also the "power to expose a whole population to death" (140). Drawing on the genocidal experiences of the Nazi and Stalinist regimes and on the global nuclear threat, Foucault highlighted how human masses are eliminated in the name of the protection and survival of a nation, a people, and/or a class. Giorgio Agamben (1998) and Roberto Esposito (2008a) have transposed these Foucauldian observations into the notions of "*homo sacer*" and "*thanatopolitics.*" Based on explorations of the evidence from Nazi concentration camps, Agamben speaks about the sovereign right to kill with impunity; meanwhile, Esposito has examined the biological/pathological justifications for the extermination of humans.

For Mbembe, the key characteristic of necropolitics is "to produce death on a large scale" (Mbembe 2003, 39) and the "creation of death-worlds" (40). This includes seven key features of necropolitics:

1) *State terror*: The State persecutes, imprisons, and eliminates certain populations so that political and social contestations can be neutralized. Those repressive tactics are operately not only by totalitarian regimes but also by contemporary liberal and illiberal countries.

2) *The shared use of violence*: In many cases, the State does not have and willingly shares the monopoly of violence with other private actors (i.e., militias, paramilitary), increasing the circulation and use of weapons in society. The latter is therefore divided between "those who are protected (because armed) from those who are not" (Mbembe 2019, 35).

3) *The "link of enmity"*: According to Mbembe, in a society where the possession and nonpossessions of weapons define one's social value, all social bonds are destroyed. The link of enmity normalizes therefore the "idea that power can be acquired and exercised only at the price of another's life" (35).

4) *War*: "Coercion itself has become a market commodity" (36). Nowadays, war and terror have become modes of production on their own, and as such, need to generate new military markets (36).

5) *The predation of natural resources*: In order to exploit valuable natural resources, populations are displaced and eliminated (i.e. indig-

enous people in the Amazon rain forest) through the active and hidden collaboration of the State, public forces, international corporations, and criminal organizations.

6) *Different modes of killing*: The exposure to death is multiple: tortures, mutilations, mass killings, high-tech elimination through "drone strikes" represent various modalities of necropolitical devices.

7) *Different moral justifications*: According to Mbembe, atrocities are justified for various reasons such as the eradication of corruption, different types of "therapeutic liturgy," "the desire for sacrifice," "messianic eschatologies," and even "modern discourses of utilitarianism, materialism, and consumerism" (36).

Necropolitics, therefore, implies a closed entrenchment of political, economic, and military devices oriented towards the elimination of human populations (Pele, 2020). Mbembe's work is devoted not so much to classical war but rather to the necropolitics of global neoliberal capitalism, which is accused of employing colonial violence to destroy and colonize impoverished human populations. However, his methodology seems to be quite relevant for describing contemporary Russian politics. It has lucidly illuminated the necropolitical potential of illiberal regimes exemplified by the Navalny and the Skripal poisonings and the murder of Boris Nemtsov and other opponents of the regime. By the same token, the necropolitical components of the Russian regime have been amplified and boosted by memory politics, with the idea of an "unfinished World War II" at its center. Finally, the necropolitics of Putin's regime has shaped Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine. This is necropolitics in its purest form, evoking all the above-mentioned features in the most lethal conflict in Europe since World War II.

Another part of necropolitics is the public legitimation of a discourse of collective death, physical or symbolic, that circulates in the public space. Legitimacy is enacted through references to a "glorified death" for the motherland or indirect allusions such as "no Putin—no Russia," a maxim coined by Viacheslav Volodin in 2014 (Stephenson 2022). The idea of a glorious death has been regularly implanted into Putin's narrative: "You have to live because of something you can die for," he pathetically mentioned in September 2022.

Before that, he claimed that even in the case of a nuclear war, "we will ascend to heaven while they will be burned in hell." The flip side of Putin's necropolitics is the dehumanization of those who have been designated Russia's "enemies," both domestic and external. Some scholars see a connection between this death discourse and "the nihilist tradition of the end of the nineteenth century, for which destruction is not 'a means but an end in itself': it would be purifying and redemptive" (Tertrais 2022).

The connection between the necropolitical "right to kill" and the state of exception (Alpin 2020, 16) paves the way for the idea of "monstrosity" which, in a Foucauldian reading, is exemplified by a radical transgression of norms, lawlessness, an eruption of violence, barbarity, and inhumanity. Monstrosity is a subversive and cruel force that instantiates its own rules, "a self-contained exception," an "absolute singularity" at the intersection of the impossible and the forbidden (Mercier 2019, 110). "Through the figure of the monster, biopolitics has always been a necro- or thanatopolitics: there have always been designated 'monsters' that one allows himself or herself to kill, to make die or to let die, in the name of a perceived 'biological danger'" (Mercier 2019, 114).

Apparently, necropolitics contains a powerful depoliticizing effect that is achieved through the intentional proliferation of fear and exposure of human lives to physical abuse and coercion. The flip side of the *civilizational biopolitics, zoepolitics,* and *necropolitics* triad is not only the production of docile and obedient bodies but also the prevention of politically meaningful counter-discourses that could potentially challenge the utopia of a uniform, collective body of the Russian imperial nation.

## IS IT FASCISM YET?

Due to its Western political pedigree, the concept of fascism is rarely applied to non-Western regimes. However, for many authors, the objectives of Russian authoritarian illiberalism and Putin's dictatorial powers indicate a new form of Russian fascism. This is grounded in the necropolitical denial of the national subjectivity of Ukraine

and is coupled with the idea of the domestic purification of Russian nationhood from those "who embrace feminism, secularism, LGBT rights, and liberal tolerance" (Stanley and Stern 2022). Yet where shall we look for the genealogy of discourses on fascism in contemporary Russia? Neither institutions nor the economy can be helpful in this respect. We consider that these discourses are framed by nuanced or entirely invisible signs of a totalitarian "closure" with keywords such as a "pure" or organic (comm)unity, gender hierarchy and/or hegemonic masculinity, and bio-racism, and demands by the sovereign power for life sacrifice. Russian civilizational bio-, zoe-, and necropolitics are important concepts that can be used to understand the form and function of the developing debates surrounding the fascist categorizations of Putin's regime. Three perspectives in this debate seem to be of major importance.

Let us start with a *political* perspective. Inevitable historical connotations embedded in the use of the term fascism make it hard to reach beyond the rhetoric of analogical reasoning and evidential thinking. As one journalist presumed, it is only after the atrocities committed by the Russian army in Bucha that we can consider labeling Russia as a fascist state which commits crimes similar to Nazi Germany during World War II (Vagner 2022). As further proposed by journalist Evgeniya Albats, Putin is comparable to Hitler due to the scale and scope of the destruction and deaths that the war in Ukraine has caused (Albats2022). A similar political approach was articulated by Akhmed Zakaev, the head of the Chechen government in exile, who characterized the regime of Ramzan Kadyrov as fascist due to its inherent characteristics of physical extermination of opponents, homophobia, and disdain for human rights. To that list, he adds specific examples of the constant search for external enemies and the manipulative instrumentalization of religion (Zakaev 2022) to the point of calling for "Jihad" against Ukraine (Khodorkovsky Live 2022).

Most politicians referring to fascism attribute it not only to the Russian state but also to Russian society at large. Vladimir Milov, a Russian opposition figure, justifies the characterization of Russia as a fascist society through the series of war crimes committed by Russian soldiers in Ukraine, which he relates to the functioning of

a dehumanizing killing machine in Russia (Milov 2022). In his view, fascism is characteristic of a society where simple persons become criminals and murderers serving a state that has politically appropriated the victory over Nazi Germany and interpreted this victory as indulgence and immunity. Grigoriy Yavlinsky (2022), another Russian politician critical of Putin's regime, agrees that Russia might face the phenomenon of fascism from below. Similar assessments also come from the left wing of the European political spectrum, including from Slavoj Zizek (2023) who suggests that Russia needs to de-Nazify itself.

At the same time, Mikhail Khodorkovsky (2022) deems that it is the shock of the war that is bringing Russia towards fascism. He implies that the military invasion of Ukraine has not been a symptom but rather an amplifier of the feelings of resentment and inherent weakness that, as we know from the German experience, could become fertile ground for fascist ideology.

From an *academic* perspective rooted in biopolitical scholarship, fascism presupposes the creation of a self-enclosed, "natural," "organic" community with a common genetic heritage. This attributes social relations and political problems to biological causes (Lemke 2011, 11). The zoe- and necropolitical turn in Russia is part of a counter-reaction to the globalist utopia brought about by the end of the Cold War and constitutes a subsequent re-actualization of the "blood and soil" narrative that was fundamental for fascist regimes of the twentieth century (Medvedev 2022b). At the same time, Russian fascism, exemplified in particular (2022b) by the late Vladimir Zhirinovsky, is based on a self-inflicted sense of offense and resentment which in a matter of two decades transformed into something similar to the "jealousy of an abandoned husband." This made Ukrainians identify with Jews in Nazi Germany. Some authors (Snyder 2018) spotted the roots of Putin's predilection for fascism years ago in the philosophy of Ivan Ilyin, while others (Galeotti 2022) have pointed to figures such as Nikolai Patrushev, the head of the Russian Security Council, as sources of fascist trends in Putin's inner circle.

Greg Yudin (2022), a Russian political sociologist, draws direct comparisons between Putin's Russia and Hitler's Germany:

> The obsession with the essence of the Ukrainian nation and its equivalence to the Russian nation is what stands out as a particularly Nazi element rather than just a fascist one… In February [2022], however, it turned into purely essentialist rhetoric,implying that Ukrainian essence, which is allegedly Russian by nature, has been contaminated by some Nazi element… The Russian Ministry of Defense is already talking about setting up "filtration" procedures in the occupied territories. And since Ukrainians are resisting stubbornly, the only possible explanation is that they were even more "nazified" than expected, which could easily lead to the conclusion that they deserve to be wiped out. The same "purity" narrative was used by Putin … when he spoke of the "enemy within," the so-called "nation-traitors" who should be "spit out like a moth" by the Russian society in order to preserve its health.

In a similar vein, Timothy Snyder (2023) dubbed the Russian invasion of Ukraine a "eugenic war" that, apart from being genocidal towards Ukrainians, is attempting "to build a 'healthier' Russian *Volk* by way of struggle." This argument fits nicely into Marlene Laruelle's definition of fascism as "a mythology of regenerating the nation's body through violence" (Wright and Laruelle 2022). Despite this definition, Laruelle refuses to apply fascist characteristics to Russia. This denial disregards the fact that ideas of a "new nation" have been overtly proposed and discussed by Sergei Kirienko, deputy head of the presidential administration, who has directly appealed to the necessity of transforming the so-called "special military operation" into a "people's war."

German analyst Andreas Umland (2022) points out revolutionary elements in Putin's regime, which seems to be another important argument in the debate. Putin's radical mutiny against the hegemonic regime of the international system established after the end of the Cold War has escalated to nuclear warmongering and attests to the anti-status-quo militant populism in Putin's attempts to dislodge the bases of international law. To some extent, this populism is revolutionary in the way it challenges norms and suggests a readiness to destroy and annihilate the old-world order for the sake of a "new Russia" (Novorossiya). Shortly after Russia re-started the war in

Ukraine, authors such as Margarita Zavadskaya (2022) and Marlene Laruelle (Laruelle and Umland 2020) suggested that the Kremlin was disinterested in mass-scale patriotic mobilization; however, a mobilization campaign was launched by Putin in September of 2022. This became a core component of his radical escalation of the war, aimed at the creation of a new Russian state and the regeneration of a Russian imperial utopia.

In Yudin's (2023) interpretation, the characteristics of fascism are more applicable to Russia's sovereign power than to Russian society. Although the state has tried to embed fascist notions in the entire country by destroying horizontal societal links and, consequently, consolidating the political community from the top, the ultimate success of these endeavors is not evident. Of utmost importance for our analysis is the way Yudin unpacks fascism as an inherently corporeal phenomenon that propagates a vision of life as a constant struggle for survival where major resources are not normative power but brute force and the ability to spread somatic fear. Mikhail Epstein's concept of "schizo-fascism" seems to add new colors to the debate as well. He notes that this

> manifests itself in a hysterical hatred of freedom, democracy, everything foreign, and people of a different identity, as well as in the hunt for enemies and traitors among one's own people. However, this chauvinist worldview now finds itself suffering a schizophrenic schism with its desire to enjoy the very benefits the "enemy" provides: real estate abroad, the privilege of giving your children an education in "Gayrope" and "Yankostan," concealing your accounts in foreign banks, and so on (Epstein 2022).

Needless to say, the very idea of a "happy life" in its Agambenian interpretation is denied in this perspective.

Finally, there is a *cultural* perspective to the debate. As Dmitry Bykov (2022c), a top Russian novelist, puts it, Russian fascism is "an ecstatic enjoinment to misbehave" propagated by mass-scale brainwashing in the media. Therefore, shoots of fascism can be seen as products of performative propaganda and what the French political philosopher Guy Debord dubbed "the society of the spectacle." This

logic is synonymous with the assumption that "no culture, not even in 'the best of all possible worlds,' can shield us from becoming the barbarians. Civilization and Auschwitz are not a contradiction in terms" (Rosenberg 2022).

For Bykov, fascism comes in a variety of national versions and is not an ideology but rather a state of the collective psyche that exalts impunity and permissiveness. In this sense, fascism is inevitable for nations in the making that assert themselves by differentiating their image from that of others who might easily be nominated for a vacant position as enemies (Bykov 2022a). Fascism is also a counter-reaction to the rationality of modernity and is grounded in the cult of irrationality as the opposite of the calculable, measurable, pragmatic, controllable, and administrable model of post-politics and power known as governmentality. Fascism is based on political will, combined with mystique and sacral truths, and resists the advent of a new generation that is qualitatively freer and more emancipated. According to this definition, we can consider that, for Bykov, Ukraine exemplifies a global and cosmopolitan future that Putin is fighting against. Within this mental frame, progress is less meaningful than the desire to compensate for an inherent inferiority complex by humiliating others. Due to their affection for the past as a defensive gesture against the new world-in-the-making, Putin and his clique always refer to the dead generation, appealing to them and treating them as their imagined supporters. In this regard, Bykov (2022d) looks at fascism from a reversed necropolitical perspective and characterizes it as the "power of spiritually dead people"; although they are dead, this does not make them less dangerous. What started with Putin's lamentations about Russia as a "divided nation" has transformed into the denial of Ukraine's subjectivity and the necropolitical rejection of the very right of the Ukrainian people to exist (Skobov 2022) through attempts to violently include Ukraine within Russia's political politic. This inclusion requires the purification of Ukrainians of everything that the Kremlin would consider incompatible with Russia's self-perception as a peculiar and exceptional civilization (Umland 2022).

From a cultural perspective, Russian self-exceptionalism is fertile ground for fascism, as can be found in the iconic Russian films

"Brother" and "Brother-2." These films were released in the late 1990s, much before the current political and academic debate on fascism had begun. Both the original movie and its sequel were replete with performative images justifying a Russian self-constructed exceptionalism, which evoked disdain for and a growing feeling of resentment toward the West (Ablotia 2022). Reference to Russian mass culture might be an important contribution to the ongoing discussion on whether the attack against Ukraine is "Putin's war" or "Russia's war."

These three clusters of narratives show that thinking of fascism as a mere "labeling technique" (Wright and Laruelle 2022) would be simplistic, misleading, and even confusing. Equally questionable would be denying the fascistization of society by referencing the lack of demand for militaristic adventurism in the country and the usurpation of power by a gerontocratic elite (Shulman 2022). As an alternative conceptualization, we approach fascism not as a regime type but as a discursive practice that, in the specific Russian context, fills a void resulting from rupture with the West and the ensuing self-isolation. In our reading, fascism is grounded in a particular type of narrative and, therefore, has its own language. This narrative starts with the biologization of sovereignty as, and its reduction to, a form of organic corporeality. For us, fascism is always a matter of degree and scope (Magun 2010) and exposes itself through particular practices rather than structurally characterizing the regime as a whole. It is a performative and aesthetic phenomenon (Zaidman 2022) that grows out of a combination of frustration, apathy, and a lack of strong normative landmarks.

Largely due to this performativity, Russian fascism, without being named as such, has generally been perceived as theatrical and thus not sufficiently dangerous. As one Russian commentator noted: "We ridiculed and laughed at them and missed the point" (Gubin 2022). It turned out that fascist narratives and practices are adaptable not only to the conditions of post-industrialism (Skobov 2023) but also to the postmodernist "society of the spectacle." The most illustrative example of this is the scandalous appeal of a Russian TV journalist who is openly gay to "drown" Ukrainian children (Krasovskiy 2022). This and several similar examples of performative necropolitics sug-

gest that theatrical speech acts and imaginaries produced by the Kremlin-loyal media industry are not simply decorative and symbolic side effects of Putin's regime; rather, they play an important role as producers of necropolitical meanings. In turn, these meanings generate fertile ground for the proliferation of fascist aesthetics in Russian society. We will come back to this argument in Chapter 4 of this book.

## CONCLUSIONS

This chapter contributes to the ongoing debate on Russia's political agency which, something that remains enigmatic for many researchers. From this analysis, we emphasize that it would be misleading to view Putin's regime as merely reacting to unfavorable developments such as domestic uprisings against Putin or Ukraine's drift towards the Euro-Atlantic West. The triad of *civilizational biopolitics*, *zoepolitics*, and *necropolitics* demonstrates that Putin's project is not reactive but explicitly transgressive.

Russia's model of civilizational biopolitics is grounded in the logic of "spiritual health" and family values as fundamental elements for constructing a conservative majority domestically and in projecting these norms externally. The clearly articulated biopolitical distinction between a "conservative" and "holy" Russia and a "liberally emancipatory," "perverted," and "morally corrupt" Europe serves as a good example of the biopolitics of sovereign power. Anti-multiculturalism, homophobic actions, and religious diplomacy are specific policy fields in which Russia constructs its subjectivity by differentiating itself from Europe, the latter of which is often portrayed as a civilization in decline infected by a "virus" that needs treatment.

In the meantime, Russia's biopolitical strategy involves a series of exceptional measures applied to residents of Russia-friendly countries. Examples include granting equal rights to Armenian citizens employed in Russia, exceptions for eastern Ukrainians to apply for Russian citizenship more easily, and the distribution of Russian passports to residents in the breakaway territories of Transnistria, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia. Considering these measures, the concept

of the Russian world can be approached as an inherently biopolitical construct that projects the idea of an imagined global community of Russophones who allegedly require care and protection by Moscow. At the same time, we see the dangers of civilizational biopolitics as an extra-ideological phenomenon through the way Russia has tested its capacity to threaten international peace and security. This is clearly demonstrated in Russia's actions aimed at pushing neighboring territories to fall within Moscow's self-assigned "sphere of interests." This shows how biopolitics directly impacts geopolitical issues and might be further extended to the Kremlin's contacts with Western right-wing parties and groups that adhere to biopolitical agendas such as promoting pro-family and anti-LGBTQ policies, enabling a strong nexus between the church and state, and fostering anti-migration and often Islamophobic narratives. This partnership has some reverberations for Russia's bio- and geopolitical construction of Europe as a civilization in a state of moral decay and a source of sexual deviations and "abnormal" pleasures.

Putin's sovereignty does not necessitate a coherent ideology that is supplementedby various bio-, zoe-, and necropolitical utopias meant to imaginatively construct Russia's transgressive agency as an untamed force fighting against the global power holders. Rather than prescribing to the liberal definition of biopolitics in terms of governmentality, responsibilization, investments in human capital, the emancipation of lifestyles, and the pursuit of a "happy life," illiberal regimes exploit bodily vulnerabilities and produce a sense of permanent fear as a governing tool both domestically and internationally.

Our exploration of the bio-, zoe-, and necropolitical triad can serve as an academic contribution to the debate on Russia's war in Ukraine. More specifically, it can act as an argument against using the explanation of the "invisible hands" of structural factors such as NATO's and EU's expansion as core elements of the post-Cold War international society in the Euro-Atlantic West. Instead of starting from the failure of the spheres-of-influence model of international politics in a wider Europe, we propose looking more closely at and probing into the underlying characteristics of Putin's rule. As we show, this rule is illustrative of Russia's political agency as a combi-

nation of civilizational biopolitics, force-based zoepolitical sovereignty, and the necropolitical "right to kill," accompanied by the glorification of a "patriotic death." These agential factors are core to understanding perspectives on the future transmutations of Russia's regime and its toxic repercussions for the international system.

CHAPTER TWO

# PERFORMATIVE BIOPOWER AND BIOPOLITICAL ACTIVISM

In this chapter, we consider a variety of performative engagements with political dimensions of life and death in order to expand the discussion on Russian biopower. Our theoretical starting point is the performative nature of representations (Stengel and Nabers 2019, 259). We treat these representations as aesthetic phenomena which are critically important in studying biopolitics (Williams 2018, 888). Considering the changing nature of sovereignty, one may argue that nowadays "representation mutates into performance (understood in the theatrical, or, better yet, the television sense), the concept of the public, as opposed to the private, is transformed, in turn, into a public represented by the media" (Esposito 2019, 321).

To a large extent, biopolitics fits into the paradigms of post-truth in the sense that ideologies are increasingly substituted by the growing transparency and visibility of issues pertaining to human sexuality and physiology. Likewise, it is relevant for debates surrounding post-politics in the way policies of life enhancement are becoming more managerial and technological. For us, performativity reaches far beyond the theatricality of politics in two important ways. First, the concept of performativity suggests a type of agency that is not based on a consolidated, aggregated, or overarching identity. Through this prism, identity itself should be seen as a series of actions that might be semiotically dissociated from one another and which lack a uniform script. Under closer scrutiny, the grand nar-

rative that tries to cement a collective identity turns out to be dispersed, fragmented, and inconsistent. This description offers a pertinent frame for analyzing Putin's regime and its eclectic ideational base, which is reflected in a variety of discursive and performative genres selected for this analysis. The protagonists of this chapter come from different social and cultural backgrounds; some are singers, while others turn out to be writers or even bike riders.

Second, performativity should not be viewed simply as an auxiliary addition to the political toolkit. Apparently, it is exactly the sphere of performativity that generates political meanings constitutive of biopower and biopolitics. In artistic interpretation, performativity is inherently corporeal, always pushing "the limits of what could be political" (Kunst 2017, 94) through resistance to and the debunking and disbanding (Lepecki 2017, 16) of hegemonic meanings. This argument seems to be in line with a broader approach to the domain of aesthetics as a producer of relations of contestation and antagonism which are central to politics.

In this chapter, we look at how biopolitical narratives and imaginaries are constructed as platforms both for the pro-Kremlin performative mainstream and for the cultural activism performed by its radical opponents. Although the concept of biopolitical activism has been previously defined (Sützl and Hug 2012, 8), it still remains unpacked and understudied. In this section, we work to fill this gap. We find that in approaching biopolitical activism it may be helpful "to understand 'biopolitics' not only as a project of elites and experts, but as a complex social and cultural transformation, a discourse—a set of ideas and practices—that shaped not merely the machinations of social engineers, but patterns of social behavior much more broadly" (Dickinson 2004, 1).

## SOVEREIGN BIOPOWER AND BIOPOLITICAL DYSTOPIA

We approach performative representations as part of the operational logic of Russian sovereign biopower which is embedded in the Kremlin's security strategy. Russian security thinking involves a highly militarized discourse aimed not at preventing a major war

but rather at preparing to ultimately win it, regardless of the enormous human and material losses. Different performative tools and strategies determine both interpretations of security policies and ways of thinking about and creating them. Central questions consider how this representational force is structured, what strategies of aestheticization are applied, and what meanings are generated and transmitted to the public.

One of the reference points for our analysis is the idea of biopolitical utopia. This was discussed by a group of authors as a series of interventions and experiments by the state aimed at "perfecting its citizens" (Byers and Stapleton 2015, 5). In the case of Russia, however, we prefer to speak about biopolitical dystopia. While this concept has been conceptualized and applied by some authors in different contexts (Huebert 2017), it remains relatively loosely defined.

In the sphere of popular performativity, the pro-Putin biker club ***Night Wolves*** is an illustrative example of the interconnections between bio-, zoe-, and necropolitics. In their 2022 bike show called "Russian Forest," the group performatively articulated the idea of Russian authenticity and purity in conjunction with a set of peculiar environmental allusions demonstrating this interconnectedness. The "Forest" was metaphorically depicted as the cradle of Russian civilization, a source of traditional folklore, and constitutive of a religious mystique of salvation and immortality. Furthermore, it was artistically imagined and performed as a natural milieu for Russians who enjoy an inherently pagan harmony with mushrooms, plants, trees, bushes, moss, berries, and wild animals. This seemingly politically innocent interpretation becomes consequential for constructing Russian identity through the metaphor of "the empire of the Russian forest." In this metaphor, a key inhabitant is Yemelya, the protagonist of Russian fairy tales who is known for his laziness and yet is ultimately capable of rising from the comfort of his village stove to acquire a subversive agency of his own. This agency is mainly physical and muscular, and the plot of the show depicts the hero's forceful vigilance towards aliens and strangers who wish to conquer Russia and destroy its forest paradise. It is at this point that the forest becomes a symbol of death; the show's narration exclaims that "it is better to perish than to live on one's knees." At the same time,

it is a symbol of resurrection and presents a battlefield against a beast that exemplifies the inimical and aggressive West destroying "our motherland," the "Red Empire" of the Soviet Union. The metaphoric allusions become crystal clear at the end of the performance when Russia is proclaimed to be the natural pivot of the globe whose role is equated with that of the sun in the universe of planets (Nochnye Volki 2022a).

The case of the Night Wolves illustrates that Russian patriotic performativity, with all its dystopian ideas, might reach far beyond cultural terrain and become a physical force. Under the leadership of Alexandr Zaldostanov, the bikers' club participated as a paramilitary unit in the war in Donbas (Nochnye Volki2022b). In this sense, the Night Wolves are important contributors to the whole continuum of bio-, zoe-, and necropolitics. Their biopolitical practices, which exemplify an obsession with saving the world from satanism, spill over to a necropolitical fraternity with Ramzan Kadyrov's squad which destroyed Mariupol in 2022. The Night Wolves' performative necropolitics is grounded in a peculiar form of aesthetics. The annual ceremonial march known across Russia as "The Immortal Regiment" serves as a good illustration of the quasi-religious cult of the dead pragmatically utilized as a justification for new wars. Furthermore, the necropolitical mobilization is symbolically and metaphorically approved by those who have already passed away and cannot speak for themselves (Glukhovsky 2022).

Our next protagonist is ***Yulia Chicherina,*** a popular singer and musician who was not politically active before 2014. However, after the annexation of Crimea and the commencement of the *Novorossiya* project, she frequently traveled to the occupied Donbas region and was bestowed with a passport of the so-called Luhansk People's Republic. She is another good example of the bio-/zoe-/necropolitical nexus. Her "patriotically" biopolitical lyrics soon transformed into representations of war as a natural extension of the "honest and true" self-other distinction and the struggle between good and evil. This is best epitomized in her song *Please* (2016) which is dedicated to a girl in Donbas who, according to the song, was killed by a Ukrainian military jet. In Chicherina's view, it is Europe, supported by America, that made Ukrainians betray their "historical unity with

Russia for material gains and profits that will ultimately turn illusory." She sees Russia as a leading anti-Western force and directly glorifies death through images of how a Russian nuclear strike might destroy the United States (Chicherina 2023a).

Singing World War II songs in the occupied and devastated Mariupol (Chicherina 2022), she called on [Russian?] soldiers to "go where death rules," adding a religious element to the war ("fast and pray before the fight with Ukrainians") (Chicherina i Apachev 2023). In her video recorded address to the Armed Forces of Ukraine, she said that "we came to stop your crimes and make you surrender, after which you will be purified in our camps to make you part of the Russian world again. For us, this is the real freedom we have been dreaming about" (Chicherina 2023b).

***Vika Tsyganova*** is another Russian singer and performer of idealized Russian "authenticity" and victimized purity (Tsyganova 2020). In her song titled "Give them Fire, Donbas" (Tsyganova 2023b), she lays the groundwork for a merger of representations of Russian-Ukrainian "brotherhood" and "kinship" with direct appeals for violence and murder. In her necropolitical imagery, Russia, which is represented through the metaphor of a bear, punishes external enemies and expects "everything as it should be." Like Chicherina, Tsyganova plays with the visualized image of "nuclear mushrooms" as a sign of Russia's unused power over the West (Tsyganova 2023a). Her song "The Fire of Change" is a clear allusion to and a resignification of the song "Our Hearts Require Changes" by Viktor Tsoi, who was a voice of the perestroika generation. Unlike the socially liberal connotations of Tsoi's political performativity of the 1980s, Tsyganova's songs are immersed in a mystical narrative of "executing a sacral order." This performativity synthesizes a red communist banner with the image of Christ as a double-edged sign of imperial universality (Tsyganova 2022). At the same time, her song "Some Are in the Trenches, Some in Dubai" lambastes compatriots who are insufficiently "patriotic" and who prefer material benefits, profits, and the "good life" to what she terms the "defense of the motherland" (Tsyganova 2023c).

Since the resumption of Russian aggression against Ukraine in February 2022, the musical part of Russian "popular biopolitics" has

further expanded. One of the newcomers has been the singer nicknamed ***Shaman*** who has become a young voice for the newest form of Russian patriotic nationalism. His performative biopolitics started with a composition titled "We," in which he created the image of a unified and consolidated nation ready to fight. Bellicosity and militarization appear to be the flip side of biopolitical uniformity as a precondition for the collective national self. By the same token, as numerous commentators have noticed, the song's aesthetics contained implicit allusions to fascism. In addition to the fact that the song was released on Hitler's birthday, Shaman is featured in the video with an armband in the colors of the Russian flag that visually resembles the Nazi symbol (Shaman 2023c).

Shaman's performative aesthetics are illustrative of the short distance between bio- and necropolitics. His performance started with a romanticized image of Russia as a big family ("My Russia") (Shaman 2023b) and a celebration of Russianness "in the teeth of the whole world" ("I am Russian") (Shaman 2022b). However, this soon translated into a "blood and soil" rhetoric ("My blood is from my father") and ended with explicitly necropolitical connotations. In one of his video clips, he calls on audiences to "rise up for those who are not with us any more to be closer to them" (Shaman 2022a). The metaphor of a "free wind" ("I just want to breathe") ultimately laid the groundwork for projecting cultural references of the Great Patriotic War onto the war against Ukraine. This projection has apparent necropolitical allusions which can be seen in his song "Confession," where he sings, "allow me to bear my hard burden and perish if need be" (Shaman 2023a).

Another typical example of patriotic music that can be approached from a biopolitical perspective is the ***Zveroboy*** band, whose lyrics celebrate and glorify the allegedly unchallengeable authenticity of Russia. This is narrated through tropes such as self-sacrifice and a readiness to die for the motherland. The circular bio-temporality of this narrative automatically connects the current "protective" and "defensive" war in Ukraine with all previous wars fought by Russia and the Soviet Union in the past (Zveroboy 2017). Russianness in this context is performed as an imminent, organic, and essentialized spiritual category which is detached from history and has re-

mained stable for centuries. This conveniently corresponds to the biopolitical mythology of the Russian world. It is small wonder that the annexation and occupation of Ukrainian territories have been represented in *Zveroboy*'s imagery as "the return of the motherland" (Zveroboy 2022b) with its functions of care and protection. This imagery reached its peak with the song titled "My Mariupol," which glorifies the land grab of a Ukrainian city devastated by the Russian army and annexed in spring 2022 as a reunification with kindred people (Zveroboy 2022a).

With the cases of the individual singers presented above in mind, we reconsider the discussion on fascism through the lens of performative and aesthetic practices grounded not in ideology in the traditional meaning of the term, but as "a faith which could not be explained solely in rational terms" (Mosse 1996, 246). Coming back to the discussion in Chapter 1, we agree that "fascism is, to a considerable extent, a phenomenon of style. In fascist systems a 'pure' ideology which would offer itself to structuralist description can hardly be found" (Schmid 2005, 138). This interpretation justifies an approach to fascism as a "biopolitical regime" grounded in the idea of a "natural order." This order allows the sovereign power to divide the population into privileged citizens and those who can be killed, tortured, or segregated (Abbinnett 2020, 3). What we challenge is the attribution of "a new economy of fascist politics" to "the industrial democracies of the West" (Abbinnett 2020, 20). Putin's regime has created a performative space for the resurrection of fascist allusions in the aesthetics of Russian popular culture. This has been further amplified by the war against Ukraine.

***Zakhar Prilepin*** is a novelist who, in 2015, moved to Donbas and joined the Russia-supported occupying forces in eastern Ukraine. He is highly visible in Russian media and is known as one of the most fervent zealots of the "Russian world."

Prilepin's biopolitical actions are grounded in the primacy of muscular force as the defining feature and resource of any political relations. He views the Russian imperial nation through the prism of a multi-ethnic militarized brotherhood devoid of any ideological distinctions: "Ivan, Khasan, Mykola, and that one from Buryatia are all ours" (Prilepin 2023, 15). He refuses to divide the hybrid national

political community along traditional lines such as left and right, liberal and conservative. Instead, he draws a necropolitical line between those who are ready to fight and die and those who are not. This distinction within the collective body of the nation seems to be constitutive for analyzing Prilepin's public pronouncements from a biopolitical perspective. He advocates for the need to purify Russia from those he refers to pejoratively as "liberals" who don't want to pay any price for what he and his associates glorify as the "Russian world."

Even if Prilepin does not himself use the term "biopolitical," we see his biopolitical imaginary as ostensibly anti-Foucauldian. For him, the state is not a function within the apparatuses of governmentality but the analog of a biological organism that has physical roots. Having identified and located these roots in Kyiv as "the mother of Russian cities," Prilepin adds a strong necropolitical flavor to his dystopian worldview by justifying mortal violence and war as a means of safeguarding the Russian "organic community" from "domestic others," including liberal sympathizers and collaborators with the West.

Thus, bellicose biopolitics translates into a peculiar version of necropolitics with two mutually constitutive facets. One boils down to a symbolic and largely performative reference to the dead generations of ancestors as full members of the Russian (bio)political community. As Prilepin states, "Russia is inhabited by much more than 145 million. It hosts the 5 million who lived in ancient Rus, the 7 million Russians who were alive in the time of Ivan the Terrible, the 15 million who populated the country when Peter the Great was ruling, the 37 million who lived under Catherine the Great, and the 170 million who survived the Great Patriotic War… They are watching us… Does death make their voices invalid?" (Prilepin 2023, 3). Another facet of necropolitics is the centrality of death in contemporary political imagery. Deaths during war are not mourned but rather celebrated and transformed into objects of necropolitical pride. For this to occur, the people inhabiting a country must live absolutely bare lives. Any attempts to overcome this bio- and necropolitical bareness through institutions, laws, or practices of consumption are perceived as betrayals and thus vehemently rejected.

From the theoretical perspective of biopolitics, Prilepin's clearly articulated distance from the locus of sovereign power is perhaps the most puzzling element of his narrative. In his book *Coordinate Z*, based on his personal experiences of fighting against Ukraine in Donbas, Prilepin calls Putin "the Emperor." In doing so, he underscores the pronounced distance between him as the far-away holder of supreme power and the so-called volunteers on the battlefield risking their lives. In interviews, he has criticized the entire model of Russian statehood which, in his view, divides people into categorical groups. According to his interpretation, the military is simply one of these divisions, along with public servants, artists and performers, athletes, businessmen, and so forth. In his opinion, this explains the relative indifference to the war in Donbas by urban middle- and upper-class individuals who keep living their regular and ordinary "happy lives." In Foucauldian language, this model somehow resembles a peculiar version of governmentality. A similar attitude is discernible in Zveroboy's composition "Militiaman" (*Opolchenets*), where the lyrics provide yet another example of the distance between the Russian version of minutemen and the state: "My motherland has fallen asleep… In the crystal sarcophagus of the state, a drunken tsar was enthroned who whispered, 'fall asleep.' And she slept for many years" (Zveroboy 2018).

These examples illuminate the intricate relations between sovereign power and the politics of the body in its bio- or necropolitical version. The idea of biopolitical sovereignty, implying the alleged inevitability of a merger between biopower and sovereign power, does not necessarily hold true in the case of Russia. It is through the lens of performativity that we see how biopolitical and necropolitical narratives fluctuate beyond, and in conjunction with, the domain of sovereignty.

## THE BIOPOLITICS OF PERFORMATIVE RESISTANCE

On the opposite side of the political spectrum, we find a variety of performative projects aimed at ridiculing and disparaging Putin's sovereignty. The way in which various artistic and activist projects

use the human body as their creative medium in order to challenge Putin's project of sovereignty is rather telling. By using their bodies, they reclaim, among other things, the individual body and people's private lives. The body therefore appears to be a contested territory between authority and the individual and represents how biopower can be confronted by bio-activism.

In the current age of war, the Russian government has increasingly intervened in issues related to life and death, and the latter has become a contested issue. The politicization of death has already been discussed in academic literature related to decolonialism (Tlostanova 2011, 40). A pertinent example of this can be seen in ***Party of the Dead*** (PD), created by Maxim Evstropov, a philosopher and musician from St. Petersburg. In his 2020 manifesto, "Party of the Dead: From Necrorealism to Necroactivism," Evstropov characterized PD as an anarchist group of activist artists and performers who metaphorically detach themselves from the community of the living. In the meantime, he argues, they radicalize the idea of Russia as a country with ubiquitous necropolitical practices and which lacks a decent future. The Party mocks the obsession with rituals such as the "Immortal Regiment" which they claim use the idea of sacral victimization to support the image of Russian glory. The PD ridicules Russia's self-assertion through wars that entail immense casualties and the subsequent glorification of militarization. These types of wars promote the idea of necro-imperialism, in which death is considered the only solution to numerous problems (Volchek 2022). In its performances, PD exposes Putin's necropolitics as the de facto de-subjectivation of dead soldiers by the Russian government, which is notoriously known to abandon corpses on the battlefields of the war in Ukraine (Partiya Miortvykh 2022). PD also held protests against the changes in the Russian Constitution that allowed Putin to stay in power for another two terms. It is notable that these changes were made based on claims that a popular referendum on this issue during the pandemic revealed the attitude of the state toward its own people as a biomass (Partiya Miortvykh 2020).

In its public appearances, PD problematizes the boundary between the living and the dead by presuming that the former are not as alive as they seem to be, while the latter have not necessarily disappeared

(Pavlova 2019). In this vein, PD's public performances parody the atmosphere of a medieval plague with multiple and inevitable casualties. It is the symbolic agency of the dead that constitutes the core of PD's vision of performative necropolitics. The dead are the most radical exception, excluded from politics and voiceless. At the same time, the dead also exemplify equality and freedom (Partiya Miortvykh 2021) beyond identity politics. Due to their detachment from life, it is impossible to defeat the dead because of their very non-existence.

The PD project is a radical performative challenge to the pro-Kremlin project of the "Immortal Regiment." This project has grown into a hegemonic narrative, referring to and associating with the generations that have passed away and whose legacy is misused to justify militarism and aggression. Evstropov speaks ironically about the "patriotic dead," who are used for symbolic purposes by the Kremlin. He explains that his activism is a response to this symbolic repurposing and offers an alternative meaning of the dead (Evstropov 2022) as those who are against violence and repression. At one of PD's protests in Tbilisi, where the group emigrated in September 2022, one of the activists said that "for the sake of glorifying those who were killed in a previous war, our state deems the current killing of hundreds of thousands appropriate" (Partiya Miortvykh 2022a).

The sarcastic necro-politicization of death by PD challenges the monopoly of the church and state to speak on behalf of the dead and therefore to sacralize the bygone past (TV2 2018). In this light, PD's activism is an important way of explaining that "what the dead say may only be the projections of what we want to hear" (Davis 2004, 78). At the same time, the status of the living is denigrated since "their living agency is diminished when part of their own power of speech is handed over to the dead other. … we give voice to the haunting within ourselves, which ensures that we are also deprived of our own voice (79).

The three young female performers of the group ***Pussy Riot***, Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, Maria Alyokhina, and Yekaterina Samutsevich, are known for their anti-clerical action in Moscow and their ensuing imprisonment. Even though they performed a political act of protest against the unconstitutional merger of the Russian Or-

thodox Church with the state, they were charged with inciting religious hatred. Yet, the political music they have produced after being released from jail is rich in broader biopolitical meanings. Their more recent music has a universal appeal in the way it is deployed with a strong and differently manifested feminist context. The music video for "Slayyyter – HATEFUCK" features an anti-clerical lesbian party to deconstruct and dehumanize symbols of masculinity (Pussy Riot 2022b). Similarly, "Straight Outta Vagina" (Pussy Riot 2016d) is a eulogy of femininity and a cultural gesture aimed at deconstructing male hierarchies imposed upon human bodies of all genders. In "Hangerz," Pussy Riot further protests abortion bans and other techniques aimed at controlling female corporeality (Pussy Riot 2019b).

To make their biopolitical messages truly universal, the band extended the harsh critique of the police state to the United States (Pussy Riot 2017). In their provocative clip "Make America Great Again," they lambasted Donald Trump's anti-immigration policy as representing an assault on and violent stigmatization of human bodies. In this metaphorical imaginary, the "greatness" of the strongest country in the West is based on possessing and humiliating the bare lives of vulnerable bodies that can be physically denuded, forcefully inspected, and abused by the state (Pussy Riot 2016b).

With some exceptions, Russia remains the main target of Pussy Riot. By comparing Putin's regime with the Stalinist repressions of 1937 (Pussy Riot 2019a), the artists point to its malevolent legacy and the continuity of the oppressive practices as a vicious circle of state-sponsored violence. The idea of a defenseless female body, vacillating between sexualization and vulnerability, is key in the composition titled "Organs" (Pussy Riot 2016c). The song title itself has a double meaning in Russian, both as part of the human body and as the colloquial name of the repressive apparatus of the state, which they show is aimed at controlling these bodies. A naked female body in a bathtub full of blood is a strong visual metaphor, betraying the necropolitical gist of a murderous power to abuse and take life. The violent crux of the sovereign regime is further lucidly exposed in the composition titled "Putin Will Teach You How to Love the Motherland" (Pussy Riot 2014) in which the band again illuminates the muscular brutality of the state. The song "Chaika" (Pussy Riot 2016a),

invoking the family name of a former general prosecutor, follows suit as a harsh parody on Putin's regime with its immanent physical violence and torture, accompanied by executioners repeating, "I love Russia, I am a patriot." Lastly, in "Like in a Red Prison" (Pussy Riot 2013a) Pussy Riot theatrically demonstrates disdain towards the oil and gas industry as the basis for governing the elite's material base.

Paradoxically, at a certain point, the artists symbolically associate themselves with their oppressors. For example, "I Can't Breathe" (Pussy Riot 2015) visualizes the burial of two live female police officers. Likewise, in "Track about Good Cop," we see policemen dancing and kissing (Pussy Riot 2018), which is a powerful metaphor that deconstructs and dislocates the masculine power of the state. However, when it comes to Putin, there is no room for compromise. In "Putin's Ashes," they sing: "We'll find you everywhere, your ashes are smoldering in the dark… Sharpening a knife for Putin, I will not forgive your evil… I will kill you" (Pussy Riot 2023b). Pussy Riot's explicit anti-war message and solidarity with Ukraine (Pussy Riot 2022a) is followed by post-apocalyptic imagery (Pussy Riot 2021) and fear of a nuclear winter (Pussy Riot 2023a). The apocalyptic motives in art projects are correlative with the idea of Russia as a necro-empire (Dyakonov 2022).

## PIOTR PAVLENSKY'S BIOPOLITICS OF PROTEST[1]

Piotr Pavlensky's radical actions, from stitching up his mouth in protest of repression to setting fire to the entrance of the FSB Headquarters in Moscow, bear clear political messages. These actions not only caused public outrage and discussion, but they also provoked confusion among law enforcement agencies which were uncertain how to react. The main feature of Pavlensky's art is the inventive use of his own naked body, which he exposes, injures, and surrenders in staging shocking performances to produce sharp metaphors of Rus-

1 This section is partly based on: Andrey Makarychev and Sergei Medvedev. 2018. "Biopolitical Art and the Struggle for Sovereignty in Putin's Russia." *Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe* 26 (2-3): 165–179. DOI: 10.1080/25739638.2018.1526487.

sia's political and social reality. In the absence of significant political opposition and with a declining public sphere, the artist offers his own body as a protest medium through acts of public sacrifice.

Pavlensky's first action, titled "Stitch," was executed on July 23, 2012. The artist appeared at Kazan Cathedral in St. Petersburg with his lips sewn up holding a banner that read, "The Pussy Riot protest was a replica of the famous acts of Jesus Christ (Matthew 21:12–13)," referring to the trial of the Pussy Riot group. Stitching up one's mouth is often used as an act of denial in Russian jails and labor camps. Inmates similarly protest against the cruelty of the prison administration by using their own bodies as the only available medium to regain the subjectivity denied to them by the system. Commenting on his action, Pavlensky suggested that he wanted to portray "the situation of the contemporary artist in Russia as a ban on *glasnost*. I am abhorred by the fear in society and the signs of mass paranoia which I see everywhere" (Matveeva 2022). This act has opened up the important theme of the medicalization of protest in Pavlensky's art. This theme implies the use of powerful medical metaphors in response to the biopolitics of the oppressive state.

On May 3, 2013, Pavlensky performed an act of artistic protest titled "Carcass," in which his assistants brought him naked, wrapped in a multilayered cocoon of barbed wire, to the main entrance of the St. Petersburg Legislative Assembly. He lay silent in a half-bent position until the police released him with the help of garden clippers. Commenting on his action, the artist claimed that he had been protesting the new censorship laws: "The human body is naked like a carcass; there is nothing on it except barbed wire, which, by the way, was invented to protect livestock. These laws, like the wire, keep people in individual cattle pens. All this has been done in order to turn people into gutless and securely guarded cattle that can only consume, work, and reproduce" (Volchek 2013).

Later the same year, he staged an action called "Fixation." On November 10, 2013 (which is a semi-official holiday called Russian Police Day), Pavlensky sat down naked on the cobblestones of Red Square in Moscow in front of the Lenin Mausoleum and hammered a nail through his scrotum, affixing it to the stone pavement. The police covered him with a blanket as the medics took quite some time to

detach him from the pavement. Once again, Pavlensky used a prison ritual to make an artistic and political statement. In Russian prison camps, similar acts of protest occur, sometimes with dozens of people nailing themselves to benches and wooden beds. By using this prison body language, Pavlensky recreated the situation of "bare life" as the ultimate position of the naked human body pitted against the machine of violence. This is what Giorgio Agamben also found in examples from concentration camps. In this case, it was the body and its most sensitive parts, chained to the cold rock of Russian history, which the cobbles of Red Square represent. "A naked artist, looking at his testicles nailed to the cobblestone, is a metaphor for the apathy, political indifference, and fatalism in Russian society," declared Pavlensky in his statement to the media (News.ru 2013).

Another one of Pavlensky's actions, "Partition," performed on October 19, 2014, also combined penitentiary and medical metaphors. Sitting naked on the roof of the Serbsky Institute of Psychiatry and Forensic Medicine in Moscow (infamous for diagnosing and "treating" dissidents and critics of the regime in Soviet times, with some also claiming even today), he cut off his earlobe with a chef's knife to protest the (bio)political abuse of psychiatry in Russia, a practice referred to colloquially as "punitive psychiatry" (TV Rain 2014). Apart from the artistic reference to Vincent Van Gogh, who cut off his ear in a moment of insanity in 1883, this is yet another representation of a common prison practice in Russia. Convicts in labor camps cut off parts of their bodies in order to abstain from work. The original title of the action, "Otdelenie" in Russian, has a double meaning in Russian as an act of partition and the name of a hospital department.

Pavlensky's final two well-known acts did not entail mutilation or the use of the artist's body as the main medium; however, they did convey graphic images of violence. On February 23, 2014, at the peak of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict over the Maidan in Kiev, in an action titled "Freedom," the artist and his friends built an imitation barricade on the Malo-Konyushenny Bridge in St. Petersburg. This was symbolically near the place where Emperor Alexander II was assassinated by terrorists in 1881. The participants of the protest burned tires, beat drums, and shouted Maidan slogans until firefighters extinguished the burning tires and the police arrested them.

Two days later, when the artist was released from custody, he made a statement about the act, claiming that he wanted to overcome apathy in Russian society (MR7.ru 2014).

Finally, in his most acclaimed act of protest, "Threat," performed on the night of November 9, 2015, Pavlensky approached the central entrance of the FSB Headquarters in the infamous Lubyanka building with a gasoline canister, doused the gasoline on the wooden doors, set them on fire with a cigarette lighter, and stood in front of them with the canister in his hands, posing for the attending photographers. Within a minute's time, he was detained by the police and charged with riot. Later, his offense was classified as vandalism and the prosecution claimed that the FSB building was an object of cultural heritage because eminent cultural figures were held prisoner there during Stalin's repressions (Rainsford 2016). During the long trial, the artist demanded that he be charged with terrorism and invited unexpected witnesses, like prostitutes and homeless people, to assess his art. Aside from being considered absurd, these unprecedented acts during his trial attempted to symbolically equalize judges as power holders and call girls. Ultimately, the court found him guilty of criminal damage and issued a hefty fine but did not give him a prison sentence.

What unites the latter two acts, "Freedom" and "Threat," is the juxtaposition of the artist's body to the machinery of violence and the ready submission of his body to the arriving guards without any attempt of escaping. As gallerist Marat Gelman commented, the acts show Pavlensky's "obvious symbolism": "The Lubyanka door is the gate of hell, the entrance into a world of absolute evil. Against the backdrop of hellfire is a lonely artist, waiting to be captured … Pavlensky's figure at the door of the FSB in flames is a very important symbol for Russia today, in both the political and artistic sense" (Guelman 2015).

Based on an analysis of Piotr Pavlensky's five major acts, we conclude that his art has a clear biopolitical message. This is exemplified by three major features. First, he uses *corporealization* in his art in the way he uses his own body as a medium and as a canvas on which a political statement is written. In doing this, although he certainly objectifies his body, he also renders it ultimately subjective,

using its fragility as the last line of individual anatomopolitical resistance to the totalitarian machinery. He also takes full control of his corporeality in the face of the state's biopolitics, which prescribes how citizens should use their bodies. Finally, by harming and destroying his own body, or humbly submitting it into the hands of custodians of the law, he defuses the threat of violence and pain. Inflicting violence and pain upon himself ultimately renders this main state instrument of control useless.

The second biopolitical feature of Pavlensky's actions is the *prisonification* of art through the metaphors and body language of Russian prison protest rituals: stitching up one's mouth, cutting off a body part, and nailing one's scrotum to a surface. At the same time, the artist and his interpreters often refer to the metaphor of "the body as a prison." In an interview, his wife, Oxana Shalygina, noted that "a naked body always implies a reference to everyday life in prison. One is locked up in one's body and stays within this prison" (Medvedev 2016b). In this sense, Pavlensky unconsciously and literally embodies "bare life," as described by Giorgio Agamben, for whom the ultimate manifestation of that type of life is the concentration camp (Agamben 1998, 97). By undressing and subjecting himself to various prison rituals, Pavlensky thus becomes the Agambenian *homo sacer*, testing the threshold of order, law, and sovereignty, and ultimately of *bios* itself as a form of political life.

The third biopolitical feature of Pavlensky's art is the *medicalization* of protest. This is seen through the use of various medical terms and techniques (stitching and partitions) and the need for medics to release and treat the artist following his actions. In this regard, Pavlensky parodies and deconstructs the same "medical gaze" that Michel Foucault thought essential for the biopolitics of the modern state (Foucault 1975). Here, once again, he assumes full control of his body, subjecting himself to medical manipulations, just as he had subjected it to various repressive instruments, from barbed wire to sitting on the fence of a psychiatric institution.

As Pavlensky noted,

> A series of legal acts aimed at suppressing civil activity and intimidating the population, the constantly growing number of polit-

> ical prisoners, restrictive laws regulating NGO activity, the censorship of "Roskomnadzor," the anti-gay propaganda law—none of this is about combating crime but about fighting your own people. This also includes a recent law protecting religious feelings. This is why I staged my performance (Volchek 2013).

Then he continues,

> I understand the body in my own way. The human body, as part of the mechanisms of power, authority, and society, is something that is accused, convicted, and damaged. As an artist, I was eager to show that what I do with my body is pretty much the same as what the state does with our society. I expose my body to these situations since it is a part of a bigger social body; this is how a metaphor of what is going on with the social body appears (Volchek 2013).

Through Pavlensky's art, we see the positioning of the body not only as material for his art but also as a biopolitical medium and weapon directed against the biopower of the state. Against this backdrop, he has drawn a parallel between the Foucauldian concept of the "power of nomination" and the practices of the symbolic "fixture" of Russia's population by the Kremlin. He asserts that the Russian authorities have tried to banalize his protests by labeling him a mentalist, schizoid, or criminal. "The power starts to deem that the state has its own body, although we understand that it is not a biological one" (Territoriya 2016). The narrative of power is "to listen, to repeat, and to obey," while the voice of art wishes "to speak, to contest, and to resist." This is an eternal opposition since power is interested in people being suppressed like animals (Ibid,). In the struggle for subjectivity, an individual ceases to be an obedient subaltern and is considered a dissident instead. In this way, protesting individuals remain, paradoxically yet significantly, mute as a symbol for the lack of appropriate words in our vocabularies to duly represent dissent. Pavlensky's political messages come from the border lines between the spoken and the unspoken, the conventionally normal and the deviant or eccentric, and inclusion and exclusion. In his

comments, Pavlensky repeatedly rejects any heroic detachment of his actions from the field of political struggles. In voluntarily expelling himself from the established cultural mainstream, he indirectly engages with power holders (in particular, with the police) by making them unintentionally partake in his performative actions. In this respect, Pavlensky is invisibly sutured into the relations of power he intends to deconstruct. To paraphrase Agamben, his relations with the sovereign authority can be described as "inclusive exclusion." In striking similarity to the sovereign, he is simultaneously in and out of the practices, institutions, and conventions that define the confines of the political terrain. In the following section, we dwell on this paradox in more detail.

## ALEKSANDR GABYSHEV, THE SHAMAN[2]

This story of performative resistance has two focal points and two protagonists. First, it aims to look at the case of the self-proclaimed rebellious Siberian shaman Alexandr Gabyshev, who, since 2019, has been known in Russia as an anti-Putin crusader. He planned to trek over 8,000 kilometers from the Sakha Republic in Siberia to Moscow and then perform a ritual to "banish" Putin from the Kremlin. After having walked about 3,000 kilometers with a small support group, he was detained by the police and returned to his native region of Sakha. After the detention, he undertook one more attempt to restart the journey, and in June 2020 he was sentenced to enforced psychiatric treatment and placed in a mental asylum. The opening of a legal case against Gabyshev was condemned by Amnesty International as an attempt to silence a dissenter. The organization went on to compare this sentence to Soviet-era punitive psychiatry. A group of reputed cultural figures issued a statement of support for Gabyshev (Aleksievich et al. 2021) which enhanced the political resonance of the whole story. International broadcasters, including the

2 This section is partly based on Andrey Makarychev. 2023. "The Performative (Bio)Politics of Bare Life: Between Putinism and Shamanism." *Protest* 2 (2): 185–205.

BBC (BBC News 2019), covered Gabyshev's campaign for global audiences.

Political theory brings into the picture what might be dubbed "trajectories of individuation" that explain "in which relational ways individuals inscribe themselves in groups and activities they qualify as political... how people learn to be part of a political self... [and how they] establish bonds they understand as political" (Benzecry and Baiocchi 2017, 237–38). From this perspective, Gabyshev's performative actions can be viewed as applying the concept of *homo sacer*, which explains his protest by showing how liminal and subaltern agency might be discussed from a (bio)political perspective. Giorgio Agamben's *homo sacer* is a metaphorical "figure regulated by neither human nor divine law" (Gratton 2011, 603) and "subjected to a particular form of violence that can be classified neither as homicide nor as sacrifice" (Depoortere 2012, 156). An individual's subjectivity comes from "escaping from the captivity of the law" (Vatter 2008, 46). "The killable and unsacrificial life of the *homo sacer*" (Costantini 2018, 19) is dubbed "bare life." This bare life "is included in the political in the form of exclusion ... and in the form of unlimited exposure to violation, which does not count as a crime" (Płonowska Ziarek 2008, 90). In other words, it is about a life "placed outside of political order," as well as the "deactivation of law and de-institutionalization" (Ferrarese 2018, 135).

However, bare life usually connotes a mute biological life that is associated with "needy and excluded bodies, that is, bodies that are bound to suffering and forced into mere subsistence" (Ferrarese 2018, 128). Gabyshev's protest illustrates an attempt to reach beyond the status of bare life and, in the language of biopolitics, leave the world of *zoe*, a purely physical existence, and enter the domain of *bios*, a politically qualified life; this escape, however, eventually brought him back to the initial position of *zoe* after his arrest and confinement in a psychiatric clinic. In all these capacities, he remained a nomadic "and free-floating body" (Mitchell 2006, 98), a romantic hero, and a messenger of the naturalistic understanding of freedom and agency.

The conceptual metaphor of *homo sacer* could be better understood as an extension and specification of the academic debate on the phenomenon of *marginality*. In political philosophy, a "marginal man" is

defined as a person who lives on the margins of two or more groups without identifying with either group (Bradatan and Craiutu 2012, 722). In a similar interpretation, a marginal figure is discussed as one possessing:

> the freedom of coming and going... a transitional personality that is isolated and unprotected and is searching in vain for an opportunity to take roots in a dominant discourse or culture... Such a person does not tend to fit perfectly into any one of the cultures to which he or she have [sic] been exposed, but may fit comfortably on the edge, in the margins of each, by keeping his/her critical distance from both. This intercultural in-betweenness suggests a form of constructive marginality that is able to move easily and powerfully between different cultural traditions, acting appropriately and feeling at home in each... Marginality is a refusal to obey or recognize the law, and the withdrawal of legal rights and protections (Jahanbegloo, Bradatan, and Craiutu 2012, 731–32, 736).

This description explains the applicability of this concept to the specific case of the Sakha shaman. In this case, the shaman is a liminal figure who intended to challenge the center from a marginal position and used this marginality to gain support. Gabyshev played with his allegedly marginal social status, voluntarily characterizing himself as "a holy fool" and a "blissful person" from "another world." This liminality represents the peculiar sense of freedom he associated himself with: "Here in my place is a new world; it is different from the other world of lost people" (NewsYkt.ru 2019). Indicatively, the starting point of his anti-Putin campaign was a state of trance, otherwise known as shamanic sickness, and the experience of madness he went through after the premature death of his wife (Gabyshev 2019b). He was not sure when exactly Putin came to power, yet he was convinced that he is a beast and even an extraterrestrial who does harm to the people and to nature (Gabyshev 2019d). This dehumanization of Putin might be regarded as a gesture of de-politicization implicitly inscribed into Gabyshev's vernacular narrative of resistance (Volkhonsky 2020). At the same time, directly challenging the supreme authority also has a strong politicizing effect.

Against this backdrop, one may categorize Gabyshev's characteristics of the Agambenian *"homo sacer"* as a type of liminal agency always vacillating between politics and its denial. He acts from the position of "bare life," which is "a closed form of existence where no resistance can be thinkable," "stripped of any legal and political protection," and which moves to what might be metaphorically described as "a zone of indistinction and continuous transition between men and beast, nature and culture" (Zevnik 2009, 86-87). The role and status of *homo sacer* are "the product of this suspension of law. He is the exception to the normal operation of secular law and of divine law... modern *homo sacer* is the product of and is made in the image of a sovereign power existing in this threshold of man and God" (Seymour 2013, 100–101).

Gabyshev is therefore "a new God's fool who, due to his unconventional behavior, which defies many forms of resistance to authoritarian political regimes, can hardly be proclaimed a covert instrument masterminded by the liberal opposition and its alleged foreign sponsors" (Kolesnikov 2019). It is not incidental that in some comments Gabyshev has been compared with Don Quixote, Forrest Gump, and the Joker (Redaktsiya 2019), who are all cultural figures that exemplify deviant agency bent on self-constructed utopian or dystopian mindsets that represent alternatives to mainstream politics. As Gabyshev accepted his weirdness and alienation from the world of "normal people," he also claimed that it is those holding power, unable to secure a normal life for the country, who are abnormal (Gabyshev 2019c). This oscillation between norms and aberrations is a useful addition to and extension of the typology of *hominem sacri* in the extant biopolitical literature.

Gabyshev's liminality can also be tackled from the perspective of what we venture to dub "popular regionalism," a concept mimicking the subdiscipline of popular geopolitics (Szostek 2017). The legacy of Sakha's semi-autonomy and quasi-statehood helps provide a deeper context for Gabyshev's actions. It is symbolic that Gabyshev designed and promoted his performative hike to the national capital as one from a well-accentuated geographic peripherality. The Republic of Sakha, Gabyshev's homeland, is known as a Russian region that consistently resists Moscow's policy of linguistic and cultural unifica-

tion (ARD 2021). The head of the State Council of Sakha issued a statement in support of Gabyshev who, in his words, "asks righteous questions" (NewsYkt.ru 2020). This statement attests to the high level of local support for his crusade. Gabyshev himself played with geographic imagery. For example, he claimed that "the light of kindness comes from the East" (NewsYkt.ru 2019). For him, the notion of the "people" refers primarily to his fellow Sakha countrymen. Sakha itself is believed to be "the heart of Russia" and a land of two peacefully coexisting faiths: Christian Orthodox and shamanism. It is from this region that freedom ought to come so that Russia would liberate itself from fear and restore "normal life" (Yakutia.info 2019).

In both opposition and independent online media, Gabyshev's cross-country campaign from Yakutsk to Moscow was given high publicity as an example of a protest coming from Russia's periphery and capable of generating support from multiple sympathizers. In one of his interviews, he mentioned that "we are coming to help liberate Moscow" (Gabyshev 2021). In this regard, Gabyshev's march could be juxtaposed with other forms of disdain toward the central government. Similar expressions of dissatisfaction included mass-scale protests against the arrest of the local governor, Sergey Furgal, in the Far Eastern city of Khabarovsk in 2020 and environmental protests in Shiyes (which is on the border between the Republic of Komi and Arkhangelsk *oblast)* and in Bashkortostan. This center-periphery dimension is a pivotal element of the political debates on the future trajectories of Putin's regime and the multiple forms of its contestation. These cases of protest in non-central regions of Russia have been promoted as more authentic than anti-government actions in Moscow, the latter of which are largely perceived as an imperial center rather than the national capital (Tokugava 2020).

The anti-imperial and decolonial contexts of Gabyshev's protest were repeatedly accentuated in numerous media comments. In one instance, he even connected his performative agency with the North American First Nations, whom he praised for their spirit of authenticity and unbreakable sense of freedom (Gabyshev 2020). His anti-colonial attitudes also further transformed into a China-skeptic narrative: "Our woods have been sold to the Chinese… We are facing deportation" from our own lands (Gabyshev 2019a). On a separate

occasion, he even mentioned that China, in his view, "is the only country where Putin can find a refuge" (Gabyshev 2019c). Similarly, China-critical motives were discernible in video blogs by Andrey Volk, who tried to imitate Gabyshev's march and replicate his narrative until he was ultimately stopped and detained by the police.

## CONCLUSIONS

In our analysis, we have shown that the body can be used as a tool of affirmation or protest and represents a territory where collective meanings are constructed and aggregated. The symbolic struggle for sovereignty has moved into the re-individualization and self-determination of the body, adversely achieved through acts of self-expression and self-denial. More precisely, there are five important implications regarding the transformations of the political in the contemporary world.

Firstly, modern forms of political crises (which have become ever more evident in 2016, with Brexit, the victory of Donald Trump in the US elections, and the rise of nationalist populism across Europe) and the shrinking space for political manifestations in Russia in particular increase the demand for "organic" forms of politics. Moving away from the mechanical rationality and nested institutions of modernity, new organic forms of politics are emerging and evoking long-forgotten images of the nation, heritage, soil, blood, and the body. The new field of politics is shaped by symbolic investments into the collective body of the nation and also into the physical body of the individual. In this sense, biopolitics tends to become the new frontier of politicization and a crucial terrain for shaping political identities.

Secondly, biopolitical performances must be interpreted against the backdrop of the cult of corporeality which has been established and propagated by Putin's biopolitical regime. Russia's hegemonic biopower is grounded in the idea of a healthy and productive body, from athletes and warriors to Putin himself. The protesting corporeality discussed in this section is the reverse side and mirror image of this biopolitical paradigm. By re-enacting biopolitical rituals and

readily submitting the body to the machinery of control, biopolitical artists and activists like Pavlensky mock and deconstruct the dominant biopolitics and thus nullify the biopower of the oppressive state.

Thirdly, biopolitical performances strike at the core of the very idea of state sovereignty. Since biopolitics is ultimately about state sovereignty in relation to the individual, the artists discussed here contest the supreme right of the state over their own bodies, reclaiming the body from the grip of the sovereignty machine. In the contemporary world of de-territorialization and virtualization, the traditional territorial forms of sovereignty give way to new cartographies and (dis)locations. The game of sovereignty is moving from territoriality to corporeality, and new borders and interventions by the state are now placed within the human body. At the same time, it is within the body that resistance arises. Pushing the limits of sovereignty onto the human body, biopower solicits an anatomical response by the individual who uses corporeal forms of protest to reclaim their sovereignty.

This leads to the fourth conclusion. Under the conditions of depoliticization, social apathy, and the failing mechanisms of civic mobilization, the individual body replaces the role of the social body and becomes a collective body of protest. At the same time, this highlights the dialectic nature of the sovereign's two bodies. This is examined by Ernst Kantorowicz in his classic work "The King's Two Bodies," which involves the physical body of the sovereign and the political body of the nation merged in one person (Kantorowicz 2016). By the same token, the artist also has two bodies, the physical and the political. By exposing the physical body to suffering, the artist assumes the role of the social body of protest, especially in times when society cannot stage protests itself. There is an obvious parallel between the body of the Sovereign and the body of the artist as a *homo sacer*: both are positioned outside the law, and both contest the idea of sovereignty.

Finally, the concept of performative biopolitics and biopower operationalized in this chapter offers a significant contribution to the ongoing debate on power and resistance in Russia. Despite all emphasis on the "organic" and "natural" features of Russian identity,

closer biopolitical scrutiny reveals that this cultural construct does not exist unless it is performed, narrated, and staged. Each of the elements of performatively biopolitical patriotism can be contested and challenged; however, an inevitable precondition for contestation is the performers' detachment from the domain of sovereign power. In this regard, it is emblematic that Alexandr Gabyshev was ultimately sentenced to forced psychiatric treatment while Pussy Riot, Pavlensky, and Party of the Dead were forced to leave Russia.

CHAPTER THREE

# BIOPOWER AND SOVEREIGNTY IN THE RUSSIAN SPORTS INDUSTRY

## INTRODUCTION

In modern society, one of the key areas of biopower, or the relationship between the state and the human body, is sports. Since the mid-nineteenth century, an era marked by the rise of nationalism, states have used physical exercise, gymnastics, and games to foster national unity and build the nation's political body by creating and motivating individual bodies (Arnold 2021). This link between sports and the nation was further enhanced in the twentieth century with the rise of the international Olympic movement. This is particularly visible if we consider the totalitarian machines applied in fascist Germany, the post-World War II USSR, and many other socialist countries such as East Germany, Romania, and Cuba, or if we look at the practices in China today.

For the state, sports play a large role in two domains of the politics of the body. The first role is linked to the classic biopolitical pursuit of the health, productivity, and unity of the nation, the creation of a collective body through mass events, collective rituals, shared emotions, and the subjection of individual bodies to collective goals. The state treats the human body as a resource that can be nationalized or at least used for the good of the nation. In the second role, biopower ventures into the field of geopolitics by turning sports into an arena of global political competition and interpreting it as

a proxy for war between nations. Sports are turned into a late-modern battlefield in which the bodies of soldiers are replaced with the bodies of athletes. This is reminiscent of George Orwell's famous statement that sport "is war minus the shooting." For him, even the Olympics should be considered as nothing less than "mimic warfare" (Orwell 1945, 10).

With this perspective in mind, this chapter looks at yet another field of Russian "politics of the body" through the Russian state's relations with the sports industry. We pay particular attention to the doping scandals which have become a trademark of Russian sports over the past decade, even before the more recent international ban on Russian sports due to the war in Ukraine. In recent years, the use of doping in sports has become a contested political issue, extending to the fields of national sovereignty, international relations, and global governance. We will start by exploring the most notable doping scheme of the past decade, namely the doping scandal during the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics. Although this event uncovered important aspects of Russia's vulnerability in the milieu of global sports, it has so far remained almost unnoticed in the extant literature on sporting mega-events in Russia.

Against the backdrop of these dramatic developments, we build our analysis on the conceptual premise of the convergence of two different types and techniques of control and regulation exemplified by anatomopolitics (presupposing, in the original Foucauldian interpretation of the term, measures of control over individual bodies) and biopolitics (policy practices that target and concern an entire population). Their conflation in the current Russian context has had a controversial effect. On the one hand, the blend of anatomo- and biopolitics solidifies the "apparatus of domination… to produce violent and totalizing effects" (Zanotti 2013, 291). On the other hand, the two regulatory mechanisms have clearly clashed with each other in the Russian debate on the doping scandal and the subsequent ban on Russia's participation in the 2018 Winter Olympics and 2020 (2021) Summer Olympics. The maneuvering and search for compromises within the global sports organization caused by this clash have exposed a sovereign power (i.e. Russia) as an object of regulatory policies rather than as a sovereign subject in its own right.

This chapter attempts to fill two important gaps in the existing scholarship on sports and politics. First, the bulk of the existing literature looks at the dynamics following mega-events from the vantage point of reaping the benefits of infrastructure development (see Müller 2014) and projections of soft power. Yet, as the Russian case has shown, hosting mega-events can also have negative external consequences for countries that place sport at the core of their national identity politics. It is within this context that we discuss the structural and mass-scale problems with doping in Russia. Second, unlike the predominant institutional analysis of the established anti-doping infrastructure (Houlihan and Hanstad 2019), we examine how national narratives of victimization and trauma are influenced by the global crusade against doping, with Russia being one of the most illuminating cases. In this respect, the novelty of our approach is based on how we conceptualize a plethora of doping-related relations of power from a novel viewpoint. This viewpoint is based on the Foucauldian vocabulary for biopolitics, a concept well-known in many academic disciplines, and anatomopolitics, a much less explored notion that we consider appropriate and expedient for our analysis (Makarychev and Medvedev 2019).

## THE SOVIET DOPING LEGACY

There is nothing specifically Russian about doping. It is one of the key characteristics of a late-modern civilization obsessed with effectiveness and success. Since the second half of the twentieth century, doping has been increasingly used in various professional communities: truck drivers and miners, policemen and security guards, students and academics, etc. Testing and expanding the limits of the human body has been the goal of modern sports and has developed hand in hand with modern science since the eighteenth century. Professional sports, as well as the bodies of top athletes, have become the cutting-edge of experimentation and the frontier of humanity. Indeed, as John Hoberman has observed, "the use of hormones in elite sports can be regarded as an avant-garde form of libertarian pharmacology, endorsed by the entire society and promoted by ad-

vertising in the pharmaceutical industry. This kind of pharmacological practice has become possible because medical professionals are increasingly willing to reach beyond the traditional limits of conventional medicine" (Hoberman 2008, 233–34).

Well before 2014, there had been well-known cases of doping in international sports. Examples include the Canadian sprinter Ben Johnson at the 1988 Summer Olympics in Seoul and the entire Finnish cross-country skiing team at the 2001 World Championships in Lahti. There have also been multiple cases in cycling, including the 1998 Team Festina affair and the American cyclist Lance Armstrong being stripped of his seven Tour de France titles in 2012 for doping. While all of these cases implicated teams or national sports federations, they did not reach the level of government or national policy planning as in other cases. The situation was quite different in the Soviet Union, as well as in the socialist states of East Germany, Romania, and Cuba. Due to the USSR's extensive doping program, doping practices were deeply embedded in the Soviet sports system. The structure of Russia's doping program and its problems with the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) could certainly be seen as legacies of a state-sport system designed to achieve victories for the state by promoting doping and protecting dopers.

Russia, in the case of this study, has been defined by Russian sociologist Simon Kordonsky as a resource state in which the traditional model of the "economy" is not the exchange of resources but rather the mobilization and distribution of resources by the state (Kordonsky 2007, 13). According to this logic, the state sees human bodies as disposable and renewable natural resources, be it on the battlefield or in the sports arena. In Soviet propaganda and mass culture before World War II, sports were regarded as a preparation for battle with the outside world. As an extremely popular "Sports March" by Isaak Dunayevsky and Vassily Lebedev-Kumach from 1936 put it:

> Hey, goalie, prepare for battle, you are the guardian at the gate!
> Imagine that the state border lies behind your back!
> Hooray to physical culture! Be prepared!
> When the time comes to crash the enemies,
> Beat them off from all borders—left side, right side! (EKSMO.ru 2018).

Meanwhile, the "physical culture parades" in Red Square and all across the Soviet Union displayed a mix of athletic and military performances where pyramids of human bodies represented tanks, aircraft, etc., and a number of hybrid "military-athletic" disciplines were invented and promoted by the state. Similar performances, combining gymnastics, athletics, and militarism, were typical of pre-war fascist regimes and were richly embellished by symbols of Norse mythology in Germany and of Ancient Rome in Italy. In all these cases, the athletic body was celebrated as an epitome of heroism to be sacrificed on the altar of war (Dogliani 2000).

As a natural extension of this policy, the Soviet Union joined the international Olympic movement after World War II. Before that time, the Olympics were disregarded as a form of bourgeois excess in the semi-isolated country that saw itself as the embodiment of a new civilization. Thus, the games were seen as being opposed to the Soviet socialist physical culture (*fizkultura*) which was aimed more at labor productivity and military preparedness. As the USSR became a superpower controlling its own part of the world and engaged in a global competition with the United States, it discovered a symbolic battlefield in Olympic sports where it sought to prove its prowess and to show the advantages of "real socialism." By Stalin's decision, the USSR joined the Olympic movement in 1950 and for the first time participated in the Melbourne Summer Olympics in 1952. After joining the Olympic Games, the goal of the Soviet sports machine was to prove the superiority of socialism in international athletic arenas. With the Olympics as a testing ground, sports became an arm of the ideological apparatus, controlled directly by the Central Committee of the Communist Party. The entire system of Soviet sports, previously organized for mass mobilization and war, was rearranged to show Soviet superiority through international competition. As a result, the so-called "Children and Youth Sports Schools of the Olympic Reserve" carefully selected genetically gifted athletes, empowered them with state support and resources, and launched them into the international arena as emissaries of socialism (Vlasov 1998).

Doping in Russian sports, therefore, has a long tradition. This tradition is rooted in the rituals of symbolic dominance which are typ-

ical of the Russian state and could also be seen earlier in the USSR's Cold War politics and the Soviet ideological doctrine. In the Soviet and other socialist sports machines, there was an emphasis on creating effective bodies, or "laboratory athletes," for the glory of the state. To this end, the state turned the bodies of individual athletes into medicinal and pharmaceutical machines, eliminating their innate characteristics and, in some cases, even their sex (as happened with the East German shot putter Heidi/Andreas Krieger, who was eventually changed from female to male through the extensive use of steroids and hormones) (Berendonk and Franke 1997).

The first evidence of Soviet doping came in 1954, when John Ziegler, a physician for the US weightlifting team at the World Championship in Vienna, learned from his Russian colleague that the Soviet team was using testosterone as a performance-enhancing drug. In response, this confession eventually led to the development of oral anabolic steroids in the US. With early advances in sports doping in the 1960s, from amphetamines to anabolic steroids, and a lack of mechanisms to detect their use, the Soviet sports machine embraced new technologies and created laboratories for sports pharmaceutics and testing. Examples of these laboratories included the Research Laboratory of Training Programming and Physiology of Sports Performance at the State Central Institute of Physical Culture in Moscow and the Central Institute of Hematology and Transfusiology (Kalinski 2003). In the 1976 and 1980 Olympic Games, many of the country's elite athletes, including Olympic swimmers, cyclists, rowers, skiers, biathletes, and skaters, were involved in doping activities in these labs. The results of this clandestine government-sponsored research were partially revealed in 1990 in the abbreviated PhD dissertation report by Russian scientist Dr. Nikolay Volkov, who was awarded a Gold Medal for his research by Russia's Sports Committee. When the Soviet Union collapsed, many sports biochemists and pharmacologists, including Dr. Nikolai Volkov and Dr. Sergei Portugalov, remained in their positions in Russian sport management. For example, Volkov was chair of the Department of Sports Biochemistry at the State Central Institute of Physical Culture in Moscow until his death in 2014 (Kalinski 2019). Meanwhile, Portugalov was Deputy Director of the Research Institute for Physical Cul-

ture and Sport until he was disqualified for life by the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) in Lausanne in March 2017 (RAPSI 2017).

The 1980 Moscow Summer Olympics was arguably one of the highest points in the history of doping in the Soviet sports industry. Due to the loose controls over doping at the time, there is little material evidence left as to the amount of doping that occurred. According to British journalist Andrew Jennings, KGB officers destroyed some doping tests, rescuing many Soviet athletes "with [these] tremendous efforts" (quoted in Hunt 2011, p. 66). By the same token, in 1989, an Australian study reported that "there is hardly a medal winner at the Moscow Games, certainly not a gold medal winner, who is not on one sort of drug or another... The Moscow Games might as well have been called the Chemists' Games" (66). Interestingly, some of the world records set in track and field during the 1980 Moscow Olympics were held for decades.

As we can see through these examples, sports became part of the large distributive economic machine in the USSR. As Soviet sports scholars have observed, the industry of physical culture and sports is a "system of bio-industrial production of a special sort" where the objects of labor are the bodies of athletes (Ageevets 2003, 9). In exchange, the state provided athletes with all the necessary equipment and training camps, relieved them of army duty and university exams, and paid them a competitive salary; the latter was especially significant for younger athletes from underprivileged classes. The state issued annual plans to win medals and fulfill qualification norms (e.g., Master of Sports) and rewarded those who met the planned target with bonuses. To fulfill the medal plan, the sports federations, youth sports schools, trainers, and athletes would routinely use doping in competition, not just among themselves but also through the use of state resources. Indeed, the state would even encourage the use of doping by Soviet athletes at international competitions in order to maximize the symbolic and ideological gains for the sovereign power.

The Soviet/Russian doping program can be seen not only as a political and ideological phenomenon but also as part of the peculiar economy of exchange typical of the Russian state. In the traditional mechanism of the Russian economy, dating back to the medieval times of Muscovy, the state takes control of all available resources of

the nation (thus preventing the development of a market economy) and distributes them to various agents in exchange for service to the state. In biopolitical terms, the "resource" is the athlete's body, which is sacrificed to the higher ideological or symbolic goals of the state.

## THE SOCHI DOPING SCANDAL[3]

The Russian doping program, having inherited many nefarious practices from Soviet times, culminated in the Sochi 2014 Winter Olympics. WADA appointed Professor Richard H. McLaren in his capacity as an independent expert to investigate multiple suspected cases of drug use by Russian athletes and to verify the allegations made by the former Director of the Moscow Anti-Doping Laboratory, Dr. Grigory Rodchenkov. These allegations were published in the *New York Times* on May 12, 2016 and aired as a segment of the *60 Minutes* television program on May 8, 2016. Eventually, McLaren's team established that Russian sports authorities had in fact used and abused doping during sport mega-events. The report found that rather than acting individually, the over 1,000 doped athletes acted as part of an organized infrastructure of doping, which included, among other wrongdoings, swapping urine samples before WADA inspections (McLaren 2016). As one of its key findings, McLaren's Report disclosed an institutional conspiracy from 2011 to 2015 that involved Russian summer and winter sports athletes along with Russian officials from the Ministry of Sport, the Russian Anti-Doping Agency, the Center of Sports Preparation of National Teams of Russia, the Moscow Laboratory, and the FSB (Federal Security Service) (McLaren 2016).

This doping scandal, which isolated Russia from the international Olympic movement and resulted in severe sanctions against the Russian sporting industry, can be viewed through the double lens of anatomo- and biopolitics. Based on Foucault's interpretation, the

3 This section is partly based on: Andrey Makarychev and Sergei Medvedev. 2019. "Doped and disclosed Anatomopolitics, biopower, and sovereignty in the Russian sports industry". *Politics and the Life Science* 38 (2), Fall, 132–143.

two concepts differ from each other in terms of the level of analysis. Anatomopolitics is "centered on the body as a machine: its disciplining, the optimization of its capabilities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase of its usefulness and its docility, [and] its integration into systems of efficient and economic controls" (Foucault 1990, 139). Meanwhile, biopolitics as a concept is applied to the entire population as a collective object of regulatory practices of governance. Biopower regulates the body politic through special administrative practices that treat people as a biological, medicinal mass. Sport, as constructed in twentieth-century mass politics, was a form of biopolitics that sanitized and mobilized the population by de-individualizing, streamlining, and regulating bodies, and, in the cases of authoritarian regimes, preparing them for war.

Foucault mentioned a "great bipolar technology" (Foucault 1990, 139) of power combining anatomo- and biopolitical strategies that both individualize and totalize, with international sports being a lucid illustration of this merger. Against this background, it is important to look at how the individual bodies of athletes in Russia's hegemonic discourse become "nationalized' or biopolitically appropriated by the state. Sport seems to be one of the fields where anatomo- and biopolitics merge to produce and shape strategies and relations of sovereign power. Sports life is a domain of radical anatomopolitics where all physical characteristics of the performing human bodies are absolutely essential for their actorship: weight, height, age, gender, muscular stamina, emotional drive, etc. It is the individual bodies of athletes who train, exercise, compete, and win or lose. In the meantime, in the domain of sports, biopower manifests itself as a productive force for establishing and celebrating affective communities of fans and supporters as collective biopolitical subjects whose emotional investments are crucial for national identity-making. This pivotal feature of biopower was aesthetically visualized in the opening ceremony of the Sochi Olympics, where six youngsters wore T-shirts with the letters R, U, S, S, I, and A on them; when standing together, they symbolically embodied Russia as the host country (Sochi Olympics 2015).

Both the creation and the functioning of the emotive biopolitical community are possible only on the basis of representational re-

lations. In these relations, sport-like bodies play the anatomopolitical role of human signs by embodying the spirit of nationhood and connoting pride, glory, and muscular force. These inclusive relations of symbolic representation are politically constructed and manipulated as one of the key functions of the sovereign power and a condition of its very existence.

Sports, therefore, appear to be a domain where sovereignty constantly reasserts itself through sophisticated mechanisms of regulation and control over athletes' bodies. By losing their physical individuality, athletes become the ultimate objects of sovereign control. As subjects to the Schmittian *Ausnahmezustand*, or "state of exception" (Schmitt 1985), athletes' bodies are used as a corporeal threshold of state sovereignty and an enactment of the Agambenian "bare life" (Agamben 1998). The logic of sovereign exception was fully applied at the 2014 Winter Olympics. Four years before Sochi, the Russian team came in 14th place in the medal ranking at the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver, failing by their own national standards. As a result, winning in Sochi became a matter of national pride and prestige. Thus, the Sochi Games became the pinnacle of President Vladimir Putin's drive for sovereignty. This was seen in the unprecedented Olympic torch relay, which circumnavigated the entire perimeter of Russian territory and even traveled to the North Pole and to the International Space Station. The 2014 Olympic Games were supposed to stress Russia's role as a global superpower, and an overall victory in the Olympic medal count was crucial.

Within this context, exceptions to national legislation and even the Russian Constitution were created for the Olympics Games in Sochi: homes were expropriated for the construction of Olympic venues without proper court decisions and just compensation; national parks were destroyed; and so on. The carefully designed and state-sponsored doping program for almost all athletes of the Olympic team was part of this space for exceptions. This was shown by the mastermind of the doping program, Dr. Grigory Rodchenkov, in the Oscar-winning documentary film *Icarus* by Brian Fogel and later verified by the McLaren Report (McLaren 2016). Athletes' bodies were exempt from both normal medical practice and international doping rules and codes of fair play. Even more importantly,

the Sochi doping operation was conducted under the supervision of the Federal Security Service, the powerful heir to the feared All-Russian Extraordinary Commission (*CheKa*), which was an organization from the time of the 1917 October Revolution. The sense of the extraordinary and entirely illegal special operation, which included swapping the compromised urine samples of Russian athletes for clean ones through a mouse hole in the lab wall masked by a cupboard, was the high point of the Sochi sovereign exception. This defied the rules of international sports governance.

Discerning the constitutive controversies embedded in the Kremlin's reaction to the doping scandal is crucial for our analysis. On one occasion, Putin did recognize the validity of the accusations against Russian athletes: "Our sport managers failed to understand the relevance of this issue, failed to update the corresponding lists (of illicit substances and manufacturers), and did not properly inform athletes and coaches about the new WADA prohibitions. We don't need to politicize the whole story and look for conspiracies. We need to react to the decisions of international sports organizations in a systematic and timely fashion" (TASS 2016). Yet at other times, he himself adhered to a political interpretation of the accusations against Russia without directly negating the veracity of specific information leaked to the media. In one of his talks, he directly related the IOC ban on the Russian Olympic team in February 2018 with the presidential elections in Russia in March 2018: "There are significant suspicions that this was all done to create an atmosphere of dissatisfaction among sports fans and athletes in order to make the state responsible for wrongdoings" (Meduza 2017).

Further analysis of Putin's narrative identified two possible reactions to the accusations against Russia for the state-sponsored doping system. As a sovereign ruler, he could have played the role of protector and defender of "our athletes," allegedly persecuted and intentionally discriminated against by the malign West. This reaction would have been structurally homologous to the Russian world rhetoric of self-inflicted victimization. Alternatively, he could have accepted liability and started developing new regimes of practices aimed at rectifying the previous wrongdoings. Putin's predilection for the second option indirectly acknowledged the limitations of

the ideology of national self-assertion. Due to these limitations, he ultimately had to give way to practices of governmentality conditioned by compliance with international standards and, at least formally, allow non-state units more autonomy. This recognition of guilt, however, engendered another controversy.

The Russian government insisted that individual responsibility for doping should be tackled on a case-to-case basis without overgeneralizations that might ostracize the whole nation (Rep.ru 2017). The former Sports Minister Vitaly Mutko assumed that "there is no collective guilt in the doping issue, only individual guilt" (Mozgovoi 2017). While he vehemently denied that the state could have been aware of the doping of individual athletes, he also emotionally defended these same athletes: "How can one so easily accuse Sasha Tretyakov, who year after year dedicates his entire life to sports, and deprive him of the gold medal? That would be against the whole philosophy of sport... Legkov resided in Switzerland for four years and won the Tour de Ski, the World Cup, and the Royal Marathon in Oslo. So why would he need a "cocktail" in Sochi?" (Ibid).

At the same time, the official Russian discourse framed the entire issue as one affecting and hurting the pride and self-esteem of the whole nation. Before the 2016 Summer Olympics in Rio, Mutko, who was the sports minister at the time, publicly apologized for individual cases, anticipating that IOC sanctions against Russia could be avoided (Mutko 2016). The major controversy at this juncture was that the restoration of Russia's sovereignty in the domain of major international sporting events relied on the acknowledgment and acceptance by WADA and IOC authorities. From the very outset of the doping scandal, RUSADA claimed its full conformity with the international standards of anti-doping control, committed its operation to the principles of independence and transparency, and recognized the rules and the timetable set by WADA (Ruptly 2015). Due to the impact of the doping crisis, in a matter of months, the Russian government introduced changes in Russian legislation, including the Labor Code and the Penal Code, and RUSADA developed and published its long-term Strategy and All-Russian Anti-Doping Rules (RUSADA 2019). Yuri Ganus, RUSADA's director, confirmed the full conformity of Russia's reformed anti-doping system with WADA's

Roadmap and praised it as a highly useful cooperation with many European anti-doping agencies in matters concerning education and sport ethics. The urgency in the introduction and implementation of all these measures attested to the determination of the Russian government to lift anti-doping sanctions and to bring Russia back into the international Olympic movement. This was done even though this strategy implied not only painfully admitting previous wrongdoings but also accepting the authority of global sports organizations as superior in setting conditions and monitoring the progress of their implementation.

Still, these attempts appear to have been quite superficial and rhetorical. Further evidence of Russia cheating the international sports agencies has emerged since. Most notably, WADA experts visiting Russia in January 2019 discovered that local administrators had repeatedly tampered with the Russian doping database between 2016 and 2018, deleting some 20,000 entries from Russian athletes and private messages from Grigory Rodchenkov. Most changes occurred when the database was in the hands of the Russian Investigative Committee. As a result, in December 2019, WADA banned Russian athletes from participating in international events for another 4 years (Pilyarsov 2019).

At the same time, more evidence came from Russian domestic competitions, suggesting that the blanket use of doping remained a normal practice. For instance, when doping officers suddenly appeared at the Siberian indoor athletics championships in January 2018, 36 athletes disappeared from the events, including adults, juniors, and even those under 18. In the women's final for the 60-meter sprint, six of the eight athletes did not show up (Sambur 2019). Similarly, when doping officers showed up unannounced at the "Izhevsk Rifle," the main biathlon competition in Russia, in January 2021, 33 young athletes, including the entire teams from Tyumen' and Khanty-Mansiysk, ran from the stadium (Avdokhin 2019).

The most notable recent case has been the doping scandal involving 15-year-old Russian figure skater Kamila Valieva's participation in the Winter Olympics in Beijing in February 2022. After she took gold in the team competitions, results from a Swedish laboratory, taken during a doping probe at the Russian national championships

in December 2021, confirmed she had taken the metabolic drug trimetazidine. Valieva was stripped of the gold medal and failed the following individual competition. Despite the clear evidence of doping, a nationwide campaign in support of Valieva started in Russia. Politicians and media personalities claimed that the young figure skater was being "bullied" by the West, which was envious of her successes. Giant billboards with her photograph appeared all over Moscow, saying "Kamila, we stand by you," and schoolchildren were obliged to write letters to support her (Kukaleva 2023).

These episodes demonstrate that doping in Russian sports continues unrestricted, and athletes, state bodies, and society have not learned any lessons from the revelations of the past decade. On the contrary, there is a strong belief in a narrative, in the spirit of KGB conspiracy theories, that this is part of a grandiose plot by the West to destroy Russian sports and to devalue Russian victories from previous years.

## BIOPOLITICAL SOVEREIGNTY

Russian biopolitical sovereignty is nourished by a general and widespread tendency to deny the doping allegations across all Russian mainstream media. As one popular meme put it, "Everyone's doping, but only Russians get caught" (Bakin 2017). The Russian public frequently cites well-known exceptions granted to Western athletes to take prescribed medications. Examples of this include the US tennis players Venus and Serena Williams and many athletes on the Norwegian cross-country ski team who had been diagnosed with asthma and were taking breath-enhancing anti-asthmatic drugs, which are otherwise listed as banned substances by WADA. For the Russian audience, this feeds into the popular theory of an anti-Russian global conspiracy in which sports is one of many arenas where the West seeks to "humiliate" and "defeat" Russia. Taking offense at the outside world and reveling in self-pity is a peculiar form of Russian post-imperial trauma, a kind of "Weimar resentment," which helps explain a great deal of Russian foreign policy under Putin's leadership (Medvedev 2014). Paradoxically, the doping saga, rather

than eliciting calls to rectify the problems at home, helps to feed feelings of alleged injustice by bolstering a sense of isolation and confrontation. As a result, Russia has used the doping affair and the subsequent reaffirmation of injured national pride to reinforce the psychological basis of sovereignty. In this way, the biopolitics of doping intersect with the geopolitics of Russian isolationism and post-imperial accommodation.

A truly comic example of such "doping sovereignty" can be seen in the November 2018 decision by the Moscow City Court to reject the CAS ruling in Lausanne that stripped Russian bobsledder Alexander Zubkov of two Sochi Olympic gold medals for doping. This ruling reinstated Zubkov, who is also president of the Russian Bobsleigh Federation, as the "two-time Olympic Champion on the territory of the Russian Federation" (Interfax 2018). This absurd decision once again stresses the painful junction between Russian national sovereignty and adherence to global sports governance. On the one hand, there has been a grudging acceptance of international law; on the other hand, however, there have been hysterical outbursts of sovereign thinking.

The most important challenge for Russia's biopolitical sovereignty came from Russian athletes who participated in the 2018 Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang, Korea, under the "neutral" (IOC) flag. In fact, they had to compete in their de facto individual capacity without revealing traditional signs of belonging to a national identity (flags or anthems). Indeed, any display of national sovereignty was under a strict ban in Pyeongchang, including national colors on the cheeks of Russian fans at the stadiums and manicures in the colors of the Russian flag among athletes.

Some nationalist commentators ventured to call these athletes "traitors" and thus disconnect them from the representation of nationhood. In particular, the Russian patriotic TV channel "TsarGrad" broadcast several talk shows discussing the doping sanctions from a nationalist perspective. These shows put a premium on sports mega-events as elements of national prestige and self-esteem, rather than as playgrounds for competitions between individual athletes. Pyotr Tolstoy, a TV producer and member of the Civic Chamber, publicly spoke out in favor of boycotting the 2018 Winter Olympics, despite

the interests of individual athletes. He claimed: "We can wait as long as necessary; what lies ahead of us is eternity" (Tolstoy 2017). The most eloquent was an assertion by Alexandr Sherin, first deputy chairman of the State Duma Committee on Defense, who took this argument further: "The Olympics are not about individual athletes, but about the whole country... We can't afford to get out of the trench with our hands up. This is a matter of respect and national pride" (Sherin and Lebedeva 2017). According to this narrative of biopolitical sovereignty, Russia should have forbidden its athletes, especially those of them who were recruited by the CSKA Army Club and were thus formally employees of the Defense Ministry, from participating in the 2018 Winter Olympics. Ramzan Kadyrov, head of Chechnya, publicly pledged that none of the athletes residing in this region in the North Caucasus would go to the Winter Olympics in their individual capacity.

This type of straightforward narrative, grounded in the presumption of the dominance of sovereign biopower over anatomopolitics, is indicative in the sense of lucidly exposing a vast space that opens up to political fantasies and conspiracy theories: "Bach, the German head of the IOC, announced sanctions against Russia on the same day Nazi troops launched their counter-offense in close proximity to Moscow during the Great Patriotic War... We still need to find out where Bach's grandfather was at that time... Obviously, with the assistance of Germany, Europe and the international community are trying to take revenge, and America stands behind all this." With all his naïve vernacular bio-patriotism, Sherin articulated the prospect of turning sovereignty in sports into a parochial myth: "We ought to organize our own Olympic Games, invite our friends, produce medals twice as heavy as the regular ones, and then we'll see if our records are higher" (Sherin and Lebedeva 2017).

Like-minded social media channels were replete with pejorative and disrespectful comments about the Russian team that came to the Winter Olympics without a national flag (Glavred 2018). Those who did not attend on principled grounds were, on the contrary, hailed as "heroes" (TsarGrad 2017). As for the athletes themselves, those who refused to perform under the IOC flag referred to "humility" in their intentions: "I intended to win, but not a car or an apartment that the

president might have awarded me; this is of secondary importance. I was always thinking about higher values. I wanted to win for my country," confided skier Nikita Kriukov. "I wanted to stand at the pedestal and see our national tricolor higher than all other flags. I wanted to sing the anthem. I wanted my country to win the medal count and contribute to that victory" (Kriukov 2017).

The following Olympic Games, in Tokyo in 2020/2021 (the 2020 Games were postponed one year because of the COVID-19 pandemic and organized in Japan under strict sanitary regulations and without spectators) and in Beijing in 2022, also saw limitations on Russian sports sovereignty. Athletes did not represent the country but the Russian Olympic Committee instead. While for the Summer Olympics in Rio in 2016 and the Winter Games in Pyeongchang in 2018, the IOC invited individual Russian athletes with a clear medical history, the Russian Olympic Committee (ROC) was allowed to nominate its own list of participants for the Games in Tokyo and Beijing. Still, the Russian flag could not be displayed, and instead of the national anthem at the medal ceremony, an introduction to Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto was performed. As a replacement for the anthem, the ROC first suggested "Katyusha," a Soviet song from 1938 that became extremely popular during World War II. As a symbol of the Soviet victory in the war, the IOC rejected it precisely because it bore clear marks of Russian identity. Tchaikovsky's melody also raised questions back at home, as critics of the regime made ironic comments that the use of this music could be punished as "gay propaganda" under recent Russian homophobic laws since Tchaikovsky was openly gay. Patriots also complained that the opening melody was, in fact, not written by Tchaikovsky but by his disciple and associate Alexander Ziloti, who in his later years became an anti-Bolshevik and escaped to the US after the October Revolution. Some patriotic critics of the song selection went as far as calling him a "musical Rodchenkov" (Kuznetsov 2021). As we can see through these examples, a biopolitical reading of Russia's sports sovereignty was present here as well.

The uninspiring performance of the ROC team in Tokyo (5th place in the overall medal count) and Beijing (9th place overall) was nevertheless presented by Russian propaganda as a resounding suc-

cess in the face of a hostile environment and unlawful bans. The Beijing Olympics ended on February 20, 2022, and in the early hours of February 24, Russia started the bombing of Kiev and unleashed its war on Ukraine. Some even suggest that Putin had waited for the end of the games. This could have been to avoid compromising his ally Xi Jinping's celebrations, as had happened previously when Russia started a war on Georgia during the Beijing Summer Olympics in August 2008. Whatever the reason for the timing of the start of the war, it created an entirely new situation in world politics and in international sports. The doping ban on Russia was quickly superseded by comprehensive sanctions against the aggressor country in the field of sports.

In response to the Russian aggression, on February 28, 2022, the IOC issued a recommendation to international sports federations to ban athletes from Russia and Belarus (which actively supported the war by providing its territory, logistics, and supply lines for the attack) from competitions. Further sanctions included that neither the International Federation (IF) nor the National Olympic Committee (NOC) would support or organize events in Russia or Belarus, and no flag, anthem, colors, or any other symbols from these countries would be displayed at any sporting event or meeting. The IOC required Russian and Belarusian athletes to compete only as Individual Neutral Athletes and insisted that Russian or Belarusian teams could not be considered for any competitions. The same ban applied to athletes who actively support the war as well as those who are contracted by the Russian or Belarusian military or national security agencies (IOC 2023). In the first few weeks after the invasion, Russia was denied the right to host the Champions League Final in St. Petersburg, the Formula One stage in Sochi, the World Championships in volleyball, the Youth Hockey World Championship, the World Chess Olympics and Paralympics, etc. In the first months of the war, Russian sports faced an almost complete ban on the international scene.

Paradoxically, this was a high point of the much-coveted "biopolitical sovereignty" of Russia since it brought athletes' bodies back home and re-nationalized the sports industry. Putin had long spoken of the need for the "nationalization of elites" in Russia. The war, ac-

companied by Western sanctions against Russia, provided fertile ground for just that, as the sporting elite found themselves almost completely locked inside Russia. Under the conditions of war hysteria and anti-Western sentiment, this kind of sports isolationism fits well into the mainstream propaganda discourse. In the first weeks of the war, the ultra-conservative portal *Vzglyad.ru* called for the "sports sovereignty" of Russia (Fateev 2022), and this eventually became a routine slogan in the official discourse. The sports minister and key sports functionaries also participated in discussions on the "sports sovereignty" of Russia at the 2023 St. Petersburg International Economic Forum (St. Petersburg TV 2023). For all its patriotic appeal, the concept offers little more than increased support by Russian investors in national football, hockey, etc. leagues, the development of "indigenous" Russian sports such as *lapta*, the Russian equivalent of cricket, and the introduction of various military-sport disciplines.

Part of the claimed "sports sovereignty" has nothing to do with self-isolation, as Russia is actively contemplating other international alternatives to the Western-dominated international federations, leagues (FIFA, UEFA, IAAF/ World Athletics), and the Olympic movement itself. Much to the chagrin of the IOC, Russia has announced its alternative to the Olympics: the first Summer World Friendship Games in September 2024, to be held every four years, with the Winter Friendship Games to be added in 2026. Likewise, Russia has suggested hosting the BRICS Games, an idea already supported by China and India. Finally, there are the regular Games of the Commonwealth of Independent States, dominated by Russia; the first ones were held in 2021 in Russia and the second in 2023 in Belarus. In other words, rather than seeking to isolate itself, Russia seeks to find non-Western alternatives to being represented in international sports. This conveniently fits within the country's drift towards Asia.

At the same time, the Russian Olympic Committee is still looking for ways to make it to the 2024 Paris Olympics. Ideally, it would be for Russian athletes to qualify for the Olympics by participating in the Asian Games in Hangzhou, China, in September-October 2023. Chinese organizers have confirmed that up to 500 Russian and Belarusian athletes can be selected, provided they are cleared by the IOC (Galtsov 2023). Meanwhile, some athletes are looking for private ways

to practice and prepare for competition outside Russia. In July 2023, the names of seven Russian athletes were discovered disguised as members of the Syrian team in the start protocols of the Pan-Arab Games in Algiers. All had changed their names to Arabic, such as swimmer Anastasia Sorokina, who was listed as a Syrian athlete named Enas Sorkine (Pogrebnyak 2023). This shows that the Russian sports industry still needs international competition and recognition.

Participating in international competitions and achieving this recognition is becoming increasingly difficult since Russian authorities are actively recruiting top athletes to support the war in Ukraine. On March 18, 2022, a massive pro-war rally took place at the Luzhniki Sports Arena in Moscow, titled "For a World without Nazism! For Russia! For the President!" and was attended by Vladimir Putin and celebrities, all wearing *Z* symbols. Among those in attendance were star Russian athletes, including triple Olympic champion in cross-country skiing Alexander Bolshunov, double Olympic champion in swimming Yevgeny Rylov, multiple World Champion gymnasts Dina and Arina Averina, and World Champions and Olympic silver medalist figure skaters Viktoria Sinytsina and Nikito Katzalapov. All these athletes were immediately disqualified for competitions by their respective international sports federations. The young Russian gymnast Ivan Kulyak was also stripped of his bronze medal at the World Cup competition in Doha, Qatar, in March 2022, for coming out to the medal ceremony wearing the *Z* symbol.

The Russian state has also inadvertently involved athletes through the military and other security services, with many athletes getting their salaries and benefits from these branches while also moving up in the officers' ranks. The same previously mentioned Olympic champions, Alexander Bolshunov and Yevgeny Rylov, are both serving, one in the Army and the other in Rosgvardia (the National Guard). If one looks at the Russian medal list from the 2020 (2021) Tokyo Summer Olympics, out of the 20 gold medals won by Russian athletes, eleven were won by sportsmen from the Army Sports Club and a further six by Rosgvardiya athletes, leaving just three medals to non-uniformed athletes (Mal'gin 2023). Such a critical dependence by Russian athletes on the state in fact equates them to soldiers who do not fully possess their bodies and lives. The biopolitical paradox

of Russian sports is that while the state pledges to take care of the athletes' bodies, offering them support and turning them into state servants of sorts, it in fact takes their lives by exposing their bodies to medicinal risks like doping and to geopolitical risks like sanctions and bans, which effectively terminate their professional lives and careers. The war against Ukraine and the concomitant sanctions have undermined world-level sports in Russia; in the absence of international competition (which in most sports means competing in and with the West), top athletes are facing degradation and an early end to their sporting careers. As sports commentator Alexander Shmurnov observed, the West "will cope with the absence of Russian athletes. The average deterioration of global sports will probably be around 5%, and in the meantime, Russian sports will collapse by 70%! Then it may take another 50 years to find the grains of new talent and to train them inside the system" (Medvedev, Yaremenko and Shmurnov 2023). Sovereignty in sports, like sovereignty in science, turns out to be an illusion in such a highly internationalized, interdependent, and competitive industry. This will eventually eat away at the very foundations of Putin's biopolitics, turning athletes' bodies into useless machines.

## SOVEREIGNTY AND ANATOMOPOLITICS

Since the end of the Cold War, the structure of the Russian sports industry has dramatically changed, and the growing heterogeneity of athletic communities has pushed mainstream discourse to adopt anatomopolitical arguments as a second pillar of Russia's sports sovereignty. The biopolitical totality that we have described in the previous section is therefore decomposing into a series of individual or group-based professional strategies where personal success and material benefits overweigh the rhetorical commitments to the spirit of national identity and honor.

On a wider note, the Russian media discourse is usually very attentive to athletes who pursue their own individual strategies and whose biopolitical connections to Russian national identity are problematic. One category is foreign-born naturalized athletes who

have received Russian citizenship and have been included on national teams mainly for career considerations. Although in most cases naturalization is accepted as a pragmatic, if not inevitable, solution for a deficit of local cadres, there are multiple critical voices who argue that it is basically second-ranked players who wish to integrate with the Russian national teams. Besides, as the argument goes, naturalized athletes, even if they have Russian passports, cannot be considered as "patriotic" as their Russia-born peers (Gorin 2017). Other skeptical arguments assume that the growing number of naturalized athletes is an impediment to developing national sports traditions and that these athletes are less attractive as objects of admiration for fans (Cherdantsev 2016). Apart from that, some sports experts deem that naturalized athletes might only exacerbate troubles with doping in Russia (Sokolov 2015). Another group is Russian athletes making their sports careers abroad, also for pragmatic reasons. One example is the tennis player Maria Sharapova, who failed to pass a doping test in 2016 and, despite the negative media coverage of the incident, maintained her celebrity status in Russia mostly through her charity programs and media appearances (Krylova 2017).

When it comes to the doping scandal, Russia's anatomopolitical strategy bifurcates into shaming individual athletes for using illicit substances and bemoaning those who are portrayed as victims of unfair treatment by global sports institutions. Doped athletes are anatomopolitically detached from the national biopolitical community and are often referred to as a "shame" to the nation which must pay a price for their misbehavior. For instance, Vladimir Saraev, deputy head of the expert committee on physical culture and sports at the Federation Council, blamed coaches and medical staff, along with athletes themselves, for either negligence or intentional rule-breaking (Saraev 2016). After the eruption of the post-Sochi doping scandal, the Russian state reserved the right to retrieve funds that had been spent on coaching and other sporting expenses. At the same time, the government decided not to reclaim honoraria from athletes who were exposed to doping.

Stories about the alleged victims of WADA's biased and discriminatory policies are much more visible in the Russian media. Most

of the athletes accused of taking prohibited drugs do not accept their guilt and instead resort to alternative explanations and excuses. Not surprisingly, the Russian media is replete with stories about those formerly accused of doping being conveniently employed by the government as sports officials, managers, and administrators (Korostelev 2016).

Emblematic in this respect was the 2016 NTV documentary titled *Doping WADAmeter* (NTV 2016). This documentary depicts the whole doping story not only as a plot against Russia but also as a conflict against the forces of totalitarian control and regulation, with WADA and the IOC on the one side and athletes' bodies being subjugated to unfair procedures on the other. In this dichotomy, global sports organizations are portrayed as unduly imposing their malign and morally humiliating policies of testing on athletes' bodies. This is shown to be detrimental to the individual careers of outstanding sports personalities, Russian and non-Russian alike, who have been discriminated against and wrongly sanctioned for what they have not done. Even some critical Western discourses have depicted WADA as a networked imperial entity that annuls athletes' dreams and makes them completely defenseless and unprotected (Macedo 2018; Girginov and Parry 2019). What further distinguishes Russian discourses, though, is the Russian interpretation of WADA as part of the so-called "Anglo-Saxon world," which is *inherently* inimical to Russia. The documentary illustrates this pathos of bewailing through a series of individual cases where the main protagonists are swimmer Yulia Efimova (triple Olympic medal winner, three-time champion of Europe, and four-time world champion), weightlifter Alexei Lovchev (European and World Championship medal winner), world record holder in race walking Denis Nizhegorodov, triple Olympic champion in cross-country skiing Yulia Chepalova, and some other sports celebrities. The story of the Russian Paralympic team being banned from the 2018 Paralympics was particularly emotional in this film.

The anatomopolitical outlook on the doping story reached its rhetorical peak and transformed into yet another element of Russia's claims for sovereignty as the only political instrument that might protect individual athletes from the alleged Russophobia in

WADA and the West in general. The narrative of the previously mentioned documentary blatantly suggests that "Russians are treated as suspects because they are the best." This discourse ultimately creates a hyper-Schmittian world of triple exceptions, where WADA first exceptionalizes itself by denying the presumption of innocence and adhering to the principles of collective will. The organization then exceptionalizes certain athletes by allowing them to use otherwise prohibited drugs for therapeutic reasons. Finally, it exceptionalizes Russia as the only country banned from the 2018 Olympics.

Yet, paradoxically, having reached its apex, the sovereignty-centric appeal loses its coherence and consistency. On the one hand, in their fascination with sovereignty, the authors of the documentary positively refer to the US experience of disregarding some of the regulations of international sports organizations, implying that Moscow officialdom should have behaved in a similar way. At the end of the film, one of the interviewees even expressed solidarity with the cosmopolitan idea of the total rejection of national symbols in the Olympics, thus turning the Games into competitions between athletes, not states. This confusion reflects yet another controversy that stretches far beyond sports politics and reveals the dislocated nature of the Russian hegemonic discourse and of the entire sovereign body politic. The whole fabric of Russian sovereignty is torn apart not only by the binary structure of its conceptualization from both anatomo- and biopolitical standpoints but also by the unresolvable conflict between striking deals with global sports organizations and thus accepting their normative power, on the one hand, and reinvigorating Russia's sovereign authority over athletes and their bodies, on the other. Contradictions and struggles between these two strategies will be decisive factors defining the compromised and incomplete sovereignty of Putin's regime.

## CONCLUSION

The politics of the body in Russian sports explored in this chapter has revealed two important trends. On the one hand, despite strong state control over athletes' lives and attempts to push the limits of

sovereignty into their bodies by implementing and covering up doping programs, the doping scandals of the past decade have shown significant constraints on biopolitical sovereignty. The Sochi doping scandal was especially revealing. It added to the emerging image of a "toxic Russia" that had become the dominant perception of the country on the international scene by the late 2010s (it is also worth noting that "toxic" was named Oxford Dictionary Word of the Year 2018). These "toxic" episodes include the poisoning of the Russian ex-spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter in British Salisbury (which also revived the memories of the earlier poisoning of another ex-agent Alexander Litvinenko in London), armies of Russian trolls and bots disrupting social networks in the West, "toxic" Russian assets in the West, and attempts by Russian oligarchs to corrupt authorities (e.g., the allegations against Russian potash magnate Dmitry Rybolovlev in Monaco in November 2018), the Russian trace in the 2016 US presidential elections, and the Kremlin's support for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, who has been using chemical weapons against his own people. These events, combined with the fallout of the Sochi doping scandal, created the image of "dirty bodies" as part of Russia's hybrid warfare against the West (Medvedev 2017). Since the whole story questioned Russia's credibility as a host of future mega-events, the Kremlin had to engage in public communication and couldn't afford to disregard what otherwise could have been dismissed as an unfriendly encroachment upon Russia.

The doping saga not only illustrated the hybrid nature of Russia's model of governmentality in sports but also the importance of its symbolic side. The fact that Russian champions and medal winners were publicly exposed as violators of Olympic rules and sport ethics ruined the whole mythology of the Sochi Games as a high point of Russia's alleged soft power. In this sense, Putin's regime fell victim to its own policy of consistently elevating sports events to the very top of Russia's symbolic order as a playground for national consolidation and public mobilization. This explains why the doping issue was so sensitive for the hegemonic discourse. It not only put the Russian government in an uncomfortable defensive position but also seriously damaged the Sochi triumphalist narrative of Russia's grandeur and supremacy.

The sovereign ambiguity and indeterminacy of Putin's response to the doping accusations can be discussed from the broader perspective of WADA's controversial actorness. The Russian government was obviously ill-prepared for the growing powers of this organization engendered by the IOC and its performance as part of the global sporting industry that Russia had sought to take advantage of for years. Having profited significantly from the Sochi Olympics and subsequent mega-events, Russia fell victim to the anti-doping agency and lost much of its symbolic power gained during the 2014 Winter Olympics. Being the first victim of WADA's policies on a global scale, Russia failed to produce its own discourse in this sphere and had to simply echo some of the arguments that have for years been articulated by WADA opponents who have questioned the legitimacy of this organization and the propriety of its anti-doping instruments (Elbe and Overbye 2014). Eventually, the Kremlin reiterated two mutually incompatible, if not exclusive, versions of the doping controversy. While Putin presumed that there was political reasoning behind targeting Russia on doping charges, he still accepted the legitimacy of the international regulatory bodies in this sphere. Russia had to submit to global biopolitical governmentality and became a subject of the new system of surveillance and control.

Overall, our analysis has revealed a critical juncture between sovereignty, anatomo-, and biopolitics, as well as between national exceptionalism and transnational governance in the Russian sports industry. Creating a sovereign exception is no longer enough to claim sovereignty; today, sovereignty is a multi-layered phenomenon that also includes "interdependence sovereignty" and compliance with international norms and procedures necessary for the recognition of one's political stand. In a global domain like sports, this is more evident than elsewhere. While Russia might have unilaterally claimed Crimea following a "hybrid operation" without bothering to achieve international acceptance and displayed a willingness to tolerate sanctions, it cannot conduct a hybrid doping operation and claim victory unilaterally. For this, international acceptance is crucial.

On the other hand, the sports industry and the ideological imagery surrounding it have been preparing the ideological and anatomopolitical groundwork for war and other elements of state policy.

It is here that the ideas of a global anti-Russian conspiracy and notions of perennial animosity between Russia and the West have circulated. These have been further fueled by the doping revelations. Popular movies about Soviet sports heroes made in the past decade, *Legend Number 17* (about the legendary hockey player Valery Kharlamov), *Going Vertical* (the story of the Soviet basketball team that won the 1972 Olympic tournament), and *White Snow* (a biopic about the Soviet cross-country skier and multiple World and Olympic champion Yelena Vyalbe) all tell the story of a bitter fight against Western opponents, where, in the end, the Russian heroes prevail; in the *Red Machine*, the Soviet hockey team beats the Canadians in the epic 1972 super-series in Montreal, the Soviet basketball team beats the US in the final 3 seconds of the Olympic final, and Yelena Vyalbe beats the Norwegians in the 1997 Nordic World Championships, taking 5 gold in all 5 disciplines. At the same time, organized groups of Russian football hooligans, supported and financed by the state, traveled to various European cities carrying banners and chanting slogans full of racism, chauvinism, and Russian/Soviet imperialism. In Prague, they unfolded banners with Soviet tanks, calling for a new invasion, and during the UEFA Euro in Marseille in 2016, they started a severe street fight with English football fans, leaving one dead and dozens wounded (Medvedev 2016a). In short, the area of sports in Russia has been increasingly associated with geopolitics, war, a battle with the West, and the idea of revenge. It predates recent phenomena such as isolationism, locking up the country, and a drift toward the East. In the latter case, the Asiatization of Russia can be seen as an attempt to create a non-Western world.

Likewise, the bodies of the top athletes have for decades been appropriated by the state, which exposes them to medicinal and political risks and turns them into soldiers of sorts (which many of them in fact are ). With the start of the war, Russian sportsmen and women found themselves hostages to the state, obliged to pledge loyalty to the war effort and to make political statements that would forever ban them from the international sports scene. The biopolitics of sports and the images of war it has evoked have been transformed into the biopolitics of real war, appropriating and disposing of human bodies on a much larger scale.

CHAPTER FOUR

# THE BIOPOLITICS OF THE PANDEMIC

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter requires a methodological prelude. During COVID-19, a growing number of academic publications applied a biopolitical perspective to analyzing the pandemic. While this perspective appears logical and instrumental in emergency situations involving issues related to life, death, and the ensuing medicalization of public policies, it does not seem to be universally accepted. For example, a recent edited volume on COVID-19 in Eastern European countries is conceptually framed in the categories of institutionalist theory, including endogenous shocks, political opportunity structures, good and bad governance, agents and principals, incentives, and so forth (Zavadskaya 2023).

The panoply of different approaches to researching COVID-19 related topics brings to the fore the question of the advantages and disadvantages of a biopolitical theorization of the pandemic. Three points seem to be of utmost importance for this discussion. First, one may claim that institutionalists, focusing on their academic vocabulary, still speak about biopolitics without naming it as such. This is seen clearly in discussions citing mortality rates or the state of public medicine. By the same token, what institutionalists refer to as policy measures for the financial support of vulnerable groups or to stimulate business activity corresponds to the Foucauldian def-

inition of governmentality. In other words, one may say that for *both* institutionalist and biopolitical approaches to the pandemic, the object of analysis is a plethora of political categorizations of human life. The main difference between these approaches is the academic vocabulary used to discuss these categorizations.

As an alternative, one may assume that biopolitical and non-biopolitical scholarships have different *foci*, the former being politically regulated human corporeality and the latter being institutional arrangements. In this interpretation, issues related to health and medicine can be discussed in terms of new regulatory and protective practices disciplining human bodies and their physicality or in terms of institutional norms and legal provisions aimed at crisis management.

Another approach would be to look for a common and mutually beneficial agenda for biopolitics and institutionalism so that the two disciplinary approaches would reinforce one another. The prospect for this academic synergy looks quite promising, considering the deficit of institutional insights in biopolitical literature beyond the generalized concerns about the degeneration of democratic practices under the pressure of what Giorgio Agamben has dubbed "a sanitation terror and a religion of health" (Agamben 2021, 8). This dialogue between institutional and biopolitical scholars might be helpful in illuminating different contexts related to public health and medical emergencies.

A core component of such a dialogue could be a better understanding of the distinctions between seemingly similar concepts used in institutional analyses and biopolitical studies. For example, those adhering to institutional theory would prefer to speak about governance ("good" or "bad"), while authors with biopolitical backgrounds would choose the Foucauldian concept of governmentality. Whereas governance usually refers to specific practices administered and managed by public authorities, governmentality is viewed as a particular type of power relations grounded not in the political will of the sovereign but in the knowledge-based rationality and logic of policy managers. Another important distinction may be made between responsible behavior and responsibilization; the former is attributed to a particular sociological pattern of behavior, while the latter

is seen as an indispensable component of liberal biopolitics, allowing for the state to retreat from societal spheres where people take care of their own lives. Another semantic coupling is performance and performativity. In an institutionalist sense, performance is interpreted as "the provision of safety and security or the ability to provide economic growth or public services" and essentially refers to state bureaucracy (Karshiev and Silvan 2023, 202). When it comes to the biopolitics of performativity, interpretations from the traditions of Judith Butler and the ensuing feminist scholarship might be projected onto the sphere of biopolitics as well. These consider performativity as a lack of a core identity predetermining gender, sexual, generational, or other corporeal identities.

Of course, academic hybridization and cross-fertilization should not dissolve the specificity of the biopolitics of pandemics. The bulk of academic literature on the biopolitical dimensions of the coronavirus crisis is marked by a strong emphasis on the amplified capacity of sovereign authorities not only to "discipline and punish" but also to differentiate groups of the population. "Biopolitics is fundamentally about unequal treatment" (Schubert 2022, 97) and differential vulnerability, yet it creates "democratic openings" or spaces and discourses that offer alternatives to the sovereign model of top-down political management of crises (Pearce 2020). Many authors point to a politics of resistance to biopower (Hannah, Hutta, and Schemann 2020) as an inevitable effect of COVID-19 crisis management.

In this chapter, we discuss how and to what extent this argument might be applied to the Russian case. The coronavirus emergency in Russia was grounded in a merger between somatic sovereignty, pastoral power, and a peculiar type of biopolitical governmentality. There was also a strong necropolitical component that normalized a "natural death" due to old age, poor physical condition, sickness, or an unhealthy lifestyle. This component further embraced a meaningful anatomopolitical element, which was revealed through constitutive references to individual bodies and specific cases of illness. At the same time, although the pandemic created several "windows of opportunity" for new discourses and practices that fall into the category of governmentality, these opportunities were contaminated by strong patriotic, and therefore divisive, components.

COVID-19 triggered new narratives, including politically meaningful counter-discourses, which diversified and pluralized the discursive scene in Russia. Based on empirical research, we have identified four clusters of biopolitical governmentality in Russia during the COVID-19 pandemic which are discussed in detail below.

## MEDICALIZED BIO-GOVERNMENTALITY

The production of the Sputnik V vaccine in Russia exemplified state-sponsored medicalized bio-governmentality and demonstrated a strong emphasis on market pragmatism and Russia's competitiveness in medical technologies. While this narrative did leave some operational space for associated actors, it was produced in close conjunction with the sovereign power and patronized by the Kremlin. The main spokesperson was Kirill Dmitriev, who is the CEO of the Russian Direct Investment Fund, which was the main investor in the 22 billion RUB production of Sputnik V. In multiple interviews, in both Russian and English, Dmitriev spoke using a depoliticized and rationalized language, citing investments and funding aimed at coping with the medical emergency in an effective and timely manner. Sputnik V could therefore be seen as a business project to promote the Russian vaccine across the globe and foster Russia's global agency as a major vaccine producer. This promotion involved a range of competitive branding and media strategies. The rationality and necessity of vaccination were also supported by other institutions affiliated with the government, such as the Skolkovo School of Management (Trifonova and Veldanova 2021).

State support for major business projects, such as the global campaign to promote Sputnik V, can be seen as an extension of the previously well-articulated interpretation of sovereignty as Russia's competitive advantage. In addition to the promotion of the vaccine by Russian governmental institutions, the advertisement and co-production of Sputnik V have expanded the space for Russian health diplomacy. In turn, this has integrated other actors, including the vaccine producer, the Gamaleya National Research Center for Epidemiology and Microbiology; state corporations and financial

institutions (such as Sberbank); professional associations (for example, the Russian Association of Pharmaceutical Producers); marketing agencies; and the media.

This bio-governmentality is a hybrid phenomenon that combines the business logic of marketing and product promotion with strong political components heavily contaminated with the rhetoric of Russian national patriotism. This rhetoric implies the almost messianic role of Russia in saving humanity from the disease. In reference to Russia as one of six countries possessing the technology to produce vaccines, Dmitriev (2021a) compared the three stages of its production, which included the invention, testing, and marketing of the vaccine, with the "nuclear triad." In a continuation of this securitized narrative, he claimed that the producers of Sputnik V faced regular attacks from the US government and Big Pharma lobby practicing "illegal and aggressive marketing." In Dmitriev's words, this explained why the funding for Russian vaccines did not include foreign financing (Dmitriev 2021c). In his view, all international criticism of Sputnik V is false: "We were right from the very beginning and created the best vaccine in the world for all humankind. We are ready to help those producers whose efficacy is lower than ours" (CNN 2021). On another occasion, he critically assessed COVAX as a slow mechanism, which, in his view, explains Russia's preference to directly supply Sputnik V to the interested countries (Dmitriev 2021b).

The foundational argument of this narrative of "indispensable Russia" places vaccines beyond politics. This point was also articulated by the Doctors' Alliance, a professional organization of medical workers that used to support Alexei Navalny's anti-corruption network. Due to harsh pressure from the authorities, however, the group radically altered its formerly oppositional narrative to a more Kremlin-supportive one.

## REGIONALIZED GOVERNMENTALITY

Another domestic "window of opportunity" was the relative decentralization of competences within the sovereign apparatus through a redistribution of power between the central government and non-

central authorities. In an unprecedented reversal of the decade-long policy of the "vertical of power" and defederalization, in April 2020, as a part of the anti-crisis package, President Putin delegated several practical powers to sub-national authorities to tackle the crisis more effectively. This included the regulation of regional labor markets, the provision of social benefits, and the administration of some elements of social and health care policies. The sharing of policy competencies between the federal center and regions was widely discussed in terms of the ensuing consequences for the entire political system.

As one Russian author has argued, crises paradoxically increase the demand for decentralization and foster discussions on a "new regionalism" (Chertkov 2023). However, governmental decentralization has been unable to counterbalance the preponderance of sovereign power. In accordance with the new amendments signed into law in spring 2020, regional electoral commissions were empowered to reschedule or postpone electoral campaigns in cases of epidemiological risks in specific territories. Pandemic-related restrictions on public gatherings were also used by the authorities to avoid mass-scale protests . Due to bans on public meetings, opposition candidates were put in an unequal position vis-à-vis incumbents, who were able to run their reelection campaigns under the guise of routine work. According to independent observers, the extension of the voting procedure from one to three days further complicated the process of electoral monitoring and control over results. At the same time, the practices of e-voting (technically less controllable by the Central Electoral Committee) and mail voting were accepted for future elections. As a result, the Kremlin, by and large, succeeded in gaining people's approval of the constitutional amendments proposed by Putin in January 2020 (75% for versus 25% against) and in securing pro-Kremlin positions (with an average vote of about 70%) during the regional electoral cycle in September 2020. Even critically minded political experts acknowledged that Putin most likely could have won a majority of votes in both campaigns without fraud and that the Kremlin faces no real and well-organized opposition. The continuing preponderance of the "party of power" at both the federal and regional levels made many analysts acknowledge that the opposition in Russia fell victim to the COVID-19 crisis and has no chances to seriously

challenge the Kremlin in the near future Some experts claimed that in 2020 Russia progressed in building a fascist type of state (Pastukhov 2020), one that excluded demands for change and used the coronavirus to justify a besieged fortress mindset.

## FUTURISTIC BIO-GOVERNMENTALITY

The pandemic has created a niche for another type of governmental narrative that is bent on post-political, technocratic, administrative, and managerial imaginations of the post-pandemic future. This future-oriented bio-governmentality has detached itself from the dichotomy of state vs. opposition by using politically neutral language to focus on increasing the efficacy of anti-COVID policies.

In line with this, Sberbank invested its new educational technological resources in the spheres of financial management and security (Baranov2020). At the same time, specialists in education intensely discussed measures to cope with digital inequality (Katsva and Eidelman 2020), while anthropologists and sociologists debated the long-term effects of isolation on society as an experience of introspection and self-regulation (Petrovskaya et al., 2020). In a more general sense, the pandemic boosted advocacy for greater connectivity in global politics. An expert from the Russian Council on International Affairs claimed:

> In the aftermath of the immediate repercussions of COVID-19, the world and its constituent parts are likely to become more, rather than less, interconnected and interdependent… The new rules of engagement and new models of interaction will grow from technical, specific, and incremental pockets of cooperation, and eventually expand to more sensitive political and strategic domains (Kortunov 2020a).

Some foreign policy specialists thought that Russia and the EU might be among the major victims of the pandemic and that both Moscow and Brussels would be sidelined in the international scene by the growing US-China rivalry. This was predicted because "nei-

ther Russia nor the EU is interested in the creation of a rigid global bipolar system that would hamstring freedom of maneuver on the world stage for both sides. Maintaining and developing cooperation between Moscow and Brussels could be one mechanism for inhibiting that negative trend" (Kortunov 2020b). Within this logic, some Russian state representatives claimed the Russian government was

> ready to talk about artificial intelligence and the European Commission's proposal for a Green Deal... Russia does not see the increased cooperation of Europeans in defense policy as a problem. We are open to cooperation with PESCO (Permanent Structured Cooperation) ... For example, cooperation with the EU on cyber defense or logistics could be envisaged, or our soldiers and experts could support EU operations in third countries. Russia already provided helicopters for the EU Chad mission in 2008, and we also worked with the EU to combat pirates around the Horn of Africa (Chizhov 2020).

This narrative was implicitly critical of the current policy of crisis management in Russia, and some public speakers advocated for opening the Russian market to foreign medical equipment and vaccines. At the same time, they requested a greater role for the state, including more lavish financial spending (Guriev 2020b). Sergei Guriev contributed to this discourse by juxtaposing anti-crisis measures in Russia and in Western countries as an example for the Russian government (Guriev 2020a). In other words, while futuristic bio-governmentality was critical of specific practices of the government, there was still the expectation for the state to do more and to actively interfere in crisis management.

## THE BIO-GOVERNMENTALITY OF RESISTANCE

The anti-Putin opposition explicitly politicized a whole range of issues related to the pandemic. This created additional space for a sharp lambasting of the ruling regime as ineffective and dysfunctional. Independent academics accused the Kremlin of giving prior-

ity to economic and financial issues over saving human lives (Gelman 2022). Similar arguments were essential among political dissidents and critically minded challengers of the regime.

In multiple video blogs, Aleksei Navalny (2020f) consistently argued that the pandemic confirmed how the Kremlin treated the population as a manageable and controllable biomass, requiring measures of surveillance and regulation resembling a "digital camp." For him, COVID-19 is a universal equalizer in the sense that Putin and all other top politicians must follow the rules that they impose on society (Navalny, 2020d). Navalny claimed that what the Kremlin widely depicted as humanitarian help to the US turned out to be a commercial deal at the expense of Russian citizens (Navalny 2020a).

Navalny spoke in favor of strengthening anti-pandemic measures (Navalny 2020b); he claimed that although a state of emergency was de facto in place, the fact that it was not announced put individuals in a precarious position. As an example, he cited the new power of the police to open cars in areas of special "level of preparedness." In turn, this policy made people perceive the police as an "occupational force" similar to, metaphorically speaking, that of Nazi Germany. He argued that people were misled by the months-long portrayal of the virus as harmless, while the authorities vacillated between applying forceful measures and acknowledging citizens' rights (Navalny 2020e). The objects of Navalny's invectives were different categorizations of "bare lives." He pointed to the government's neglect of the poor state of medicine in the most disadvantaged regions, such as North Ossetia, and to what he dubbed the "heroization" of the deaths of public servants belonging to the ruling United Russia party.

In his video-recorded narratives, Navalny anchored the two most visible and vociferous public speakers in the mainstream media, Aleksandr Myasnikov and Elena Malysheva, in the sovereign discourse. He simultaneously deconstructed their public positions through investigative revelations of their expensive property assets abroad (Navalny 2020f). On behalf of the sovereign power, Myasnikov assumed that "those who are supposed to die will die" (Navalny 2020c). Navalny, as well as many others, considered this a cynical normalization of death, something incompatible with medical ethics.

Vladimir Milov, another independent voice in the Russian opposition, also argued that Putin's major mistake was a reluctance to disburse significant public funds to directly support the economy. In his words, Putin was not only reluctant to unequivocally introduce quarantine but also preferred to rely on financial half-measures and delegate the bulk of the burden to Russian business (Milov 2020). In support of vaccination, Milov called the Kremlin's anti-crisis management a major fiasco (Milov 2021a). He went on to accuse Putin of blocking Russian market access to Western vaccines and, in doing so, predetermining the "low level of vaccination in Russia and, correspondingly, one of the highest mortality rates in the world" (Milov 2021b).

Other critics of the regime questioned the appropriateness of the annual military parade, which was rescheduled from May 9 to June 24, 2020. At the center of the debate was that eighty World War II veterans were put in compulsory isolation for a two-week period before they could have access to Putin's tribune. In the meantime, 14 thousand soldiers and officers preparing for the parade were in daily contact with one another, potentially spreading the virus. Dmitry Gudkov, an opposition politician, questioned both the moral side of the story (keeping elderly persons apart from their families just for the sake of surrounding Putin with war veterans) and the prudence of huge financial expenditures for a military show during the pandemic (Prygunov, Gudkov and Golts 2020). This episode was illustrative of how biopower is understood by the Kremlin as a mechanism of segregation that, even in times of crisis, allows the governing elite to hold ceremonial events of high propagandistic value. As an example of this, the military parade was used to create a positive atmosphere a week prior to the referendum on constitutional changes stipulating the prolongation of Putin's presidential tenure for an additional two terms.

This type of governmentality discourse is limited by its focus on criticizing and deconstructing the sovereign power rather than contributing to the appearance of non-sovereign terrains of public life. For opposition leaders, Foucauldian statistics is a sphere of manipulation rather than governmentality, yet some of them still implicitly or explicitly address Putin and members of Russian governance. Anastasia Vasilieva, the head of the Doctors' Alliance, characterized the

Health Ministry as "criminally dysfunctional," in the way medical staff in hospitals are severely underfunded (Vasilyeva 2020e) and accused Putin's regime of embellishing the situation with the pandemic. In her original view, this was done for the sake of conducting the referendum on the prolongation of Putin's presidential terms (Vasilyeva 2020b). Ultimately, however, she too drastically changed her narrative in favor of supporting the regime.

## ANATOMOPOLITICAL GOVERNMENTALITY

This type of governmentality was built on the wide-spread vaccine hesitancy in Russia. This was not only a type of discourse but also an alternative policy space with its own communicative resources and spokespersons: lawyers, activists, scientists, medical doctors, and journalists (Mashkova-Blagikh 2021). They propose rejecting the idea of the collective political body and the associated freedom of individuals to decide on issues pertaining to their medical conditions.

Initially, the narrative of anatomopolitical governmentality deconstructs the sovereign power by challenging the legal basis of Putin's regime and therefore depriving the Kremlin of a monopoly in this crucial area. Russian adherents of anatomopolitical governmentality appeal to legal provisions that prevent state authorities from unleashing an enforced vaccination campaign under the threat of administrative sanctions or other punitive measures against vaccine-hesitant citizens.

During the pandemic, but before its later pro-Kremlin U-turn, the Doctors' Alliance addressed medical skepticism about forced vaccination (Vasilyeva 2020d). In multiple video addresses, the head of the Alliance, Anastasia Vasilieva, claimed that Russian statistics were unreliable and chaotic and that different sources gave different numbers of excess mortality. The start of the vaccination campaign also differed from one institution to another according to plans based on the government's instructions. Vasilieva pointed to the unpreparedness of the medical infrastructure to face the crisis (Vasilyeva 2020f). In her view, the experimental application of the Sputnik V vaccine on human beings was accompanied by multiple inconsisten-

cies and lies, with substantial information being hidden. She specifically referred to evidence from a volunteer who had complications due to the trial and could not get assistance from the vaccine producers. Vasilieva ridiculed attempts by the Russian Healthcare Ministry to link the enforcement of vaccination with abstention from alcohol weeks before and after the jab. Her direct verbal attacks on the Kremlin and its propagandists (Vasilyeva 2020a) were accompanied by consistently positive references to Western practices of testing vaccines and ensuring their safety on the basis of indisputable scientific data (Vasilyeva 2020g). During the pandemic, Vasilieva advocated for access to foreign vaccines on the Russian market (Vasilyeva 2020c).

A major feature of anatomopolitical governmentality is the paradoxical combination of liberal civil activism in defense of individual rights and conspiracy theories accompanied by different forms of othering and violence (Ristić and Marinković 2022). Thus, Alexandra Mashkova-Blagikh, a video blogger and political activist, became popular during the COVID-19 pandemic for her libertarian narrative of the primacy of individual bodies over state-imposed measures of biopolitical control (Mashkova-Blagikh 2021). At the same time, her public position was grounded on two pillars. The first was the assumption that the deep crisis of the post-1991 neoliberal political order appeared to be constitutive for the human rights agenda. The second included conspiratorial thinking (Fursov 2020) that might be qualified as far-right no-vax campaigning (Savino 2021).

## THE ABSENT CENTER OF SOVEREIGNTY?

Among the most contradictory features of the anti-pandemic crisis management in Russia were several "windows of opportunity" that temporarily opened up for a more pluralist and decentralized type of governance. This was made possible due to the new narratives of bio-governmentality that addressed sovereign biopower. These were particularly relevant in the way vaccination policy split society and created preconditions for a political debate. At the same time, the cumulative effect of these four discourses of bio-govern-

mentality on sovereign power seems to have been meager. The genealogy of medicalized governmentality was meant to strengthen the sovereign qualities of Putin's power. Futuristic governmentality was largely incorporated into the mainstream discourse, and most of the proponents of anatomopolitical governmentality supported Putin's war on Ukraine. Furthermore, key speakers for anti-Putin governmentality were either imprisoned or had to leave the country.

For many contributors to bio-governmental discourses, the state is not an enemy but rather a Foucauldian productive governmental institution. Yet, the COVID-19 pandemic caused the fragmentation and disarticulation of Russian sovereignty. State authorities found themselves targeted by critical narratives. Under these conditions, the state lost its political voice and the capacity to streamline and lead the discourse. During the medical emergency, sovereignty became a function of conflated narratives that contradicted one another. When it came to the pandemic, sovereign power did not produce a biopolitical discourse of its own but was instead reduced to administrative and managerial technicalities with little strategy behind them. By the same token, the COVID-19 emergency underscored and highlighted the representational function of sovereignty. This experience showed that, in the absence of a strong public voice, public discourses were substituted by several narratives meant to represent the missing voice of the sovereign. At the same time, the sovereign body was the target of multiple discussions with details of the president's inoculation and his adherence to practices of self-isolation. All this enhanced the sphere of crisis-ridden popular biopolitics (Makarychev 2021) with a high degree of symbolism and performativity.

## FROM THE PANDEMIC TO WAR

While the conflation of military conflicts and medical emergencies is not a new topic in academic research (Brantly and Brantly 2023), a biopolitical gaze offers an important, although ambiguous, contribution. Giorgio Agamben discussed the connection between the pandemic and war within the context of sacrificing freedoms

for security. He claims this has resulted in a "perpetual state of fear and insecurity" (Agamben 2021, 28). He assumes that "wars have bequeathed us a great many nefarious technologies, from barbed wire to nuclear power plants. After the health emergency it is very likely that, along the same lines, governments will attempt to continue the experiments they could not previously complete" (19).

By and large, this description duly reflects the political trajectory of Putin's Russia, both domestically and internationally. The main problem with Agamben's interpretation is that he expected this devolution to take place in Western societies, which are the primary targets of his dark predictions. However, Agamben's scenario has materialized on the other side of the liberal-illiberal divide, in an autocratic country where the regime and a significant part of society clearly identify with an anti-Western position. According to Agamben's vision, the Euro-Atlantic international society would generate more and more violent and oppressive impulses from within. Instead, it has found itself confronted with Putin's Russia, which has not only annihilated democracy within its own borders but has also started a brutal, full-scale war against its neighbor. Within this context, even before the war, Russian scholar Nikita Turov predicted that the conflict in eastern Ukraine might be reawakened by direct Russian intervention (Turov 2022, 20). This was based on his study of the historical correlations between medical emergencies and military conflicts.

Another one of Agamben's points that deserves criticism is his assumption that "people no longer believe in anything, except in a bare biological existence which should be preserved at any cost. But only tyranny, only monstrous Leviathan which has drawn swords, can be built upon the fear of losing one's life" (Agamben 2021, 25). As we shall demonstrate in Chapter 5, it is not the fear for one's life but the intentional deflation of the value of physical existence that fuels Putin's bellicosity and drives the Russian war machine in Ukraine.

This context begs the question of whether the pandemic and Russia's military intervention in Ukraine can be subjected to analytical comparison. Our answer is yes, and we support the idea that there are structural parallels between the Corona crisis and the war which might tell us a great deal about the Russian political regime. In ret-

rospect, the COVID-19 pandemic can be seen as a dress rehearsal for war. During COVID, Putin's regime successfully tested a state of emergency by suspending the law under the pretext of "saving lives." Two years later, the hypocritical pretext of "saving the lives of the Russian-speakers in East Ukraine" was used as a justification for unleashing the war in Ukraine.

In a more general sense, the pandemic has brought about the biologization and medicalization of politics. Human life and the human body have become focal points of Russian politics. Similarly, like everywhere else in the world, physiology and epidemiology have also become political. Both society and everyday life, on the one hand, and domestic and international politics, on the other, have been radically medicalized. The collective body of the nation has turned into an object of pathological analysis; national health care has been equated with national security; an arms race has been transformed into a vaccine race; and national sovereignty has become collective immunity. Experts and doctors have taken center stage. In some cases, as seen from Sweden's chief epidemiologist Andreas Tegnell's influence on life, health, and well-being in Sweden, their power exceeds that of elected politicians. Likewise, medical statistics has become a key tool of governance. As Bruno Latour has noted, statistics has become a form of biopolitics in which the population is regarded as a statistical mass and a pool of patients (Latour 2021). Parallels can be made between the way authorities took stock of human bodies and distributed care and life among various groups of the population during the pandemic and during the mobilization campaigns in the course of the war in Ukraine. Both reached into Russia's human reserves and treated the population as a statistical and biological mass.

At the same time, although Russia recorded one of the world's highest excess mortality rates (374.6 deaths per 100,000 population, a total of over 1 million people) (Lancet 2022), deaths due to COVID-19 were not regarded as something extraordinary or due to any malfunction of the healthcare system, but rather as a natural calamity beyond human control. This response helped to largely normalize death among the Russian population. Deaths due to COVID were not blamed on the authorities, and in fact, the Russian population

showed a high degree of indifference to both the extraordinary measures (quarantines and lockdowns) and to the disease and death (Levada 2020). Instead, the fatalistic judgment that "those who are destined to die will die" prevailed. It is the same sort of fatalism with which Russia accepted the war in Ukraine (as an external force coming from above), mobilization (as an imperative by the state), and losing hundreds of thousands of men to war (over 200,000 killed, wounded, and missing in action at the time of writing). The "normalization of death," which started with the COVID-19 pandemic, prepared Russia to some degree for the impending war. This unique cult of death, which emerged in Russia during the war in Ukraine, will be examined in greater detail in Chapter 5.

The pandemic has consolidated the Putin regime and accelerated its authoritarian evolution. In the early stages, in March and April 2020, it was a shock for Putin's consolidated authoritarianism as life in the big cities came to a standstill, private businesses closed, oil prices collapsed with the expectation of a global shutdown, and the Russian ruble was devalued. Some analysts believed that COVID-19 would be the "black swan" or the unpredictable external shock that would finally ruin Putin's coveted stability. The Russian government reacted similarly to other developed countries, announcing relatively strict quarantines and lockdowns, along with one-time payments to large families and some support for businesses. Still, Russia's aid package amounted to a meager 1.2% of GDP, compared to almost 30% in Germany and 12.5% in the United States (Lomskaya 2020).

As the pandemic progressed and became normalized, the Russian economy withstood the initial shock and avoided social and political unrest. The Kremlin then moved on to benefit from the new situation offered by the global medical emergency. The pandemic was used as an excuse to completely ban any form of street protest, citing sanitary precautions to disperse a wide array of movements, from opposition rallies or marches to single pickets that observed social distancing. Likewise, the authorities used the medical emergency to facilitate the adoption of long-planned changes to the Russian Constitution that lifted the limitations on presidential power and Putin's terms in office. These also limited judicial power and local self-government and introduced important conservative elements such

as references to God, "Soviet legacy," "historical truth," "ancestral memory," "the Russian people," and a clearly biopolitical provision announcing that marriage is a "union of a man and a woman" (Kommersant 2020). Citing the same sanitary precautions, the authorities banned independent observers from the polling stations, spread the voting over several days, allowed early and at-home voting, and created makeshift polling stations in the streets, in tents and buses, in the trunks of automobiles, and even on tree stumps. This enabled large-scale falsifications during the voting process and resulted in a compelling 79% of votes in favor of the constitutional reform in July 2020. From that time on, the Russian authorities have made the loose multi-day voting format a routine and used it in all subsequent regional and federal elections. The state of emergency brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic has thus turned out to be the new norm.

In addition to incorporating biological instruments and discourses into Putin's authoritarian regime, the pandemic has also revealed sharp regional disparities in Russia's federal structure. During the pandemic, the regional governors had to protect Putin's approval rating from the impact of necessary but unpopular measures. The message to the governors was "handle COVID on your own as best you can." As a result, the national challenge was transformed into a series of regional ones as Moscow retained carte blanche to shift blame and responsibility to the governors. Following the outbreak of the war, the Kremlin conveyed a different message to the governors: "You represent Russia, which is waging a righteous war, and your interests align with Russia's interests." At the same time, since the war is an exclusively federal concern and the governors have limited means to influence it, they can only compete in displays of patriotism and loyalty. Consequently, the war has further diminished regional desires for institutional changes or more autonomy and effectively eliminated any bargaining intentions they might have had with Moscow. The volume of federal assistance that the regions can now expect to receive depends not only on their political loyalty but also on their role in the war effort and the nation's ability to withstand economic sanctions (Busygina and Filippov 2023).

At the same time, as mentioned above, there has been a striking similarity in the techniques used in the distribution of life and death

during the war and during the pandemic. In both cases, Russian authorities have treated various regions and groups of the population according to their value for the state and their proximity to the federal center. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Moscow and the big cities, strategically important regions, and key organizational elements (the army, security services, the banking sector, and state media and state employees) were given preferential care, more vaccines, and superior medical resources. Meanwhile, those in peripheral regions, small towns, and people in the countryside gained much less attention and died in larger numbers without proper access to medical facilities. Two years later, during the war in Ukraine, the same peripheral regions, depressed areas, and unprotected social strata carried a much heavier burden during Russia's mobilization. These included communities in East Siberia, the Far East of Russia, and in the underpopulated and economically depressed areas of Central Russia. The average ratio of mobilized men in the region of Krasnoyarsk (6% of the reserve is 10 times higher than in Moscow (0.6%). The republics of Tyva and Buryatia and the Ulyanovsk and Arkhangelsk oblasts, which are some of the poorest areas by Russian standards, were also hit hard (Savina and Bonch-Osmolovskaya 2022). The media reported on the village of Tuymenevo in Kemerovo Oblast, where literally all the men of all ages (a total of 59) were called to war, leaving only women and children, just like in World War II (Novaya 2022). Consequently, it is exactly these poor and peripheral regions that have recorded the highest number of deaths (Savina and Bonch-Osmolovskaya 2022). Economists Oleg Itzkhoki and Maxim Mironov contend that poorer regions are targeted to prevent social protest in the wealthier regions and in the big cities. (Itskhoki and Mironov 2022). In this sense, the uneven distribution of life and death by the authorities among Russia's regions during the pandemic and during the war in Ukraine is a clear state policy of social Darwinism that enhances regional disparities within Russia and denies life, care, protection, and social justice to economically depressed and politically insignificant territories and segments of the population. This reflects the colonial structure of the Russian state (as conceptualized by Alexander Etkind in his *Internal Colonization*) and is a good example of necropolitics, a term de-

vised by Achille Mbembe to describe the biopolitics of the colonial world order.

Finally, one cannot fail to see the connection between COVID-denialism and anti-vaxxing in 2020-2021 and the support for the war against Ukraine in 2022-2023. The same public figures who were asserting individualistic, anatomopolitical narratives aimed against the state during the pandemic openly supported the war after February 24, 2022. Aleksandra Mashkova-Blagikh and her interlocutors reproduced the entire spectrum of Kremlin propaganda after the restart of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, from the artificial disintegration of the Soviet Union to externally imposed manipulative technologies aimed at depriving Russians of their national identity. The anatomopolitics of the COVID-19 emergency immediately transformed into an apology for intervention and the ensuing anti-Western rhetoric. For anti-vaxxers and COVID-dissidents, Russia is fighting against the same "globalist lobby" that, in their imagination, was trying to oppress and subdue Russia through digitalization, vaccination, feminization, and so on (Mashkova-Blagikh and Aleksandrovich 2022). Yet after the restart of Russia's military intervention in Ukraine, Mashkova-Blagikh's libertarian and state-critical discourse immediately morphed into pro-Putin loyalism. Some of her biopolitical statements from the time of the pandemic (such as "We are different from Europe: we are less law-abiding, formal, and more soulful and heartful") transformed into direct support of the invasion: "Russians who are ashamed of their country are not Russians" (Mashkova-Blagikh and Aleksandrovich 2022). Mashkova-Blagikh repeatedly emphasized the idea of the purification of Russia from "domestic traitors" ("If you don't like this country, get out") mixed with an aggressive Soviet nostalgia.

The previously mentioned Doctors' Alliance followed a similar pattern. After their U-turn from opposition to loyalty towards the Kremlin, Anastasia Vasilieva, the head of this organization, suggested that health and human lives were beyond politics. Based on this, she called for the lifting of Western sanctions that harm sick people in Russia: "The West's disregard for the principles of humanism and medical professionalism causes more suffering" (Vasilyeva 2022a). She claimed that "European countries are boycotting Russian med-

ical professionals, excluding them from networking, and thus discriminating against them" (Vasilyeva 2022b). On a different occasion, she added that the Doctors' Alliance would like "to help colleagues from the DNR and the LNR, but we lack funds for this." Vasilieva unequivocally supported the war and reproduced all pro-Kremlin propaganda narratives, including labeling Ukraine as a "fascist" country. In her view, the Navalny-led anti-corruption network FBK is similar to the "Kyiv regime" (Vasilyeva 2023).

What brings together the anti-vaxxing narrative and support for the war is the same anti-Western conspiratorial mindset. This mindset includes the image of an evil global world which, through international institutions (be they the WHO, the EU, or NATO), threatens the "natural order" and undermines the integrity of the individual human body and the body of the nation. COVID-denialists and anti-vaxxers viewed both the pandemic and the vaccine as elements of a global "war against Russia." In October 2021, the sociological service Levada-Center asked people a provocative question: Do you agree that the coronavirus is not a natural disease but a new form of a biological weapon? Some 35% of the respondents "fully agreed" and 26% "mostly agreed," for a total of 61%. Furthermore, 59% of respondents who agreed with this statement were among those with higher education. The sociologists involved in the study concluded that "the militarization of consciousness and the promotion of mystical ideas that the world is in a state of war and that the enemy is all around turned out to be more successful than the attempt to produce a rational response to a serious natural threat and to accept the simple idea of vaccinating against COVID" (Levada 2021).

## CONCLUSION

The juncture between the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's war on Ukraine is characterized by three paradoxes. First, the war on Ukraine was certainly planned long before the pandemic. In fact, early preparations for the war can be traced back some 15 years, to Putin's speech at the Munich Security Conference in February 2007, followed by radical military reforms in the early 2010s (Medvedev

2023b). However, as this chapter argues, the pandemic dramatically enhanced the preparations for war by producing a two-year state of emergency in which key regulatory techniques were successfully tested. These included a ban on any street and opposition activity (including the poisoning of the key opposition figure, Alexei Navalny, in August 2020 and his later imprisonment in January 2021), a radical change of the Constitution, which allowed for the authoritarian capture of state institutions, including elections, and the biopolitical control of the population as a statistical and biological mass governed by digital technologies (QR codes, vaccination passports, medical histories, etc.). The pandemic produced a cleansed political landscape, a disciplined and loyal elite, a decentralized multi-level of biopolitical governance, and a compliant, demobilized, and fatalistic population. This has conditioned the population to be ready to make sacrifices without questioning the actions of the authorities, even in life-and-death situations, and successfully prevented and subdued any will to stage a significant protest.

As for Putin himself, he spent a large part of the pandemic in isolation in a bunker. Anyone who approached him, including his closest associates, had to stay in a 14-day quarantine, and while meeting foreign leaders, he was separated from them by a ridiculously long table. By many accounts, this left an imprint on his personality, enhancing his anti-social features and making him even more secluded, conspiratorial, and manic. This isolation has effectively worked to confirm the distorted picture of the world in his head. This change, too, might have contributed to the final decision in February 2022 to start the war on Ukraine.

The second paradox is that, in a matter of months, Putin transformed from a weak anti-pandemic crisis manager into a military dictator. This trajectory attests to the hybridity of his regime. This hybridity makes such a transformation possible and facilitates vacillation between two models of power. This first is sovereignty, which is exemplified by Putin himself and mostly projected into the sphere of foreign policy and geopolitics. The second is governmentality, which is represented by the so-called systemic liberals, including the head of the Central Bank, Elvira Nabiulina; Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin; the head of Sberbank, German Gref; the deputy chief of

presidential administration, Sergei Kirienko; Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin; and others. These individuals are in different ways inscribed into the structures of the sovereign power, which preconditions the relative ease with which the administration can delegate some powers to them in case of emergency. As we have seen, the war has drastically elevated the public profiles of personalities such as Evgeniy Prigozhin, the head of the private military company "Wagner," the former officer Igor Girkin, and the head of Chechnya Ramzan Kadyrov, the former of whom is in direct conflict with the Russian Ministry of Defense. The political system which allowed Putin to manage the COVID-19 pandemic relatively smoothly will have many deadly reverberations over the course of the war in Ukraine.

Finally, the third paradox is that while Russian public discourses in 2020-2021 were primarily domestically oriented and concerned with governmentality and biopolitics rather than military or geopolitical security, the country has quickly adapted and accepted the conditions of war imposed on it in February 2022. On the one hand, this shows the inconstancy and volatility of public opinion in Russia in terms of how people just follow the mainstream discourse and delegate their "opinion" to the national leader. Indeed, some sociologists doubt that "public opinion" even exists in Russia (Yudin 2023). On the other hand, the pandemic has instilled a sense of isolation, alienation, and emergency in the population, producing an embittered, atomized mass with little sense of empathy and a high tolerance for the suffering and death of others. These features, which emerged during the COVID pandemic, have come fully into play during the war in Ukraine.

CHAPTER FIVE

# WAR IN UKRAINE: FROM BIO- TO NECROPOLITICS

## INTRODUCTION

In the existing literature on biopolitics, war is discussed in connection with "the emergence of fascist states and societies in which the power over life and death, adjudicated on explicitly racial criteria, is disseminated widely" (Reid 2006, 148–49). According to Foucault, this can lead to a state of affairs "which effectively means doing away with the people next door" (Foucault 2003 quoted in Reid 2006, 149). Russia illustrates the validity of this argument by intertwining biopolitical concerns about physical protection with the "biopolitical production of fear" as a precondition for articulating Russia's international subjectivity (Makarychev and Yatsyk 2017a). The concept of the "Russian world" in its different versions is a good example of this assumption.

As we have argued, the fundamental characteristic of the Russian civilizational discourse implies a biopolitical distinction between Russia and the West. Biopolitical norms necessitate their opposite through deviation or perversion. In the Russian narrative, a liberal, emancipatory Europe acts as Russia's "Big Other." The biopolitics of the liberal West is portrayed in the Russian interpretation of biopower as intentionally conducive to depopulation and, in the long run, to the implementation of post-humanist ideas of a future world without human beings. As an alternative, Russian biopolitics is expected to take a strong pro-life and pro-natalist stance, with mea-

sures including the robust promotion of conservative family values, segregated education at schools, a veneration and propagation of rural and communal lifestyles, bans on non-traditional sexuality and pornography, and so on. Correspondingly, EU enlargement is viewed as an expansion of the sphere of "gay culture."

"Spiritual health" and family values are the core elements of Russia's model of biopolitics. These elements work to construct a pro-Putin majority domestically while systematically projecting Russian home-grown discourses of anti-Western biopolitical conservatism abroad. At the same time, this neo-imperial policy implies the self-assigned right to change the status of neighboring territories under the pretext of protecting their populations and gradually incorporating these populations into the broadly understood "Russian world." In doing so, Russian biopolitical imperialism synthesizes biopolitical and geopolitical resources to create "geographies of exceptionalism." This is most visible in the case of the seceded territories of Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Transnistria, Crimea, and Donbas (Makarychev and Yatsyk 2018). Therefore, biopolitical instruments resonate quite strongly with the Russian neighborhood policy which implies the imposition of a socially conservative agenda of biopolitical "normalization." In this vein, the idea of empire acquires visible biopolitical connotations, and Russia intends to reconfigure its borders by expanding its version of biopolitical conservatism with its strong Orthodox component.

In the meantime, there are a couple of important arguments that need to be taken into consideration. First, the Agambenian perspective allows us to approach the Russian political regime as capable of functioning by producing crises and generating states of exceptions that are routinized and normalized by the Kremlin. The roots of this penchant for exceptionalism date back to the 1990s, with the coup attempt in 1991 and the standoff between President Boris Yeltsin and the parliament in 1993. The two wars in Chechnya, later interventions in Syria and Georgia, and the short-lived deployment in Kazakhstan ultimately culminated in the full-scale attack on Ukraine. These examples show how Putin's regime of sovereign power systematically and intentionally (re)produces exceptions and, at the same time, paradoxically normalizes them as an existential condition for survival.

Secondly, what started in the first years of Putin's rule as a politics of care for and protection of life (otherwise known as biopolitics) has transformed into necropolitics, or the politics of death. This trend can be observed both domestically (through the murder of Boris Nemtsov, the poisoning of Alexei Navalny, etc.) and in the neighboring countries where, as the attack against Ukraine has lucidly demonstrated, Putin's regime needs new victims and new violence. Well-documented examples of Russian necropolitics in Ukraine include, among other crimes, the torture and execution of civilians, sexual violence, the systematic bombing of residential quarters, and the destruction of civilian infrastructure in all of Ukraine's major cities.

The war in Ukraine can be seen as the culmination of the politics of the body which the Russian state has pursued over the past decade. It has exhibited brutal physical manifestations of violence within the context of a frontal kinetic war involving large masses of people, with hundreds of thousands killed or mutilated, along with millions of forced refugees. So far, Ukraine has lost a quarter of its pre-war population of 40 million people. Meanwhile, this war has affected hundreds of millions of people in other parts of the world as Russia ruined the wartime "Grain Deal," which was meant to move grain from Ukraine to parts of the world where millions are going hungry. This sabotage was all in an attempt to blackmail the West. The International Rescue Committee calls the grain deal a "lifeline for the 79 countries and 349 million people on the frontlines of food insecurity" (Bonnell 2023). In this global and neocolonial context, this war can be seen as a typical example of Achille Mbembe's necropolitics.

The immense physical proportions of the war came as a shock to twenty-first-century Europe. Moreover, it has been a far cry from the high-tech warfare one might have expected from a well-equipped Russian military, especially considering that Russia has undergone substantial modernization of its air and space forces over the past decade. Instead, as observed by Anatol Lieven, one sees scenes of carnage, massive infantry attacks, artillery duels, and trench warfare reminiscent of World War I rather than World War II (Lieven 2022). Similarly, the Russian Army's treatment of the civilian population in the occupied territories is extremely brutal and physical, incon-

sistent with modern laws of war, and bears all the signs of large-scale war crimes, or, as some international lawyers concede, genocide (Wright 2022). These features can be better understood by considering the biopolitical practices of the Russian state and the extensive use of biopower in domestic policies. The oppressive politics of the body inside the country has been transformed into the politics of war, genocide, and torture; the biopolitics of care has been transformed into the necropolitics of war (Medvedev 2023, 16–20).

This chapter will take stock of the biopolitical/necropolitical nexus and will examine the various forms of necropolitics, or the politics of death, that have been revealed during the war in Ukraine.

## ANATOMOPOLITICS OF THE "RUSSIAN WORLD": THE BUCHA MASSACRE

Since the first days of the Russian invasion, there has been ample evidence of war crimes committed by Russian soldiers in the occupied towns and villages. The most blatant and clearly documented of the hundreds of cases has been in the town of Bucha, a quiet, green, middle-class suburb of Kiev. On February 27, 2022, Russian forces moved into the city of Bucha, making it one of the first outlying areas of Kyiv taken by Russian forces. The Russian forces occupying Bucha included the 64th Motor Rifle Brigade of the 35th Combined Arms Army, which was headed by Lieutenant Colonel Azatbek Omurbekov. After a month, the Ukrainian military pushed Russian troops northward out of Bucha in a general Russian retreat from the Kyiv area. Ukrainian forces entered Bucha on April 1, 2022 (AFP 2022).

As the Ukrainian troops moved in, evidence started to appear showing mass civilian casualties. Dozens of local residents who were shot as they went about their daily routines—in their vehicles, on bicycles, or simply on foot—had been left lying in the streets. Many of the recovered bodies had been mutilated and bore signs of torture: ears cut off, teeth extracted, etc. Ukrainian investigators further confirmed the evidence of torture in the form of the beheadings of victims and the incineration of corpses. The bodies of some of those killed had even been mined and turned into boobytraps with tripwires. Later, civilians with their wrists bound in plastic re-

straints before being shot were also found in the torture and execution chambers that had been discovered.

During the occupation by Russian forces, the local residents of Bucha were denied their basic needs. According to sources from Human Rights Watch (HRW), Russian soldiers went door-to-door, questioning people, destroying their possessions, and looting their clothes to wear themselves. Civilians were fired upon when leaving their homes in search of food and water and were ordered back into their homes by Russian troops, despite a lack of basic necessities such as water and heat due to the destruction of local infrastructure (Gorbunova 2022).

There were multiple reports of women of all ages, from small girls to the elderly, and also boys and men being raped by Russian soldiers. In some cases, the rape was performed publicly in front of a crowd; in other cases, children were raped in front of their parents, and vice versa. This testifies to the premeditated, systematic, and anatomopolitical nature of rape. There was also a clear biological and racist component involved, as the rapist Russian soldiers called their victims "Nazi whores" (referring to the Russian propaganda discourse of "de-Nazifying Ukraine") and claimed that they were raping the women so that they "can no longer give birth to Ukrainians" (YLE 2022). In this sense, Russian soldiers were weaponizing sexual violence and using it as an instrument of war.

This largely resembles the use of rape by Red Army soldiers in the occupied parts of Germany in 1944-45, which the British historian Antony Beevor describes as the "greatest phenomenon of mass rape in history" and concludes that up to 2 million women were raped. There are also reports that Joseph Stalin, if not directly endorsing, at least justified this crime in private conversations (Beevor 2002; Appelbaum 2013, 32). This also echoes a sexist remark by Vladimir Putin who, in his press conference on the eve of the Russian invasion in February 2022, used a line from an obscene rhyme in Russian folklore to speak of Ukraine. The rhyme depicts a man raping a dead beauty in a coffin: "Like it or not, bear with it, my beauty" (*nravitsya-ne nravitsya, terpi, moya krasavitsa*) (Bostock 2022). In addition to directly implying rape and necrophilia and suggesting that Putin wanted Ukraine to submit to his demands without putting up a fight, the lyrics also legitimized Russian soldiers' sexual violence in Ukraine just a month later.

In a similar display of anatomopolitical violence, Russian soldiers have been reported to undress their victims in order to look for tattoos with Ukrainian national symbols or slogans (the Trident, "Glory to Ukraine," etc.) and to execute those exhibiting them (Kozlovsky 2022). Likewise, Russian occupiers have sought out teachers of Ukrainian language and history, with these people often being interrogated and sometimes ending up disappearing later on.

In trying to understand what Russian writer Dmitry Bykov (2022b) refers to as an "orgy of sadism," the historical roots of this violence cannot be overlooked. Human rights advocates point to the fact that the Russian (and earlier Soviet) Army has a long tradition of using systemic violence against civilian populations, as exhibited in the war in Afghanistan (1979–1989), where between one and two million Afghans were killed, and in the conflicts in Chechnya (1994–1996 and 1999–2000), where up to 50,000 civilians were killed in the First Chechen War alone. The Chechen wars have a well-documented record of war crimes, such as the mass killing of civilians in the village of Samashki in 1995 and in Novye Aldy in 2000. This tradition is also apparent in Syria, where since 2015, Russia has been engaged in the carpet bombing of residential areas and civilian infrastructure, turning the city of Aleppo into rubble in 2016. The bombing of Syria is particularly resonant of the destruction of Mariupol and other Ukrainian cities (Cherkasov, Medvedev, and Racheva 2023).

Many observers also make connections with the "Tbilisi Syndrome," which involved the indiscriminate use of live ammunition and lethal weapons against protesting crowds in Almaty, Tbilisi, Baku, and Vilnius in the last years of the Soviet Union which left hundreds of civilians dead. Jeff Hawn claims that the institutional flaw in the Russian Army lies in the fact that it has stayed unrepentant of its past actions: "Today's atrocities are all because Russia's military never outgrew the mindset of its Soviet forebears; it remains focused on lethality and victory at all costs. Its institutions do not shy away from brutality and maintain a disregard for human life, which clears the way for new atrocities without accountability" (Hawn 2022). It is noteworthy that shortly after the Bucha massacre, the very same 64th Motor Rifle Brigade of the 35th Army which had operated in Bucha was awarded the title of Guards by President Putin

himself at a reception in the Kremlin. This action seems to approve and legitimize the war crimes that had just been committed by the brigade (Medvedev 2023a, 129-135).

The atrocities of the Russian troops in the occupied territory of Ukraine can be better understood by taking a closer look at the violence these troops engage in back home. As investigated by the journalists of Proekt Media, the same 64th Motor Rifle Brigade of the 35th Army that occupied Bucha is notorious for its crimes and cruelty at its home base, in the town of Knyaze-Volkonskoe in the Khabarovsk Territory in the Far East of Russia. The bullying (*dedovshina*), torture, and extortion practiced by the senior servicemen and officers of this brigade have been reported to be so cruel that conscripts and contractors commit suicide, are reported to eat chlorine or needles to be discharged for medical reasons, or simply desert the military unit. In just three weeks in February 2014, seven soldiers died at the brigade's home base. The same track record of violence and rampant crime is typical of the 127th Motor Rifle Division of the 5th Army, which was also present in Bucha. Several beheaded bodies of soldiers were found in the vicinity of this division, which is also located in the Far East of Russia (Reznikova and Balakhonova 2022). In this sense, the domestic biopower, the anatomopolitics of violence that is endemic to the Russian state and its various power and enforcement agencies (the army, the police, and the prison system), is exported by Russia to the neighboring territories and transformed into an external biopower. In this war, the anatomopolitics of torture bridges the inside/outside divide and redefines the biological essence of the "Russian world" through the normalization and institutionalization of practices of violence.

## BIOPOLITICS OF MOBILIZATION: THE BODY AS A NATURAL RESOURCE

The first stage of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, from March to April 2022, was fought almost exclusively by contract servicemen. President Putin repeatedly pledged that no conscripts would be sent to the frontlines, and the idea was to keep the war as far as possible from the general public. It is well known that the war was portrayed

as a remote, high-tech "special military operation" fought by professionals and shown to audiences on TV in a similar fashion as the US Gulf War had been. After the failure of the *blitzkrieg* in February 2022, however, the war dragged on, and rather than the futuristic Gulf War, it reverted to old twentieth-century-style trench warfare with the predominant use of infantry and bloody battles for every mile of Ukrainian territory. Russia felt the need for more manpower and, for the first time in its post-Soviet history, announced the so-called "partial mobilization" in September 2022. Although the authorities proclaimed that 300,000 new soldiers would be enlisted from the reserves, sources from *Novaya Gazeta Europe* suggested that the target figures for the regional governors were up to 3% of all men aged 18 to 50, or up to 1 million men (Asanova, Antonina, and Kaganskikh 2022; Meduza 2022a).

In the first days of mobilization, the Russian government organized referendums in the occupied territories, and on September 30, 2022, Putin announced the annexation of the Ukrainian oblasts of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhya. The annexation of these four oblasts was supposed to signify that the mobilized troops were now "defending" the "new regions of Russia." This once again revealed the link between geopolitics and biopower and the territorial and the corporeal. In other words, Russia needed new life to protect new land and thus merged land-grabbing and life-taking techniques to acquire these two resources.

It also has to be mentioned here that already since February 2022, there has been a complete mobilization in the so-called Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DNR and LNR). As of July 2022, some 140,000 men had been mobilized. This affected up to 75% of the personnel in some enterprises and subsequently resulted in the shutting down of mines, public transport, and public services. There have also been raids and searches in the streets of Donetsk and other major cities. Often, commissars would even go to schools and kindergartens in order to catch the fathers that came to take their kids home. Those from LNR and DNR suffered heavy losses due to poor training and equipment. Although there are no verifiable statistics of the losses in these territories, it is estimated that up to 30,000 people had died as of August 2022 (Meduza 2022b). Thus, for the popula-

tion of these republics, Russian citizenship has not only legal but also biopolitical dimensions, as civilians pay for this citizenship with their bodies and sometimes with their lives.

In Russia proper, the mechanisms of mobilization were highly diversified. This was because handing in the mobilization orders was a key element for implementation. Commissars and police officers would go around residential blocks in the early hours, conduct police raids in the streets and on the subway, turn up at universities and colleges, and reach out for anyone they could grab. Directors of enterprises were obliged to submit full lists of male employees to the authorities, and there were reports of entire working collectives being mobilized. Some examples of this were all the men from the philharmonic orchestra in Bashkortostan (Gil'manov 2022) and, according to sources from *Novaya Gazeta Evropa*, all 59 men from the village of Tyumenevo in the Kemerovo region of Siberia being mobilized (Novaya Gazeta Evropa 2022). Commissioners regularly violated state regulations, sometimes mobilizing fathers of three, sons taking care of disabled single parents, and men over the age of 50 or even 60 years old in order to reach the target figures that had been set for each region. Just like during the terror campaigns in the Soviet Union in the 1930s and 1940s, the principle of numbers ruled, and the repressive agencies turned the population into a statistical mass subject to random terror in order to reach their quotas. By the same token, mobilization is an exercise in biopolitical governance, operating on the principle of anonymity and statistics, where the state machine reaches out for human bodies without regard to age, occupation, aptitude, or health (Medvedev 2023a, 136–45).

Still, there were large disparities in mobilization figures across Russia's regions. These disparities resulted in a peculiar necrogeography of the country. For example, during the first wave of mobilization, the oblasts of Ryazan and Kaliningrad were tasked with mobilizing 2.5% of males of eligible age and the city of Sevastopol in the annexed Crimea 4%, while in Moscow and St. Petersburg the respective figures were 0.3 to 0.7% (Petrov 2022). As a rule, the mobilization struck remote and rural regions harder while sparing larger cities and regional centers. Further recommendations, including that the local authorities should "[go] to the countryside, since there

is no mass media there, no opposition, and there is greater support for the war," were also leaked to the press (Meduza 2022a). Human rights advocates have observed the disproportionate burden of mobilization on ethnic minorities in Russia. In Buryatia and Chuvashia, local activists reported blanket mobilizations in ethnic villages where even fathers of five children and men over 60 have been called up (Wonderzine 2022). In Crimea, where the Russian authorities had already repressed the ethnic minority of Crimean Tatars since its annexation in 2014, mobilization specifically targeted Tatar men. This targeted mobilization of Crimean Tatars was dubbed by local activists as "mobilicide" and equated with the Soviet genocide and deportation of the very same ethnic group in 1944 (Vorotnikov 2022). Similar complaints came from the ethnic republics of Dagestan, Sakha (Yakutia), and Bashkortostan (Idel.Realii 2022; Mackinnon 2022). There were also reports of non-citizen migrants from Central Asia with temporary residency in Russia being caught in police raids in Russian cities, in markets, hostels, or at construction sites, forced to sign a military contract, and sent off to war (Rakhmankulov 2022).

From the very first days of mobilization, the use of mobilized individuals in the war has been particularly wasteful when compared with the regular troops of trained contract soldiers. In some cases, units were sent directly to the front line without proper training or combat preparation and were left in the trenches without food, ammunition, equipment, or proper clothing. In fact, it seems as if the Russian Ministry of Defense was merely filling holes in the Russian defense with the bodies of the newly mobilized. The lack of clothing and equipment due to poor logistics and theft in the MoD procurement system was so bad that the military commissioners instructed mobilized individuals to bring their own equipment, such as tactical clothes, thermal underwear, socks, boots, gloves, sleeping bags, goggles, binoculars, bullet-proof vests, and helmets. In many regions of Russia, families, neighbors, and local communities of mobilized individuals started donation campaigns to collect these items from door to door and send them off to battalions at the front. According to many accounts from the war, mobilized individuals were treated as a disposable resource. As a result of their poor training and equipment, together with the dysfunctional command and com-

munication, the losses among the mobilized in the first months of the mobilization campaign were estimated to be as high as 60–70% of personnel. According to the economists Oleg Itskhoki and Maxim Mironov, 15–20% of the mobilized were killed and 45–50% wounded (Itskhoki and Mironov 2022). On certain days in the winter of 2022–23, the daily losses of the Russian Army exceeded 1,000 men. By early 2023, according to the *New York Times*, Russia's combined losses were over 200,000 men (Cooper, Schmitt, and Gibbons-Neff 2023).

In summary, the mobilization for war in Ukraine has revealed the reach of biopower in Russia through the mechanisms of state management of the human mass which distributes life and death among the population. This has been further transformed into necropolitics and a necrogeography of Russia. The mobilization campaign, which placed a heavier burden and has had a more significant death toll on remote and outlying regions and unprivileged groups of the population, has highlighted the territorial and social segregation in Russia. These regions and groups were specifically targeted since, when compared with larger regions or majority groups, they were less able to show any resistance to the state machine or stage protests. Thus, mobilization has increased social divides in Russia. The boundary line between the more affluent and mobile urban population and the depressed, small, and/or factory towns and rural areas has now been drawn not just based on income or education levels but on life itself, as residents of poorer regions are more likely to be killed on the battlefield in Ukraine. Social Darwinism, typical of Russia's neoliberal socio-economic regime, has been further reinforced by the necropolitics of mobilization.

## EXPOSING BARE LIFE: "WAGNER" PMC

One of the clearest examples of the Russian state using the bodies of unprivileged groups of the population can be seen through the Private Military Company (PMC) "Wagner" recruiting prisoners from Russian penal colonies. This PMC was organized by the criminal authority and Putin's close associate, Yevgeny Prigozhin. Hailing from St. Petersburg, the native city of Vladimir Putin, Prigozhin served

a prison term for robbery and fraud and later became a businessman in the restaurant and catering industry. As Putin's so-called "personal chef," he was the executioner of some of Putin's most delicate errands. In the mid-2000s, he founded the PMC "Wagner," which consisted of retired special forces officers and was named after the callsign of one of its commanders, Dmitry Utkin, known for his love of Nazi aesthetics and music by Richard Wagner. The group was first noticed assisting in the Russian occupation of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts in eastern Ukraine in 2014. Later, it was engaged in wars in Syria, Sudan, Libya, the Central African Republic, Mozambique, Mali, and other African countries, where the group provided security services in exchange for gold mines, oilfields, and other valuable assets (Yakoreva and Reiter 2018). They became known for their atrocities—torturing prisoners and filming their executions. One example was the killing of a deserter from the government army in Syria, whom they smashed with a jackhammer, dismembered, and burned (Korotkov 2019).

After the start of the full-scale war in Ukraine on February 24, 2022, "Wagner" was called to action. The group entered Ukraine from Belarus and supposedly participated in the Bucha Massacre (Amann, Gebauer and Schmid 2022) before later fighting as an assault force in the Luhansk region. Whereas initially the group had been quite selective about the preparedness of its members, as Russian losses mounted in the spring of 2022, "Wagner" started recruiting new mercenaries without specific regard to their training, skills, or criminal record. Later in the summer, Prigozhin and his aides started recruiting prisoners directly from Russia's penal colonies. Prison staff and administrators looked away as he traveled around the country in a private helicopter and appeared before inmates assembled in the courtyards of the colonies. Prigozhin offered prisoners a service contract with his PMC that included a high salary of 200,000 rubles (equivalent to $4,000, which is a large sum by Russian standards), a 5-million-ruble ($80–100,000) payment to their family in the event of death, and a pardon from their sentence after six months of service. Although he did not conceal the high risk of war and heavy losses on the battlefield, thousands of inmates volunteered to join the PMC. In interviews with recruiters, preference was given to pris-

oners with long sentences, such as those charged with manslaughter, robbery, or having caused severe bodily injury. Later on, recruiters also reluctantly started recruiting prisoners charged with rape and drug crimes (Goryashko et al. 2022). They also contracted prisoners with HIV and hepatitis C, which created some tension among the regular troops and particularly among the medics (Melnikova 2022). In early 2023, there were reports that "Wagner" also started recruiting female prisoners, with the first group supposedly contracted from the Krasnodar Krai (Yakubenko 2023).

According to Olga Romanova, the head of the "Russia in Prison" human rights foundation, the PMC recruited up to 50,000 prisoners in the second half of 2022, with 10,000 added each month (Romanova 2023). In February 2023, Prigozhin announced the end of his recruitment campaign. At the time, there were only 10,000 ex-convicts left at the front, with all others having been killed or wounded, deserted, taken prisoner, or reported missing in action. (Romanova 2023). By Prigozhin's own account, he lost 20,000 men in the battle for Bakhmut alone when this small town in Donetsk Oblast of Ukraine saw some of the heaviest fighting of 2022–2023 (Zagvozdnika 2023).

The use of ex-prisoners in the war can be properly described as "cannon fodder." Prigozhin saved the experienced core of his PMC in the rear and sent the untrained and unmotivated convicts forward in the first wave of the so-called "meat attacks" against the Ukrainian artillery and machine guns. "Blocking detachments" (*zagradotryady*) of experienced soldiers were also stationed behind the PMC fighters to shoot anyone turning back. According to Ukrainian intelligence sources quoted by CNN, the human losses in such attacks reached up to 80%, and there were multiple reports of the wounded being left on the battlefield or denied immediate medical assistance (Lister, Pleitgen and Butenko 2023). After a brief recovery, wounded contractors were sent back to battle, even if they were missing a limb which had been replaced by prosthetics.

Any attempt to surrender or desert by a PMC contractor was punishable by death. In the group's corporate slang, this was referred to as "nullifying." In November 2022, the video of such an execution went viral on the Russian internet. When PMC soldier Yevgeni Nu-

zhin, who had earlier surrendered to the Ukrainian Army, was exchanged in a POW swap, he was executed by a jackhammer smashing his head. The subtitles of the video read that he "suffered a traditional Wagnerite punishment" (Radio Svoboda 2022b), and Prigozhin himself commented on the video, saying "for a dog, a dog's death" (News.ru 2022). In February 2023, a video of a similar execution by a jackhammer of yet another "Wagner" defector, Dmitry Yakushchenko, was released on the internet (Koshechkina 2023). While these executions provoked some public outcry, they were endorsed and welcomed by some politicians and the patriotic media. Being "jackhammered" became a meme and a jackhammer in a gift box became a popular souvenir. Sergei Mironov, the head of the parliamentary faction "A Just Russia," was photographed posing with a jackhammer, and Prigozhin even went as far as to send a jackhammer branded with the Wagner logo and tainted with fake blood to the European Parliament (Medvedev 2023a, 146–51).

In July 2023, the PMC was withdrawn from Ukraine and stationed in Belarus, and the surviving ex-prisoners were allegedly released. This followed a two-day riot by "Wagner" which was fueled by Prigozhin's controversy with the Ministry of Defense and culminated with his 5,000-strong army capturing Rostov, the capital of Russia's South Federal District, and Voronezh, another major southern city, on its march towards Moscow. The group shot down several military aircraft and helicopters before stopping a mere 100 miles from Moscow. Yet, as of August 2023, the recruitment of convicts in Russian penal colonies continued, this time carried out by the Russian Ministry of Defense proper. For this purpose, the ministry has created a PMC named "Storm Z." It is even less discerning than "Wagner" in recruiting prisoners, sometimes enlisting disabled convicts, or forcing the prisoners to sign contracts. Its recruits are often denied the promised pay and refused medical assistance in Russian military hospitals (Verstka 2023).

The "Wagner" recruitment of prisoners is a textbook case of Giorgio Agamben's concept of "bare life," which was, incidentally, also based on the experience of the Nazi death camps. Like in a concentration camp, the life of a prisoner in a Russian penal colony is reduced to a bare minimum at the threshold of existence. The deterio-

rating conditions in Russian prisons, combined with violence, torture, and rape from both fellow convicts and the prison administration, deprive the prisoner of any personality, identity, or corporeal integrity. Under such conditions, where the price of their life is almost nullified, inmates are offered to exchange this worthless life for the illusion of freedom and even some monetary compensation. As Olga Romanova has put it, "The PMC fulfills wishes, and for many, this wish is death" (Romanova 2022). The prisoner becomes an Agambenian *homo sacer,* like a convicted outcast in Ancient Rome who was placed outside the legal order and whom anyone could kill. Likewise, anyone, Ukrainians, their own commanders, fellow combatants, the blocking detachments, the local Donetsk and Luhansk militia, can kill the ex-prisoners in "Wagner"; sometimes, they even disappear without trace, and no information is released to relatives or to the prison administration where they had been serving their terms. Yevgeny Prigozhin literally took them out of the Russian legal system, nullifying the work of the police, investigators, courts, and the penitentiary system. This in fact destroyed the foundations of law and created an extra-legal "state of emergency," the Schmittian *Ausnahmezustand*. It is exactly this externality of prisoners to the legal order that allows them to murder and rape on Ukrainian soil. The projection of this "state of emergency" onto the territory of a neighboring country transformed cases of biopolitical exception into geopolitical aggression.

The use of prisoners in war as cannon fodder and disposable material also reveals the essence of biopower. The state deprives a person of his or her legal rights and corporeal sovereignty, first by creating tortuous conditions in prisons, and then by transporting their bodies to war and disposing of them in the most direct manner, digging trenches under artillery fire or throwing them into senseless, unprepared "meat attacks." Even after being wounded and having lost their limbs, their bodies are returned to battle to make full and final use of them. A high point in the logic of biopower in Putin's regime can be seen through the utilization of prisoners as organic matter in the war in Ukraine.

## THE GENDERED WAR: RE-DEFINING MASCULINITY, FEMININITY, AND THE FAMILY

The war in Ukraine and mobilization have also revealed the gender aspect of power in Russia and re-defined the roles of men, women, and the family in their relation to the state. On the one hand, this is definitely a "male war," led by a patriarchal state espousing the values of the traditional family and dominant masculinity and cultivating the image of the male warrior. As Marlene Laruelle and Ivan Grek have aptly observed, this war, for all its losses and risks, helps restore the shattered self-esteem of Russian men, especially from the more impoverished and depressed regions. "By allowing men to escape the difficulties of everyday life—with its low pay and routine frustrations—the war offers a restoration of male self-worth. As one soldier wrote on Telegram in February, the war confers 'a sense of belonging to the great male deed, the deed of defending our Motherland'" (Laruelle and Grek 2023).

In the discourse generated in Russia surrounding this war, Ukraine is portrayed as Russia's cheating wife or little sister that went astray and must be brought back home. Russia is seen as a dominant masculine figure. This is represented by President Putin himself as a self-appointed "alpha male" who has been projecting toxic masculinity in world politics for the past 20 years (Greer 2022). It is no coincidence that Putin has, on many occasions, used derogatory masculine language with respect to Ukraine. (Recall the previously mentioned line, "Whether you like it or not, bear with it, my beauty," which he used on the eve of the invasion in February 2022). The rape of Ukrainian women by Russian soldiers in the occupied territories also follows the gender paradigm. These are not only acts of sexual violence but also performances of political humiliation and ethnic superiority (Medvedev 2023c). In a viral audio clip, which was intercepted by Ukrainian intelligence forces in April 2022, the wife of Russian airborne officer Roman Bykovsky jokingly instructed him to "go on, rape Ukrainian women, I allow you, just wear some protection" (Krutov and Yegoshina 2022).

On the other hand, the war has challenged the stereotypical image of the Russian woman as a selfless and loyal companion, ready to sacrifice herself for her husband and children. Rather, it has revealed

a biopolitical entrepreneur who sees a man's body as a resource for obtaining state benefits. Along with the mass mobilization campaign came the new phenomenon of express marriages to the mobilized. Before being dispatched to war, local authorities organized express marriages for mobilized individuals. People rushed to the registry offices so that their families could get substantial payouts in the event they are seriously wounded or killed (3 and 7 million rubles, or $45,000 and $100,000, respectively). Russian state TV showed concert halls packed with hundreds of mobilized men in uniforms with their fiancées in white dresses collectively taking the vows and being blessed by Orthodox priests before being sent off to war. Based on the number of "excess marriages," the opposition media outlet *Mediazona* estimated that the number of those mobilized in the first wave in September-October 2022 was not the officially claimed 320,000, but almost half a million people (Mediazona 2022).

The "death money" for those killed while serving (*grobovye*) became a hot issue in social media and state propaganda. State TV showed one story of parents buying a Lada car with the compensation payment given for their son killed in Ukraine ("a white one, just as our son liked") and driving this car to his grave (Zaripov 2022). In another viral video, a group of soldiers' widows in the annexed territory of Donetsk thanked a sponsor from Moscow with tears in their eyes as they were presented with fur coats (TV Rain 2023).

The role of Russia's women in their relations with the state has radically changed over the past four decades. In the late USSR, during the last years of the war in Afghanistan (1979-1989), the "Committee of Soldiers' Mothers" was a formidable social and political force, one that had a significant impact on state policy on conscription and military service. The group lobbied for Gorbachev's decrees granting exemptions from military service for full-time students, a law on obligatory medical insurance for soldiers, and a provision for alternative civilian service. During the First Chechen War (1994–1996), the "Soldiers' Mothers" received the Right Livelihood Award (the "Alternative Nobel Prize") for searching for missing soldiers, recovering their bodies, assisting in the return of prisoners, and providing humanitarian assistance to the civilian population in Chechnya. Since Vladimir Putin came to power in 2000, the "Soldiers'

Mothers" have been sidelined and silenced, and in 2022, a new committee called "Soldiers' Widows of Russia" was created. In January 2023, the organization called on President Putin to start a large-scale mobilization, sending "tens of millions of men" to war (Savina 2023).

This paradigm shift from "Soldiers' Mothers" to "Soldiers' Widows" has been marked by a change in women's attitude towards war. Rather than protecting their sons and husbands from atrocities, women volunteer by providing supplies to the army and collecting provisions, clothing, and equipment. Mothers have also been known to encourage their sons to be mobilized in order "to become real men." Apart from certain ethnic regions in Russia (the mothers' protests in Dagestan and ethnic activists in Buryatia and Tuva), there have been precious few women's protests against mobilization across Russia. Instead, the mothers and wives of the mobilized are enticed by state payoffs and accept the idea of sending their men off to war. This testifies to the declining social and economic conditions in the poorer regions of Russia, which serve as the main human reserve for mobilization. Systemic poverty, unemployment, complete indebtedness to microcredit organizations, alcoholism, and family violence result in a situation where many families see the man, usually middle-aged, with a drinking problem and with no employment prospects, as a burden. Quoting social anthropologists from Krasnoyarsk who did field research on mobilization in the region's settlements, journalist Pavel Pryanikov states: "Mobilization causes few problems because misandry—women's hatred of men—is very strong. They send 'worthless men' who are of no use in everyday life off to the trenches… There are few regrets about sending such men to the trenches, it is a load off the mind" (Tolkovatel' 2023). In this resource exchange, typical of Russia's distribution economy, women, trapped between domestic violence and oppression by the state, exchange the devalued assets of male bodies for state payments and benefits.

The atomization of Russian society during the Putin era and the prevailing social anomie (decay of norms) have destroyed the biological foundations of social life. The bonds of blood and kin are being corrupted by ideology, cynicism, militarism, fear of the repressive state, and pure economic rationality. In this inversion of women's biological role, even female hygiene products are assigned

war-related meanings. In a video from a mobilization precinct, a female officer instructs new recruits to use ladies' hygienic pads inside leaking army boots and to use tampons to plug bullet wounds (Inform Napalm 2022). This reflects how the biopolitics of the Russian state treats human bodies as a disposable mass. Driven by fear, greed, and ideological clichés, women interiorize the discourses of the dominant biopower and present them in exaggerations and parodies. In a viral TikTok video from February 2023, a drunk Russian mother, sitting in her kitchen in a T-shirt with a glass of alcohol, addresses the Ukrainians: "I am the mother of four sons, and I also have two daughters. I will give you all four of them! You will not f... ing break Russia. I will give birth to another four! (With these words, she grabs her large breasts.) We, Russian mothers, are like that!" (Inge 2023).

This is similar to Marshal Georgy Zhukov's apocryphal reply to Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower in May 1945, when the latter commented on the excessive human loss of the Red Army (80,000 killed and 300,000 wounded) in the battle of Berlin: "No problem, our women will give birth to new ones (*baby novykh narozhayut*)." The biopolitics of war in Russia reduces gender roles to a bare minimum. Male bodies are utilized as cannon fodder in the many wars of the state, while women's bodies are used as machines for the reproduction of this strategic raw material (Medvedev 2023b). This illustrates the transformation of biopolitics into necropolitics, as suggested by Foucault and later conceptualized by Mbembe. In Russia, life is preserved and cultivated as an organic natural resource ("people as the new oil," as a local saying has it) to be utilized and disposed of on the battlefield. For Russia's biopower, life has no value in itself but is only a strategic resource in the hands of the state.

## NECROPOLITICS OF WAR: THE CULT OF DEATH

The two years of war since 2022 have seen the final transformation of biopolitics into necropolitics and the emergence of a specific culture of death in Russia. Vladimir Putin has been talking about death (not his own but other people's) for years. In the film *World*

*Order 2018*, speaking about the prospects of global nuclear war, he asked a rhetorical question: "Why do we need a world if Russia is not in it?" (Meduza 2018). Later the same year, speaking on the same apocalyptic theme at the Valdai Discussion Club, he suggested that "as martyrs, we will go to heaven," and Russia's foes "will just croak because they won't even have time to repent" (RIA Novosti 2018). With the start of the war in February 2022, his mentions of death became more frequent, as he spoke of the glory of dying in war. For example, when talking to the mother of a killed soldier in the Kremlin in November 2022, he mentioned that each year Russia loses 30,000 people to road accidents and a further 30,000 to alcohol. While these deaths go "unnoticed," dying in the war in Donbass "gives meaning to life: his goal has been reached" (President 2022).

Putin's propagandists echo their leader. As stated by Margarita Simonyan, head of the *Russia Today* television channel, it is better "to die for the right and important cause" than "to pass away as a weak man from a serious illness" (ChTO 2023). TV propagandist Vladimir Soloviev, referring to Putin's words, further confided that "life is hugely overvalued; why fear the inevitable, especially since we will go to heaven" (Soloviov 2023). Meanwhile, actor and Duma deputy Dmitry Pevtsov hailed the Russians' capacity to die in great numbers: "Our people know how to love, how to be friends, and how to die in large numbers… No other country has so many saints. This is our strength; this is what makes us different from the rest of the world" (Kapital strany 2023).

At the same time, rather than condemning the war and calling for peace, in the true Christian spirit, the Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate has blessed the atrocities and the killing of the Ukrainians. Patriarch Kirill claimed that "death in the line of duty redeems all sins" (Euronews 2022) and that "a true believer is not exposed to the fear of death" (Morozov 2022). Death is further glorified in posters on city streets, at bus stops, and in the windows of shops, and there are portraits of soldiers and officers killed in Ukraine everywhere. As a local resident in the Siberian city of Yurga, in Kemerovo oblast, which is home to several military units, told journalists:

> The city has turned into a graveyard. We are surrounded by the dead. The faces of those killed in action are everywhere. In the center of town, by the fountain where young families walk with their kids, there are screens that show photographs of our fallen military on the walls of the buildings non-stop. On the sides of the roads, in children's playgrounds, there are billboards with the same faces. Everywhere there's life also has the dead looking at us from every corner... It is terrible and hard. Yugra has turned from a cozy military town into the city of the dead.

The journalist also noticed a World War II poster in the street that read: "Contempt for death shall be spread among the masses and shall lead to victory" (Sibir. Realii 2023).

The cult of death started long before the war, with the processions of the "Immortal Regiment" held all over Russia on the eve of Victory Day. On this day (May 9), participants carry portraits of fallen World War II heroes in a quasi-religious ceremony. Starting as a civil initiative by a local TV channel in the city of Tomsk, this was quickly taken over by the government bureaucracy and state propaganda and turned into a nationwide ideological campaign honoring the dead. For years now, their portraits have graced hallways in schools, the walls of administrative buildings, and roadside billboards. In 2016, Alexander Ageev, an academic and director of the Institute of Economic Strategies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, suggested giving voting rights to the 27 million Soviet people that died in World War II. This meant that their ballots would be cast by their descendants (Obukhov 2016). While his ideas did not gain much traction, it is true that the dead started to play a significant role in Russian politics, in decisions related to sanctioning policies, and in ideological dogmas. This growing cult of the dead has established the discursive and psychological basis for the necropolitics of the war in Ukraine.

In addition to necropolitics, there is also what the economist Vladislav Inozemtsev calls a peculiar "necroeconomics," or "*death-o-nomics*," in Russia. Rather than the cultural and ideological "death worshiping," he analyzes death as a rational choice in Putin's Russia. Assuming that a mobilized individual serves for five months before

getting killed, the sum of his monthly payments plus the presidential one-time payment of 5 million rubles to the family of a serviceman killed in action in addition to life insurance payments and supplementary payments from the regional authorities add up to a neat sum of 15 million rubles ($250,000 according to late 2022 exchange rates). If the dead individual in question comes from an average Russian region (not Moscow), this sum would be more than the mobilized individual would have earned in his remaining lifetime. Thus, Inozemtsev concludes that "if a man goes to war and dies at the age of 30 to 35 (i.e., at the most active and healthiest age), his death would be more economically profitable than his further life. In other words, Putin's regime does not only glorify and ennoble death, but also turns it into a rational choice" (Inozemtsev 2023). Men across many of Russia's regions are willing to take the risk of being killed or disabled, and their families are inclined to accept this outcome in the current socio-economic conditions of Russia, where "the purchase of lives" has been turned into an industry.

On the other hand, the government also expects a positive economic outcome from this death-o-nomics. If we assume that the number of mobilized and contract-based soldiers ranges from 400,000 to 450,000, then their minimum total allowance would amount to approximately one trillion rubles per year. A further one trillion would have to be allocated to compensate for killed or wounded soldiers, assuming there are 50,000 killed and 100,000 wounded, which is the minimal estimate of the Russian war losses as of summer 2023 (Aljazeera 2023). Added together, these payments of two trillion rubles ($20–30 billion, depending on the exchange rate) would represent nearly 10% of pre-war federal spending and could be reinvested into the economy. Economist Dmitry Belousov (incidentally, the brother of First Deputy Prime Minister and Putin's top economic advisor Andrei Belousov) has even predicted the emergence of a social group of "the young rich" and the contribution of this "war money" to long-term investment programs (RBC 2023). The Russian government could well use the unofficial motto of the "Wagner" PMC, "Death is our business, and business is good."

In observing the various manifestations of necropolitics in wartime Russia, Russian-American philosopher Mikhail Epstein defines

Putin's Russia as "anti-world" and based on destroying life as a political principle. In his book *The Russian Anti-World*, he introduces the notions of "necrocracy" (the power of death) and "ontocide" (the killing of being) (Epstein 2023). He observes the principle of pure negativity that rules Russian politics today and attributes this to the specific mechanisms of "self-colonization," or what Alexander Etkind terms "internal colonization" (Etkind 2011), which refers to when the state runs the country as a resource colony and treats subjects as disposable raw materials. He also links this cult of death to the organic and chthonic cult of the earth typical of Russia, citing an old woman in a Siberian village who said, "I may have lost my son to war, but the Russian land has enlarged" (Epstein and Medvedev 2022). If previously the main export commodity of Russia were the bodies of fossilized animals extracted from the earth (oil and gas as fossil fuels), now the key export of the country is death itself.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS: THE DIALECTICS OF BIO- AND NECROPOLITICS

The necropolitics of war marks the culmination and final transformation of the biopolitics of Putinism. Having come full circle, the politics of life and care in the original Foucauldian meaning has turned into the politics of annihilation and death. There is no contradiction here, as even the early manifestations of Putin's biopolitics had elements and implications of death in them. One case can be seen in the "Dima Yakovlev Law," which banned the foreign adoption of Russian children and effectively condemned hundreds of Russian infants to a slow death. Likewise, further manifestations of biopower in Russia brought with them repressive, anatomopolitical, and life-taking components. In addition to the anti-gay legislation of 2013, a new law adopted in July 2023 targets transgender people in Russia by banning transition surgery and hormone therapy, prohibiting changing gender on official documents like passports, annulling any marriage when a spouse changes gender, and banning adoptions by such couples. The new law is certain to increase the number of suicides among transgender and transsexual people in Russia (MacFarquhar 2023).

In this sense, the politics of the body, as applied to the population as a de-individualized, statistical, and governable mass, makes no distinction between life and death. In the dialectics of biopower, shaped by nature itself, the management of life is also the management of death, and life-giving and life-taking are two sides of the same coin. Thus, as this and the previous chapters of this book have shown, the biopolitics of the Russian state has organically transformed into the necropolitics of war over the past decade.

Our research unveils another important characteristic of Putin's regime of power. In its logic, biopolitics—as the whole plethora of measures aimed at taking care of specific groups of the population—always needs to be a collective phenomenon and ultimately ought to embolden national cohesion and the spirit of patriotism in society. At the same time, necropolitics is always fragmented and reduced to individual losses, thus leaving no space for any mass-scale mobilization on this basis. Human deaths can only be selectively symbolized in public discourses and imageries, and in most cases, mournings for the dead are performed and perceived as private matters, with casualties often remaining faceless and even nameless.

The authorship of biopolitical measures of care and protection is usually highly publicized due to its importance as political capital and a resource. Necropolitics, by contrast, often remains without agency or responsibility for losses, be they from pandemics or wars. Human casualties are usually referred to as victims of structural circumstances beyond the control of the power holders. In this regard, necropolitics sets certain limits to the protective and care-taking functions of biopower and therefore exposes its vulnerabilities. This dichotomy—the collective nature of biopolitics as protection and the always particular and individual nature of death—is one of the major building blocks of the hegemonic regime of power and sovereignty in Russia.

# CONCLUSION

In this book, we have applied biopolitical scholarship and its multiple concepts to the field of Russian studies. Ontologically, we have shown that biopolitics offers an academic alternative to the well-established schools of thought that presume the grounding of politics is based on institutions, ideologies, or material and financial assets. Biopolitics emphasizes the centrality and primacy of human lives, bodies, and, in a broader sense, corporeality, as ontological characteristics of the political. Epistemologically, it presumes that by studying different practices of life and death in their discursive, symbolic, performative, and other forms, researchers delve into the depth of political agendas, calculations, logics, and rationalities of power.

These epistemic and cognitive drivers encouraged us to write the biopolitical story of how Putin's lengthy and unchecked presidency has changed Russia, and how these changes might be approached and interpreted from the perspective of biopower. For scholars who do not focus on Russia per se, this book might serve as a reference point to avoid stereotypical cliches that simplify the story of the post-Soviet transition and reduce it to failures and irregularities in institution building, ideological derogations from liberalism, or electoral imperfections. The nature of Putinism reaches far beyond these simplifications and manifests itself in a different type of transition, which we have described in the categories of biopolitics, zoepolitics, and necropolitics. This triad has, metaphorically speaking, subdued

small islands of governmentality with its predominantly managerial and largely depoliticized logics of governance. This has led to an ocean of violent and repressive sovereignty with a centralizing and totalizing power that has been intensely discussed in the academic literature (Chappell 2006, 317–18).

The COVID-19 pandemic and military intervention in Ukraine exposed Putin's sovereign power as discursively incomplete, inconsistent, disjointed, and disarticulated. This left a great deal of space for narratives and images that either represented the sovereign through other drivers of discourse or interpreted and complemented its semiotically dislocated acts of speech. We tracked symptoms of these transformations within Putin's "vertical of power" during the COVID-19 pandemic and continued observing much more radical signs of the decomposition and fragmentation of the regime during the war in Ukraine. The most notable example of this fragmentation could be seen in Yevgeniy Prigozhin's mutiny in June 2023.

Yet, the regime remained bellicose. The war in Ukraine has, on the one hand, expanded the space for patriotic governmentality. On the other hand, it has increased the sovereign power's potential to enact popular bio- and necropolitics as resources to enhance the durability of Putin's rule and power.

Such an evolution is not unique to Russia and can happen in many societies. In fact, world history has seen other examples of fascist transformations of biopolitics. In Russia, however, this transition was made possible and was enhanced by the nature of the Russian state, which traditionally treats the population as an organic natural resource and which uses political ideologies, institutions, and practices exclusively for the purpose of its own survival. In a general sense, what happened to Putin's biopolitical project of normalization and the idea of the "Russian world" structurally resembles what Slavoj Žižek has called the trajectories of great ideas that have turned into their opposites. Examples of this can be seen in the French Revolution, which transformed the idea of freedom into that of terror, and the so-called "end of history," which ended with multiple violent conflicts (Žižek and Harari 2022). In line with this logic, the radicalization of the politics of care and protection of the "normal" way of life against so-called "deviations" was doomed to trigger a tragic necropolitical effect.

The biopolitical genealogy of Putin's regime, therefore, should not be taken as an exceptional case. On the contrary, there is very little in the Russian model of biopower that lacks comparison with other illiberal regimes (Budraitskis 2022). Moreover, most of the trends pertinent to contemporary Russian biopolitics have a broader universal scope. For example, tendencies for the biopolitical regulation and categorization of human lives, particularly during states of exception, have been seen in most countries, including in liberal democracies. As Dina Khapaeva (2017) found in her research, playing with death has become a commodified feature of many Western cultures. This has opened a debate on whether violence and anti-humanism are symptoms of a crisis in democracies. Yet, in Russia, these trends have accelerated and ultimately led to the biggest war in Europe since the middle of the last century.

Thus, the study of Russian biopolitics might be helpful in properly diagnosing necropolitical tendencies in other illiberal dictatorships, such as Lukashenka's Belarus. In this respect, this book challenges the opinion of many leftist authors who propose that the centrality of *bios* in politics blurs the distinctions between illiberal biopower, which appropriates the body by the state, and liberal biopolitics, which transfers "the property of the body from the state to the individual, but within the same biopolitical lexicon" (Esposito 2008b, 641). Our analysis disproves this opinion and highlights meaningful distinctions between the liberal and illiberal models of biopolitics. While Foucault's biopolitical project, consisting of the gradual de-sovereignization and growing role of self-care, self-management, and self-governance (Ong 2006, 14), seems to be irrelevant in Russia, Agamben's version appears to possess a higher explanatory power. Paradoxically, however, the way in which Agamben developed his concepts of the camp and of bare life as allegedly relevant for Western liberal societies ultimately looks overstretched and even misleading. What might be helpful for the academic instrumentalization of his theory is perhaps its re-orientation to the much more expedient object of illiberal regimes producing mass-scale violence, practices of filtration and enforced relocation, and forceful border changes with long-term effects. All of these can be seen clearly in the Russian war against Ukraine.

Yet explaining the malicious ability of Russian power holders to radically escalate what other countries seem to be able to mitigate or balance with the logics and rationalities of governmentality, responsibilization, and normalization is challenging. The key to understanding this challenge could lie, at least partially, in the unique relationship between the Russian state and society and in the dominant role of the state in Russian history. The specifics of the Russian climate, geography, resources, and geopolitics have worked to make the centralized state the key actor. The state has colonized the territory and the population of Russia. It has shaped the institutions of modernity in Russia, has become the key economic actor in the distribution of resources, and has subordinated the rule of law and private property. As a country of belated modernization, permanently catching up to and competing with the West, Russia has copied and borrowed Western government practices, ideologies, technologies of power, and even the very format of a "well-ordered police state" (Raeff 1983). Seeking to consolidate its power and achieve its strategic priorities, the state has tested, appropriated, and modified various Western political ideologies and practices. These practices have been tailored, corrupted, and perverted to meet the needs of the Russian state.

As Russian philosopher Nikolai Berdyayev observed almost 100 years ago, many western ideologies in Russia, unconstrained by law, custom, or civil society, turn into their opposites (Berdyayev 1955, 32-42). For instance, Voltaire's sarcastic atheism, born from the ideas of the Enlightenment, was turned into the terrorist annihilation of religion by the state in Russia. Socialism, which was a product of the complex evolution of Western society and an antidote to nineteenth-century capitalism, was turned into "barracks communism" and eventually the GULAG in Russia. After the fall of Communism at the end of the twentieth century, we saw the transformation of liberalism into oligarchic capitalism and the capture of state institutions by a criminal clan. This led to the degradation of democracy into a personalist, authoritarian regime.

Biopolitics in Russia has followed the same path. What was initially promoted in Russia as an instrument of life and care (about public health and sanitation, food, reproduction, the new generation) quickly turned into a repressive "jackhammer" to discipline both so-

ciety and the elite, define enemies inside (the LGBT community) and outside of the country (foreign adopters, decaying "Gayrope," etc.), and draw a perimeter around Russia's biopolitical sovereignty. Finally, as Russia's illiberal democracy has transformed into authoritarianism and eventually totalitarianism with elements of "organic" and "soil-based" fascism, biopolitics has turned into zoe- and anatomopolitics of violence. With the start of the war against Ukraine, it has further transformed into pure necropolitics and the production of death.

The table below helps to summarize our overall research findings. It shows how bio-, zoe-, and necropolitics are interconnected, albeit not in an entirely linear fashion, in each of the four domains of our study (covered in chapters 2–5). On most accounts, we found it quite challenging, if at all possible, to draw a clear line of distinction between anatomo- and biopolitics. Therefore, contrary to Foucault's theory, we preferred to integrate them into one rubric. This makes particular sense in the cases of performative and sports politics, where individual bodies symbolically represent and signify the collective body of the nation. We also discovered the roots of necropolitics in the tendency to reduce *bios* (politically qualified life with rights and protection) to *zoe* ("naked life," equated with physical needs and instincts and susceptible to abuse and violence). It is zoepolitics, exemplified by the elevation of physical force and justified by the narratives of hegemonic masculinity, that made the war against Ukraine possible and even acceptable for a significant part of the Russian population. In this regard, the necropolitics of war and the biopolitics of the "Russian world" are two connected links that might be extended to the fascist practices of "blood-and-soil" mobilization that have been incorporated into the practical toolkit of Putin's regime.

This table, if read vertically, shows the transformation of each of the three major nodal points of our analysis depending on the policy domain under which they were deployed. Thus, when it comes to performative resistance, biopolitics might have merged with anatomopolitics, while during the coronavirus crisis it overlaps with different forms of governmentality. At the same time, biopolitics boosts the ideational construct of the "Russian world" and its specific pastoral power. The zoepolitical column is equally rich in content. It includes both the rhetoric of hate that deprives internal or external others of

human characteristics and glorifies muscular force as the backbone of political agency. In this sense, zoepolitics prepares the ground for necropolitics, which encompasses a focus on memory politics of the dead and demands the sacrifice of life as a precondition for membership in the "patriotic" community loyal to sovereign power.

| | BIOPOLITICS | ZOEPOLITICS | NECROPOLITICS |
|---|---|---|---|
| PERFORMATIVE POLITICS | A merger of anatomo- (Pavlensky) and biopolitical (Pussy Riot) actionism | The animalization and dehumanization of otherness ("Night Wolves") | Necropolitical ceremonies and public actions ("Immortal Regiment") |
| SPORTS | The biopolitical appropriation of athletes' bodies for the sake of national glory | Football fans' violence patronized by the state | Sports as a war-modeling metaphor |
| PANDEMIC | Different versions of bio-governmentality | The population as vulnerable "bare lives" | The normalization and routinization of death as a phenomenon beyond "our" reach |
| WAR | The "Russian world" as a biopolitical construct | The cult of muscular force and violence as a basis for survival in a norm-free world | The glorification of a "patriotic" and "useful" death |

With these findings in mind, we end with one final question: Are there alternatives to the transformation of biopower to zoe- and then to necropolitics with fascist overtones? A biopolitical answer to this question leads to Foucault, whose liberal recipe includes the declining power of sovereignty and the ensuing shrinking space for political will-based decisions, the growing role of knowledge-based governmentality and the corresponding logic of policy rationalization, as well as the sustainable culture of societal responsibilization. Although it is unlikely that any of these nodal points will emerge in Russian politics in the foreseeable future, they remain theoretically valid and practically relevant reference points for the prospective blueprints of Russian critical thinking.

# ACADEMIC GLOSSARY

**Bare life.** The metaphor of "bare life" was coined by Giorgio Agamben as a radical expression of inequality and exclusion, nicely illustrated by the debates on sexuality, family, or immigration in many contemporary societies. The idea of bare life describes a typical totalitarian situation in which victims and perpetrators may easily swap roles, and the boundary between the two is to remain inherently indefinable. Conceptualizations of bare life range from the practice of incarcerating and criminalizing the opposition to the reality of refugee camps. The expansion of the space of bare life through de-socialization and deprivation of rights and lives is correlative with and tantamount to the enlargement and widening of totalitarianism.

**Biopolitics** as an epistemic category encompasses a broad variety of conceptualizations of issues, processes, and relations central to the linkage between politics and life, including the integration of body-related issues in political calculations, along with various political impacts of politics on human corporeality, differentiation of forms of life, and instrumentalization of the ensuing vulnerabilities. Biopolitics implies a shift of political agency from state institutions and ideologies to collective—and often self-organized—human bodies, and thus requires more emphasis on sociology, anthropology, and cultural studies.

Biopolitics is not a full-fledged theory but rather a concept or academic lens that opens up a peculiar optics of research. Biopolitics is not a substitution for but rather an addition to other conceptualizations of politics; it asks different questions and uses different glossaries for studying politics. Key biopolitical questions are: How do political actors build their strategies on life- and body-related issues (sexuality, reproductive behavior, demographics, medicine, gender, penitentiary institutions, etc.)? How do new political subjects appear based on biopolitical discourses? How do biopolitical discourses and practices articulate and build hierarchies between various types of life ("ours" and "alien," "protected" and "bare" or "naked," "worth living" and "doomed to death," etc.)?

In tackling these questions, biopolitical discourses oscillate between the issues of life and death (biopolitics and necropolitics), collective and individual bodies (biopolitics and anatomopolitics), and bios and space (biopower and geopolitics). Biopolitics connotes those practices (including discursive ones) that are directly related to measures of controlling, managing, and administering human bodies through investing in matters affecting lives and protecting the physical existence of social groups. Biopolitics as a concept applies to the whole population as a collective object of regulatory practices of governance. Biopolitics places human bodies at the center of complex social, cultural, and political relations, defining such political concepts as nation-building, security, borders, ideology, inclusion, and exclusion. It implies that the problematization of the whole gamut of issues related to life and the social functioning of human bodies is embedded in power relations and therefore is inherently political. Biopolitics can be a nation-building tool based on normative standards of biopower, defining rules of belonging and conditions of abandonment ("bare life").

There are multiple modalities of biopolitics that differently shape the entire spectrum of political institutions and practices, from liberal to illiberal. In its original meaning, biopolitics makes full sense in a liberal type of society and connotes a broader conceptual chain containing the ideas of productive modes of power, responsibilization, and governmentality. Biopolitics may conceptualize political power as an oppressive corporeal force, a type of material or physi-

cal possession to be protected for the sake of "national survival," yet at the same time, biopolitics may also unveil multiple facets of freedom and democracy as key components of liberal rule.

**Biopolitical bordering.** In biopolitics, borders are largely constructed on the contingent basis of differentiating between groups of a population, with ample space for "Us" vs. "Them" distinctions. Borders are biopolitically constructed through distinctions between groups that are taken care of and those whose protection is not unconditional or is denied, which ultimately sets the rules for inclusion and exclusion. Biopolitics deals not with fixed territorial or physical borderlines but with borders functioning as filters or categorizers of mobile groups of human beings that cross borders, and as knowledge-based practices of "normalization" and rationalization. It is particularly interested in studying "liquid," non-linear borders, often externalized and outsourced, and analyzing mechanisms and practices controlling, managing, and administering human bodies. Border biopolitics might be approached as an assemblage of medical, immigration, and transportation authorities aimed at the codification of incoming groups of people, their examination, and the ascription to them of certain statuses (placed in quarantine or exempted from border checkups, etc.).

**Civilizational biopolitics** is grounded in an organicist interpretation of Russian identity, with constitutive references to the metaphor of the family and the concomitant function of unsolicited care monopolized by the state. Civilizational biopolitics is exemplified by the "Russian world" doctrine defined through the categories of kinship or the belonging to a family-like pastoral community, an imagined collective "We," with a key distinction between "a population" (a statistical entity unable to properly articulate its needs) and "the people" (the source of the Russian civilizational project). It is based on a masculine political culture in its different normalizing interpretations, interpretations which reveal its zoepolitical underside—the grounding of politics in the laws of wild nature and physical force. In this respect, civilizational biopolitics normalizes wars and violence through the Russian equivalent of *Lebensraum*, or "living

space." The bio-civilizational turn not only extends state sovereignty into the private lives of citizens but also renegotiates the borders of—and the rules of belonging to—the Russian political community, which requires external othering or the portrayal of certain outsiders as threatening the bio-normative coherence of the in-group. Civilizational biopolitics offers a particular way of anchoring an increasingly dispersed and uncertain sovereignty in a traditionalist and patriarchal matrix of power relations.

**Necropolitics** implies a readiness and necessity to sacrifice lives for the sake of a "great cause," be it the nation, a political ideal, or a leader who embodies either or both ; it can also signify a refusal of protection that can lead to the loss of lives. Any of biopolitical issues—health care, immigration, pandemics—may expose explicit or implicit necropolitical connotations, with death being included into the political calculus. Biopolitics turns into necropolitics when certain populations are located outside of the sphere of "humanity" and are thus denied due care and proper protection. Therefore, the illiberal version of biopolitics is heavily contaminated and polluted with strong necropolitical elements and components that have ultimately de-actualized the main object of biopolitical regulations—the population. Due to this hybridity, illiberal regimes vacillate between bio- and necropolitics, thus making the borderlines between the two precarious, contextual, and ultimately uncertain.

In necropolitical logic, the safety, integrity, and identity of the collective self trump the physical materiality of individual bodily life, which implies the sacrifice of human lives for the sake of repelling threats that are considered common to the entire community. In necropolitics, some groups are targeted for elimination after being classified as pathological to the social body, so that parts of the population are killed by other parts in order to ensure survival.

Related concepts are:

Necronationalism—a concept focusing on the practices of settler colonial nation-building organized around the colonial management of dead racial (indigenous) subjects. It includes genocide, ethnic cleansing, the desecration of cemeteries, and land acquisition;

Necropolitical governance—domination over human bodies through measures of coercion and direct violence. It usually connotes racialized forms of control and dominance, but may stretch beyond them;

"Spatial necropoilitics"—punitive measures towards specific neighborhoods and areas where the police have a legal right to kill.

**Popular biopolitics.** By analogy with the sub-discipline of popular geopolitics, popular biopolitics aims to study non-elite, under-conceptualized, routine knowledge, more vernacular than expert or academic, along with performative representations of lives and human bodies in the arts and media with multiple myths and conspiracy theories. Popular biopolitics is an epistemic category that allows peering into cultural practices related to the political existence and functioning of human bodies, and problematizes interactive and non-hierarchical relationships between political and academic concepts, on the one hand, and artistic and performative imageries and literary discourses, on the other.

The objects of popular biopolitics—images, performances, and representations—should be distinguished from academic and political concepts. Hence, popular biopolitics is interested in finding out how biopolitical concepts developed in academia and then often used in political narratives might be represented through images, symbols, or metaphors. Popular biopolitics encompasses the sphere where political concepts circulate as visualized signs, images, and performances. Popular biopolitics makes it possible to discern the assemblage of performative representations of corporeality and bodily politics that are conducive to the reformulation of the idea of the people, with ostensible populist connotations.

"**Sexual sovereignty**" concerns the emergence of a normative, moralizing discourse promoting Russian "traditional values" as opposed to the "moral decay" of the West. In the logic of sexual sovereignty, the function of external biopolitical others is often ascribed to the collective West as representing the liberal emancipatory agenda, with feminism, moral relativism, sexual freedom, and the erosion of the institution of marriage as its key elements. In particular, Russian an-

tigay legislation can be viewed as a response to the normalization of homosexuality in the West. The normative gap is underpinned by the Orthodox Church, which lambastes feminism as a dangerous ideology of emancipation. By claiming that there are "traditional roles" for women to play, the Russian Orthodox Church uses a biopolitical argument to define what the Russian political community should look like. "Sexual sovereignty" consorts with "somatic sovereignty" as a type of attitude toward the sovereign power implying the reinterpretation of national or imperial territory as analogous to a body that needs care and protection from sickness and intrusions.

**Zoepolitics** is a type of political structure grounded in the struggle for physical survival of "biological bodies" shaped by muscular and physical force and includes death as a likely outcome of the struggle for survival. For zoepolitics, the prospect of death is a natural element of "bare life." From a zoepolitical perspective, political leadership is defined by "natural" predispositions, which makes zoepolitics one of the most effective forms generative of bounded political roles pertinent to the production of sovereignty-centered discourses. A state claiming its uncompromised and undivided sovereignty tends to resort to an organicist discourse, with zoepolitical categories at its center. Zoepolitics offers a particular way of anchoring an increasingly dispersed and uncertain sovereignty in a traditionalist and deeply patriarchal matrix of power relations.

Zoepolitical discourses stretch beyond traditional ideological (left–right, conservative–liberal, democratic–autocratic) dichotomies, and substitute ideologies with references to the "natural state of affairs". Zoepolitics is one of the major political resources of regimes which is manifested in their capacity to expel or displace certain groups to the margins of the polity and reduce their status to *homo sacer*, using a variety of measures, from verbal de-legitimation to physical violence. Totalitarian systems have taken "zoefication" (the reduction of bios as politically qualified life to its zoological physicality) of citizens to the extreme in stripping people of their civil rights, social positions and political status.

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# INDEX

The authors of this work examine the importance of biopolitics in fueling Russia's confrontation with the West. In their view, the development of Putin's authoritarianism was largely triggered by what they call a biopolitical turn. This shift is exemplified by the use of an increasing number of regulatory mechanisms to discipline and constrain the human body. Such political practices concern issues of sexuality, reproductive behavior, adoption, fertility, family planning, public hygiene, and demography. This turn created a new disciplinary framework for the population and the elite. Bans and restrictions of a biopolitical nature, became one of the main tools for articulating the rules of belonging in the political community and drawing its political boundaries. Biopolitical discourses have taken up the core of the Russian identity formation, which contrasts a positive "conservative Russia" with a supposedly vicious "liberal West."

"From sexuality to torture and murder, the authors illuminate how Putin has turned a dystopian future into a present reality. This is a compelling innovative piece of work by two scholars at the top of their game."

Misha Glenny, Rector, Institut für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen (IWM), Vienna

"*Biopower in Putin's Russia* fruitfully takes Foucauldian concepts beyond the West."

Charlotte Epstein, Professor, University of Sydney, author of *Birth of the State: The Place of the Body in Crafting Modern Politics*

"Finally, a socially grounded theorization of the Putin regime's turn to all-out authoritarianism and war."

Iver B. Neumann, director of the Fridtjof Nansen Institute in Oslo, co-author of *Governing the Global Polity*

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