Russia's Biopolitics of Sexual Sovereignty: A Genealogy

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Abstract

The project draws on postfoundational political theory, poststructuralist discourse analysis, and postcolonial theory to offer a comprehensive analysis of the anxieties over sexuality, sexual norm and sexual behaviour that gained salience in the Russian public sphere in the years 2011-2014. Over this period, problematizations of homosexuality and other "deviations" from "traditional" norms were articulated as matters of national and state security; the field of discursivity around sexuality and sexual norm became a dynamic, tumultuous space instigating a moral panic.

I begin with theorizing Vladimir V. Putin's illiberal governance as founded upon a perpetual state of emergency that manifests itself in an obsessive preoccupation with (re)defining and defending sovereignty. I investigate this constitutive discursive dynamic to trace the transition from the early, mostly technocratic (first term), to the more authoritarian and conservative stage of Putinism (second and third terms on). This transition, I argue, was marked by the change of emphasis within the nodal point "sovereign democracy" whereby the floating signifier "sovereignty" gradually rose to salience.

I argue that the new iteration of "sovereignty," that came about marking Putin's return for a third term in office in 2012, was marked by the propagation of "spiritual-moral values" and the deployment of the discourse of "sexual sovereignty." These developments responded to a need to conjure up a new populist front and relegitimise the regime. Tracing the emergence and deployment of the discourse of securitization of "traditional values" through the foundational work of a number of key organic intellectuals and moral entrepreneurs of Putinism, I offer a genealogical examination of discursive preconditions of the 2011-2014 sexual panic that came about as early as the 1990s and 2000s. This analysis allows for me to argue that these preconditions, as well as the discourse of sexual sovereignty itself, need to be scrutinized

beyond writing them off as a mere manifestation of a "centuries long," "deeply entrenched" homophobia of the Russian society.

I then proceed to a discussion of Putinite state homophobia as a biopolitical discourse, arguing that its function is to facilitate nation-building by drawing lines of inclusion/exclusion. A discourse analysis of a textual sample comprised of what figured in 2011-2014 as mainstream expert knowledge on homosexuality, allows for me to discern an interplay between the repressive legacy of Soviet psychiatry that, in the Russian Federation, has morphed into a medical narrative supporting the discourse of sexual sovereignty, and a trend for normalization of "non-traditional" sexualities. The analysis reveals that the "expert homophobia" is infused with the same political logic of securitization discerned previously. In a similar vein, the Russian state's peculiar approach to the biopolitics of HIV/AIDS, that relies on the affirmation of traditional values, contributes to the perpetuation of the lines of division discerned in the psychiatric discourse.

Finally, I apply postcolonial theory to transcend contextually limited analytical frameworks for approaching Russian sexual politics. I argue that the political logic of securitization informing the discourse of sexual sovereignty is symptomatic of the liminal postcolonial positionality of the Russian political subject vis-a-vis the "West." The narrow presumption that homophobia is always (and only) about homosexuality clouds what is at stake in different stances on LGBT+ rights in various geopolitical spaces. To counter it, I argue that the sexual panic in Russia was a culturally complex phenomenon entangled in the "subaltern empire's" quest to articulate its national identity in relation to its constitutive outside - the "West." Reading the discourse of sexual sovereignty via Homi K. Bhabha's theory of hybridity, I demonstrate how the Russian political subject is caught in mimicry of the Western hegemonic political language. By

reversing and subverting this language, it tries to construct a paleoconservative imaginary of an anti-Modern autarky in the absence of domestic referents for national identity politics.

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Introduction

From 2011 to 2014, Russian politics experienced a substantial hegemonic reconfiguration, with the official political discourse undergoing a major shift (Makarychev and Medvedev, 2015; Makarychev, 2018b; Wilkinson, 2014; Malinova, 2022). Following a sudden rise of the urban oppositional movement in 2011-2012,[1] the change consisted in an intensive centralization and consolidation of the political space through the toughening of an anti-liberal and anti-Western rhetoric in the public discourse. This rhetoric eventually crystalized in a new hegemonic regime built inter alia around the nodal point of "traditional values," and around an anti-modernist (anti-Western), normative and moralizing biopolitical order of discourse on sexuality and gender.

Through references to some imaginary historically distinct Russian customs, morality, and way of life, these "traditional values" have tended to be only negatively semanticised in opposition to the allegedly "Western" emancipatory political developments, rather than in relation to specific domestic referents. Hence, Viacheslav Morozov (2015), following Aleksandra Novozhenova (2014), coins the term "paleoconservatism" to highlight the similarity of this discursive formation to the openly agonistic political stance of the American paleoconservatives that "emphasize tradition and organic spirituality, and tend to politicize culture as an instrument of 'civilizational struggle'" (Morozov, 2015a, p. 114). Unlike a more conventional kind of conservatism that seeks to safeguard an already existing social formation from excessive politicization by radical forces both on the left and right, this discursive regime actively promotes this politicization from a far-right stance, constructing and naturalizing what it at the same time refers to as the "tradition" or "status quo."

[1] I am referring to the so-called "White Ribbon Movement," a broad coalition of (mostly liberal, but also radical left, libertarian and some far-right) political forces. E.g.: Ross, 2016.

The corollary of this paleoconservative hegemonic bloc is the new official discourse on sexuality and gender, which emerged in the public domain in 2011-2013 and was supported and institutionalized by the passing of a number of new laws aimed "at improving the demographic situation, upholding public morality, and proclaiming a sort of 'sexual sovereignty' of Russia" (Makarychev and Medvedev, 2015), including (but not limited to) the so-called anti-homosexual-propaganda legislation[2] that received a lot of international attention. Within this discourse, the differentiation of the public and private spheres, which used to be firmly established in the Russian society before the 2010s, was reconfigured via publicly thematizing sexuality as a key arena of social, cultural, economic, and political importance in the (mainly mainstream political) media loyal to or supportive of the government. A corollary of this foregrounding of sexuality has been the articulation of a division between the (proper) people and the "dangerous," subversive others (LGBT+-citizens, feminists, paedophiles, altogether), in terms of attributing to the latter some alleged social and biological threat, such as the dissolution of the "traditional" family, decrease in birth rate, spread of HIV/AIDS epidemic, etc.

This project aims at tracing the genealogy of the problematization(s) of sexuality, sexual norms, and sexual behaviour of Russian citizens within the period of 2011-2014, exploring the articulation of this theme in the mainstream political discourse in Russia since 2011. The Foucauldian genealogical approach that I adopt in this work offers a way of focusing on contingent and overdetermined fabrications of historical phenomena (Koopman, 2008), which allows questioning common-sense understandings of the emergence of societal phenomena by exploring the full totality of discourse to enhance the possibility of analysis. An important feature of a genealogy is its ambition to go beyond the mere account of the discourse under

[2] Effective at the federal level from June 30, 2013 after similar legislation had been passed by several federal subjects earlier the same year.

analysis and to address its conditions of possibility. In other words, Foucault's "effective history" entails a radical historicization of discourses, institutions, and practices established in agonistic plays of dominations through adopting a critical ethos towards them.

The Foucauldian analysis of discourses challenges the common understanding of domination and oppression. "If power flows not simply top down, but from the bottom up, in a capillary fashion, if it is not centralized but local and diffuse, then we cannot expect to capture it by means of a centralized, systemic theory" such as Marxism or those informed by liberal teleologies of progress (Phelan, 1990, p. 2). Instead of such approaches, I rely on a more nuanced postfoundational social ontology that adopts poststructuralist concepts of hybridity, hegemony, performative shift, and constitutive outside, each questioning the apparent closure of the discursive formation under investigation and deconstructing the binaries of a conventional analysis in order to demonstrate the ways this discursive formation is at the same time political and contingent, embedded in larger historical structures of meaning, and producing unexpected effects of displacement and metonymic shifts.

This apparatus helps me highlight the ways the Putinite state homophobia in Russia is contingent upon Russia's ambiguous global positionality, its historically formed discursive structures, and national identity politics in their complex intra-actions with the "West" as the Other and constitutive outside of the political subject of Russia. Furthermore, it will allow transcending (to an extent that it brings in added value) conventional binaries of realist and positivist political theories, such as state authority/civil society, endorsement/resistance, repression/freedom, domination/subalternity. Their static distinction, I argue, would prove irrelevant and misleading in the analysis of the Russian political discourse. I also discard voluntarist and statist approaches that see the totality of the domestic political process in the country as resulting from the will of individual or institutional political subjects (such as

Vladimir Putin himself, or his government), whose agency is thus conceptualised as isolated from larger discursive structures, reified, and stands in need of interpretation within the framework of an (ir)rational choice theory. To transcend these reductionist perspectives, I rely on the Foucauldian model of power, the theory of governmentality, and the methodological framework of genealogy supplemented with Laclau and Mouffe's research apparatus of discourse analysis.

This dissertation was conceived and written in the years after the Russian annexation of Crimea (2014) and the establishment of the separatist "people's republics" in the East of Ukraine, but before the devastating full-scale war Russia waged on that country. The war signifies a rapture in discourse that results from a dysfunctional hegemonic logic, marking its failure to achieve its objective at a closure in the signification of social and political reality. What led this logic to its ultimate failure of language as "soft power," is a question that this dissertation, although finished before the war, highlights and, to an extent, sheds light on.

Many would argue (Taylor, 2018; Pavlovsky, 2019a; Rutland, 2019) that the foundations of Putinism go further back than Putin's arrival in office in 2001, to the year 1993, when the authoritarian super-president constitution was adopted that made Putinism possible. In the project, I rely on the political theorist Gleb Pavlovsky's (2015; 2019a) heuristic explanatory model of #SistemaRF to highlight this historical continuity between the presidencies of Boris Yeltsin and Vladimir Putin. Understanding #SistemaRF as a historical contingency devoid of determinative continuity with the Soviet system, Pavlovsky uncovers at its core a constitutive void of ideas, aspirations, and gravity concealed by "ironic ideologies" and "on-call spectres" summoned to conjure up an illusion of the meaningfulness of the social order it perpetuates. The only two "serious" considerations that the System stands by are its own survival and defence/expansion of sovereignty against the "global civilizational threat" objectified, above

all, in the eastward expansion of NATO. It is this obsession with sovereignty at all costs, combined with the regime's inherent logic of escalation, that has predetermined the current state of events.

In answering the question "Why is #SistemaRF such as it is?" it is impossible, I argue, to do without addressing the liminal postcolonial positionality of the Russian political subject vis-a-vis the "West." Applying the theory of hybridity developed by the postcolonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha (2004) and adapted by Viacheslav Morozov (2015), I argue that the sexual panic in Russia is a culturally complex phenomenon entangled in the "subaltern empire's" quest to articulate its national identity in relation to its constitutive outside — the "West." This theoretical approach allows for one to highlight how the Russian political subject is caught in mimicry of the Western hegemonic political language. By reversing and subverting this language, it tries to construct a paleoconservative imaginary of anti-Modern indigeneity in the absence of a domestic set of referents for the construction of a national identity politics. It is the predetermined ultimate failure of this discursive dynamic that endlessly leaves the Russian state unable to conceive of any other way forward than to resort to postmodern hybrid warfare, including that against its own population.

And yet, the scope of this project stops short of directly addressing Putinism's climax it arrived at in 2022. Instead, I concentrate on a different point of bifurcation, the "sexual panic" of 2011-2014. It is then that, I believe, the hegemonic reconfiguration of the regime was effected, paving the way for what many (it turned out, prematurely) called "late-Putinism" (Gileotti, 2019). It is this construction that saw the new iteration of the "sovereignty panic," one that revolves around what I call "sexual sovereignty." It should be clear that this discursive regime did not end in 2014, rather, the process of its active crystallisation, mostly achieved by 2014, was over and its place in the political regime was sedimented from then on, without significant changes beyond

creeping escalation. For this reason, some of the texts I analyse go beyond the primary scope of 2011-2014 to address discursive dynamic that is part and parcel of the discourse of sexual sovereignty that, although, after 2014, gave way to the new, "post-Crimean" consensus, was nevertheless preserved and perpetuated.

However, the inclusion of post-2014 materials is not the only deviation from the primary scope. Since the project is conceived as genealogical, and one of the core explanatory models, #SistemaRF, is understood to have been evolving since 1993, I cannot help but go back in time to trace the various material-discursive prerequisites and preconditions that eventually shaped the discourse of sexual sovereignty, provided it with rhetorical strategies and regimes of truth. Although I argue, following Pavlovsky, that as a political regime, #SistemaRF is in no determinative continuity with the Soviet system, #SistemaRF is not the only condition of possibility for the discourse under consideration. Another condition of possibility is the continuous biopolitical tradition of production/repression of (non)normative sexualities, specifically expert knowledge and discursive-material dispositifs, that were mobilised to lend the discourse of sexual sovereignty its rhetorical apparatus, as well as cohesion and legitimacy. For that reason, I go back in time as far as the roots of the biopolitical production of sexual deviancy in Russia take me, occasionally addressing both pre-Revolutionary, and Soviet dispositifs and regimes of truth.

An important limitation of this research is that, for the purpose of explaining the Russian sexual panic, it makes use of Morozov's "subaltern empire" framework, laying emphasis on Russian discursive (and material) subalternity vis-a-vis the "West," with less space allocated for the work of addressing Russian imperialism, both internal and that directed at its immediate neighbourhood. I am fully aware of the probable performative "centring" of the Russian imperial core that this focus entails. Indeed, the ongoing gay purge in Chechnya is but one

example that could help highlight the imperialist and nationalist dynamics at play in the game of "sovereignty" that Russia, undoubtedly, plays on two fronts: against both its colonial periphery and the "metropole." The primary reason for this choice of focus is explanatory economy: I believe that the discourse of sexual sovereignty is mainly implicated in the dynamic of subaltern resentment, whereas comprehensive analysis of both vectors of Russia's postcolonial positionality would not be accommodated by this dissertation given its length limitations. That said, I do tackle in detail the imperialist ("civilizationist") prerequisites of the discourse under analysis in their nexus with subalternity to the extent that it helps shed light on the emergence and development of this discourse. Nevertheless, as Kieran Healy (2017) argues, there is always "something else to add," however almost always at the expense of a careful examination of what is "already there" to tackle. Research on the sexual politics of Russia's "internal colony" and external periphery and its implication in Moscow's policy is scarce and undoubtedly deserves expanding. I hope that this work is going to receive a strong impulse now as postcolonial theory transcends its gaze beyond the so-called "third world" and fruitful research on the CEE region emerges at high rates.

From this intersection follows an important political caveat that needs to be enunciated: problematizing the Russian political subject, or the so-called "deep people" of Russia as a subaltern figure in no way should entail attributing to them some sort of political "righteousness" or "higher moral ground" as a mandate for morally unacceptable behaviour — even if explained and motivated by the said subalternity, be it individual or state level oppression of their respective subaltern, propagation of hate speech, waging wars and committing war crimes. As Morozov stresses on many occasions, idealisation of "the people" as a given entity that exists independently of the state and the global capitalist order entails a dangerous simplification:

> The emergence of a popular subject is indeed blocked in Russia by the Eurocentric hegemony, which imagines the country as exotic and its people as barbarian and rebellious. Yet, this pure native, uncontaminated by the imperial element of Russia's identity, is in itself an orientalist myth, regardless of whether it is imagined as uncivilised and fearsome or noble and worthy of compassion (Morozov, 2015a, p. 164).

He refers to Rosalind Morris' bold statement made in her introduction to the foundational essay by Gayatri Spivak: "There is neither authenticity nor virtue in the position of the oppressed. There is simply (or not so simply) oppression" (2010, p. 8). Similarly, the subaltern can indeed be complicit in oppression by siding with the empire, "cheerfully giving their own voice away in exchange for the phantom freedom of imperial pursuits and even acting as the empire's agents. These individuals and groups are subjects of empire, but they are not (yet) the people as a sovereign political subject" (Morozov, 2015a, p. 165). As for the Russian empire subject, the subalternity element in its economic and ideational positioning does not entail any higher moral ground either. One could (endlessly) speculate about how the Kremlin's international and domestic policy would have turned if NATO had not continued its expansion, or if the "West," contrary to what Pistor (2022) argues to be the case, had chosen to help build democracy in the Russia of 1990s rather than capitalism at the expense of democracy. These questions, however, are misplaced to the extent they are asked with the purpose of excusing the wrongdoer: an explanatory theory on Russia's postcolonial condition may help us understand how and why the current Russian political subject has emerged. What it cannot and should not do is deny responsibility on behalf of this subject (and its respective subjects) for what they choose to do.

The structure of the dissertation is as follows. In Chapter 2, I lay out the theoretical framework of the thesis. Chapter 3, I theorise Vladimir V. Putin's illiberal governance as founded upon a perpetual state of emergency that manifests itself in an obsessive preoccupation with (re)defining and defending sovereignty. I investigate this constitutive discursive dynamic to trace the transition from the early, mostly technocratic (first term), to the more authoritarian

and conservative stage of Putinism (second and third terms on). This transition, I will argue, was marked by the change of emphasis within the nodal point of "sovereign democracy" whereby the floating signifier "sovereignty" gradually rose to salience.

In Chapter 4, I argue that the new iteration of "sovereignty," that came about marking Putin's return for a third term in office in 2012, was marked by the propagation of "spiritual-moral values" and the deployment of the discourse of "sexual sovereignty." These developments responded to a need to conjure up a new populist front and relegitimise the regime. Tracing the emergence and deployment of the discourse of securitization of "traditional values" through the foundational work of a number of key organic intellectuals and moral entrepreneurs of Putinism, I offer a genealogical examination of discursive preconditions of the 2011-2014 sexual panic that came about as early as the 1990s and 2000s. This analysis allows for me to contend that these preconditions, as well as the discourse of sexual sovereignty itself, need to be scrutinized beyond writing them off as a mere manifestation of a "centuries long," "deeply entrenched" homophobia of the Russian society.

I then proceed in Chapter 5 to a discussion of the Putinite state homophobia as a biopolitical discourse, arguing that its function is to facilitate nation-building by drawing the lines of inclusion/exclusion. The analysis of a textual sample comprised of what figured in 2011-2014 as mainstream "expert knowledge" on homosexuality, allows for me to discern an interplay between the repressive legacy of Soviet psychiatry that, in the Russian Federation, has morphed into a medical narrative supporting the discourse of sexual sovereignty, and a trend for normalization of "non-traditional" sexualities. The analysis reveals that the "expert homophobia" is infused with the same political logic of securitization discerned previously. In a similar vein, the Russian state's peculiar approach to the biopolitics of HIV/AIDS, that relies

on the affirmation of traditional values, contributes to the perpetuation of the lines of division discerned in the psychiatric discourse.

Finally, in Chapter 6, I draw on postcolonial theory to transcend contextually limited analytical frameworks when approaching Russian sexual politics. I argue that the political logic of securitization informing the discourse of sexual sovereignty is symptomatic of the liminal postcolonial positionality of the Russian political subject vis-a-vis the "West." Challenging the narrow presumption that homophobia is always (and only) about homosexuality — "a logic that pre-empts thinking more contextually, historically, and conceptually about what might be at stake in claims to LGBT rights" or against them in various geopolitical spaces (Walcott, 2010, p. 317), I argue that the sexual panic in Russia was a culturally complex phenomenon entangled in the "subaltern empire's" quest to articulate its national identity in relation to its constitutive outside, the threat of the "West." Reading the discourse of sexual sovereignty via Viacheslav Morozov's application of Homi K. Bhabha's theory of hybridity, I demonstrate how the Russian political subject is caught in mimicry of the Western hegemonic political language. By reversing and subverting this language, it tries to construct a paleoconservative imaginary of anti-Modern indigeneity in the absence of another resource for national identity politics.

Chapter 1 Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, I will present the theoretical framework within which this research is carried out. It consists of two mutually complementary lines of argumentation: (1) postfoundational political theory and analytical approaches and (2) poststructuralist discourse analysis. The first conjures up the broader field of political ontology and theoretical concepts, while the second presents the specific analytical toolkit for the analysis of phenomenal features of discourses on sexuality and gender and exploring the workings of these discourses in contemporary Russian politics.

The overall purpose is to introduce the theoretical framework and methodology of my project in terms of their ontological, epistemological, and practical claims, producing an added value vis-à-vis other possible approaches. The major claim is that, although I am going to work with a set of theoretical narratives that happen to be distinct and different in several ways, nevertheless, they share a synergic ontological base and offer mutually reinforcing analytical tools. My ultimate objective is to produce a genealogy of Putinite state homophobia as a mode of political critique. I understand genealogy as a general theoretico-methodological framework of my analysis that channels it along the ontological tenets and presumptions of Foucauldian "effective history" (Hook, 2005). The latter sets out to trace, explain, and critique the particular socio-political formation that I argue Putinite sexual politics constitutes. The genealogical analysis will allow for me to show the multiple traces of the influence that power has had on the particular regimes of truth at work "without having to make reference to a subject which is either transcendental in relation to the field of events or runs in its empty sameness throughout the course of history" (Foucault, 2003, p. 306). At the same time, the perspectives of the analytics of government and critical policy studies will adjust my optic to analyse this formation within the framework of a postfoundational model of (bio)power and discursive

institutionalism. Finally, poststructuralist discourse theory lays out the actual methodology of studying this formation, providing a set of concepts and analytical procedures when reading the particular texts.

Further, I will argue that, despite some considerable political and, broader, ontological differences, Foucauldian accounts of discourse, genealogy, and analytics of government, and Laclau and Mouffe's (2001) post-Marxist theory of articulation and discourse can be combined into a distinct methodological approach of effective history that is best suitable for the aims of this dissertation. Similarly, for the methodological part, poststructuralist discourse theory as a set of interrelated method toolkits remains within the horizon of effective history and is sufficiently consistent with the late Foucauldian ontology of the social.

Another important theoretical tenet of this dissertation is postcolonial theory of hybridity and subaltern studies that have been applied to Russia within the recent approach of "subaltern empire" (Morozov, 2015a,b; Tlostanova, 2010). However, I have decided not to include the discussion of this approach in the theoretical chapter, as its applied analytical character will be best addressed in the context of my own research; hence the discussion of hybridity of the Russian political subject and its ramifications for my analysis will form an integral part of Chapter 6.

Michel Foucault's archaeological (Foucault 1982; 2001; Dreyfus, Rabinow, and Foucault, 1983) and genealogical (Foucault, 1978; 2010; Dreyfus, Rabinow, and Foucault, 1983; Mahon, 1992; Dalgliesh, 2017; Koopman, 2008) methodology is foundational for my work for a set of theoretical and practical reasons. Posing quite different sets of analytical operations and underlying assumptions, they nevertheless stand as mutually enriching and sharing a network of common threads and leadups that, provided the requisite creativity and coherence of purpose and implementation, can be productively combined within a single methodology (Koopman,

2008; Dalgliesh, 2017, ch. 4-5). In this perspective, genealogy provides a broader theoretical framework that enables a diachronic historical inquiry into the power-knowledge-subject triad that constitutes our present and is deployed in and through our knowledge, practices, and types of rationality. Dealing with the past, a genealogical inquiry situates itself in the present, eventalising the contingencies of its makeup, and poses questions about the future, or rather, possible futures (Dean, 2009). Archaeology, on the other hand, is a synchronic structural inquiry into the discursive grammar of a specific historic formation, constituting an entry point of this work, providing a snapshot of a structure, proceeding along the truth axis, identifying historically distinct regimes of truth, and analysing the discursive conditions of their existence. As a more or less systematic set of analytical operations, archaeology entails a close reading of a discursive formation, while genealogy offers a way for its historicization and critique from the standpoint of the present defined, as it is, by concerns about the future.

1.1 Genealogy and Problematization

> My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is danger-ous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do. So my position leads not to apathy but to a hyper- and pessimistic activism. I think that the ethico-political choice we have to make every day is to determine which is the main danger.
>
> Michel Foucault in an interview with Hubert L. Dreyfus, Rabinow, and Foucault and Paul Rabinow (Dreyfus, Rabinow, and Foucault, 1983, pp. 231-232)

Foucault's project of genealogy as a distinct historical and philosophical methodology emerged in response to what he saw as the inefficacy of global or "totalistic theories": "the[ir] attempt to think in terms of a totality has in fact proved a hindrance to research" (Mahon, 1992, p. 174). Theories founded upon a totalistic imaginary, however useful and productive they proved

within modern political formations, have been failing in the contexts of rapidly transforming structures of "liquid modernity" (Bauman, 2000).

Approaching the political field of Putinism from the standpoint of a genealogical analytics of government entails deconstructing analytical dichotomies imposed by these global theories. This can be achieved by demonstrating their inadequacy in dealing with a political system in which competitive, deliberative political processes are replaced by a web of simulacra institutions and quasi-subjects with loose agency, where populist consent is continuously articulated and reproduced in the media and lacks an identifiable political locus beyond meta-representation, and the repressive state apparatus works less by coercion and direct violence than through a quasi-political language that mimics and emulates a variety of imported narratives. Finally, the very political subject of Russia, as I will argue, lacks anything that can be addressed in terms of a positive meaning: it is essentially relational and keeps rapidly transforming in response to its fluctuating constitutive outside.

All these claims will be exposed in the respective analytical chapters. Yet, at this point I would like to stress that my aim here is not to define the said features of the Russian regime for making up a particularistic case contrasted to the "grid" of liberal democracy, which falls outside both my competence and my objective. Instead, I want to argue that there is an inherent limitation to these "totalistic theories" that makes them irrelevant for the case of contemporary Russia that I am addressing.

A key feature of many of such theories is the underlying notion of the social as a "totality." It is this tenet that needs to be deconstructed from the standpoint of postfoundational political ontology before I can move on to the second line of argumentation for this thesis.

1.1.1 Social totality

The notion of the social as a structured and determined set of elements united by a shared genesis, functionality, and logic of development and tightened around a single, fixed centre, lies at the heart of virtually any political and ideological narrative that derives from the Enlightenment. European liberalism, Marxism, critical theory and structuralism, all of which have to some extent contributed to the foundation of the political ontology of progressive movements, are united by a shared discursive grammar that privileges integrity, identity and cohesion at the expense of fragmentariness, hybridity and discretisation (Laclau and Mouff, 2001).

The critical theory that founds such an articulation finds its roots in a metahistorical, totalizing view of the emancipatory dimension of social and political behaviour. Compared with that, Foucault's genealogical project is much more modest. It is based on the notion of problematization: how in a certain historical context "clusters of difficulties are transformed into a set of problems for which certain solutions are proposed" (Dalgliesh, 2017, p. 72). It is especially important that both the problems themselves and the solutions are understood as performative, that is, constituted as political articulations rather than neutral representations of objectively existing, pre-discursive conditions. A Foucauldian genealogy, therefore, abandons the metahistorical view of the social as a kind of objectively given whole that contains the prerequisites, conditions, and the nature of possible changes to be extracted.

The political narratives of progressive movements are also often articulated in the form of a genealogy. Mitchell M. Dean (2009), following Colin Gordon, singles out two metahistorical genealogical genres in the historical scholarship of the 20th century. The first type of genealogy is a semiology of a catastrophe. The most vivid example of this trend is the German and Austrian immigrant authors of the 1930s, not only of the left, but also on the (liberal) right —

the Frankfurt School, Karl Polanyi, Ernst Cassirer, Alexander von Rustow, and Friedrich von Hayek. This type of genealogy explores the present moment by looking into the past in search of signs of an imminent catastrophe. It interprets the present as a moment of despair, emptiness, stupidity, fragmentation (ibid.).

The commonality of this type of genealogy with the Foucauldian project is that genealogy is used here as a practice of critical distancing from the doctrines of Western rationalism and Enlightenment with their vision of history and oriented towards progress. At stake here is resisting "the blackmail of the Enlightenment" (Dean, 2009, p. 54), the imperative to situate one's political position either in line with or against its ideals. Instead of adopting a panoramic perspective on the totality of a disintegrating structure inherent for such projects, Foucault understands genealogy as a way of delineating the contingent genesis of particular problems that arise in and through various forms of political struggles.

The second type of totalistic metahistorical genealogy described by Dean is said to take shape in modern social theory, again both in its left and liberal versions. This trend has a distinctly pro-Enlightenment character and counters the metaphysics of a catastrophe with "meta-histories of promise," i.e. narratives of the inevitable fulfilment of the ideals of Modernity infused with the pathos of the inevitability of emancipation, and the triumph of (liberal) democracy. This type of genealogy is most vividly represented by Marxism, but also includes more liberal writers such as Jurgen Habermas or Francis Fukuyama. This form of genealogy is also characteristic of explicitly political critical projects such as decolonial movements and multiculturalism and, on the other hand, plays a pivotal role in the endorsement of imperialism on behalf of emancipatory progressive liberalism.

The basic intellectual-ethical setting of Foucault's genealogy is thus defined through a series of negatives: it does not position itself either for or against the Enlightenment, it does not

absolutize, nor does it reject rationalism (Dean, 2009, p. 55). It does not uphold an unconditional belief in linear progress, neither does it descend into nihilism. It involves rejection of a naive "realism, convinced of its certainties about the essence of the present moment" (ibid.). Foucault's project offers a practice of carefully localized diagnostics: it presupposes a view upon the present moment not as a deterministic totality of a large structure, but as an assemblage of overdetermined opportunities with an open outcome, which is immanent to the heterogeneous modes of practice. It is this openness integral to Foucault's genealogy that makes his apparently modest model a "dangerous" critical project.

1.1.2 The Ethos of Genealogy

The mission of a Foucauldian genealogy is thus to raise critical questions about government and self-government without aiming to provide a comprehensive normative account of how various forms of "conduct of conduct" could be modified (Dean, 2009, p. 48). However, unlike Foucault's earlier archaeological method, genealogy does not seek to assume a neutral, value-free position with respect to its material. Rather than aspiring to represent objectively existing groups or reflect the social as a totality, it seeks to trace the microphysical processes of its permanent re/assembly thus setting itself the task of undermining comfortable evidentialities through "disperse and discrete interventions" (Mahon, 1992, p. 120) into normalized discourses for the purpose of "eventalisation" (ibid., 108) of their constants and discovering a horizon of new opportunities for emancipatory politics.

Philosophical and historical foundations of this critical strategy trace back to the Nietzschean opposition of two forms of understanding of genesis: *Ursprung* and *Herkunft* (Mahon, 1992). The orientation to the search of *Ursprung*, which founds totalistic genealogies of the social, presupposes an attempt to grasp the essence of things, their pure possibilities, and hidden

inherent properties. Such a framework presupposes the existence of fixed forms preceding the external world. In the spirit of *Ursprung*, critical historians too often rely explicitly or unconsciously on the articulation of the "truth of being" in the form of an identity that remains holistic and self-identical throughout history. On the contrary, a historian driven by the *Herkunft* hypothesis turns away from metaphysics and "listens to history" (ibid., p. 109). This path leads them to the discovery that there is no essence beyond things, only a phantom fabricated from pieces of borrowed forms (ibid.).

In search of *Herkunft*, the genealogist should carefully avoid the risk of projecting the objectives and needs of the present to this point of appearance, thus shaping the multiplicity of contingent becomings into a teleological chain culminating in the present moment (ibid.). The present is not a result of a consistent development, but an intermediate and unstable nexus of heterogeneous power relations, including their less mobile (but also local and context-dependent) forms. Hence, the interpretation of agency as active transformation of the external world by the will of a sovereign subject, individual or collective, should be abandoned. The ethical attitude of genealogy advocates for the search and expansion of capacities for self-government. Such capabilities are enabled not through denial, freezing, or reversing of relations of power, but through intensification of local power dynamics in which their sedimented and vertical forms acquire kinetics requisite for continuous reconfiguration, providing the possibility for a more equal tactical balance of forces.

1.2 Governmentality Studies

1.2.1 Analytics of Government

The adoption of Foucault's theory of governmentality and the project of the analytics of government have been developed by Mitchell M. Dean (2009), Graham Burchell and Colin

Gordon (1991), Thomas Lemke (2011, 2015), Peter Miller and Nikolas Rose (2008), among others. As we have seen, genealogy is a diagnostic of the present interrogating what is taken as natural, necessary, or neutral by avoiding projecting the present onto the past. Dean defines the critical ethos of genealogy and governmentality as one of criticism as opposed to critique which, bearing on the legacy of the Frankfurt School, would rely on universal norms and point towards a necessary end. Conversely, "criticism" suggests "something open, multiple and immanent to the regimes of practices under analysis" (Dean, 2009, p. 3). Genealogy as "critical" or "effective" history is critical in this particular sense and is effective "to the extent that it upsets the colonization of knowledge by those trans-historical schemas and teleologies which claim to be able to account for the truth of our present" (ibid.).

Effective history puts forward an ethico-political orientation to self-government that abstains from prescribing the exact ways freedom should be practiced. Instead, it gives priority to the how-questions when scrutinizing particular regimes of power and rule and the discourses within which they are formed and operate. According to Foucault, this project "has to be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them" (Foucault, 1984, p. 96). It is this critical ethos that inspires the project of governmentality studies. As Dean argues:

> It is concerned to make intelligible the limits and potentials of who we are and have become, and the ways our understanding of ourselves is linked to the ways in which we are governed […] and the ways in which this occurs under forms of knowledge postulated as truth by various authorities. By becoming clear about the limits, we open up the possibility of an action to accept or reject them, to show their contingent nature, or to add up the costs of transgressing them (Dean, 2009, p. 14).

Inasmuch as the analytics of government is concerned with these questions and to the extent that these questions translate into a postfoundational historical ontology of power in its inseparable bind to knowledge and regimes of truth, this framework breaks with many

analytical concepts, tools, and assumptions of methodological statism, such as problems of legality, the concept of ideology (at least in the Marxist sense), and the issues of the attribution of power to a specific source.

Breaking free of this methodological toolkit, Foucault defined government as the "conduct of conduct" (Dreyfus, Rabinow, and Foucault, 1983, pp. 220-1). Combining these two senses of "conduct," government entails shaping our behaviour in correspondence with particular sets of norms and for a variety of objectives. Elaborating on this understanding, Dean defines government as:

> any more or less calculated and rational activity, under-taken by a multiplicity of authorities and agencies, employing a variety of techniques and forms of knowledge, that seeks to shape conduct by work-ing through the desires, aspirations, interests and beliefs of various actors, for definite but shifting ends and with a diverse set of relatively unpre-dictable consequences, effects and outcomes (Dean, 2009, p. 18).

It would be worth adding here that this does not presuppose that these "desires, aspirations, interests and beliefs" and the "various actors" themselves somehow pre-exist the framework of government. Rather, they gain intelligibility, i.e. become problematized within a particular governmental discourse that shapes them in ways that embed them into the power relation that is being constructed within the dynamic of government. This definition problematises the practice of government as a material-discursive assemblage in which governor and governed become articulated as two faces of one actor - be it a corporation, a population, a people, a society, or a state (ibid.).

Government, thus, shapes the field of action and, correspondingly, the field of freedom. To govern, then, is "to structure the field of possible action, to act on our own or others' capacities for action" within a certain frame of meaning-making or field of rationality (ibid., p. 22). Governmentality, then, deals with the different rationalities or mentalities of government (Miller and Rose, 2008, p. 190). Rationality is here conceived in a broader sense as a specific

way of conceiving of and responding to a problem that demands action and thus conjures up this rationality. A mentality of government is always more or less systematic and draws, to an extent, upon formalized knowledge or expertise. In this sense it comes close to the notion of discourse that I make use of in this research, although it adds an important dimension to it: that of a pragmatic modality in relation to a particular field and object of governing that are themselves articulated within this discourse, and in response to a particular problem or set of problems that arise within them.

Government is not limited to relations of power and authority. Crucially, it deals with matters of subjectivity and identity (Mahon, 1992). Along these axes, subjects, their identities, their forces, and capacities as those of living individuals within the framework of governmentality are problematized as members of a population, which is a resource to be fostered, used, and optimized. According to Dean, governmentality draws the population into the so-called apparatuses of security. These apparatuses include practices, institutions, and forms of knowledge that "ensure the optimal and proper functioning of the economic, vital and social processes that are found to exist within that population and would thus also include health, welfare and education systems" (Dean, 2009, p. 29). This is where the theoretical frame of governmentality reflects that of biopolitics and comes to operate in the realm of biopower that goes beyond the conventional scope of sovereignty to exercise productive governance over human bodies, their vital recourses, and their freedom (Lemke, Casper, and Moore, 2011; Lemke, 2015).

Although aware of their specific contextual differences in Foucault's oeuvre and Foucauldian analysis, I will often use the notions of biopolitics and governmentality interchangeably inasmuch as the form of modern governmentality I am dealing with, one that problematizes sexuality and gender as a matter of security, is in essence biopolitical and as such is overlooked

by conventional political analysis that can only make sense of them in terms of the state extending its sovereign power into the domain of the "private." Biopolitical governmentality can best be conceived in an analytical triangle of sovereignty, discipline, and governmental management which has "population as its main target, apparatuses of security as its essential mechanism" (Foucault, 2009, pp. 107-8). All the three gain intelligibility within specific frames of rationality and knowledge production that conjure up specific modes of problematization and allow partial fixation of meanings operated on and through.

The analytical perspective into which this theoretical discussion translates for the purposes of my research can be called analytics of government in Dean's sense of the term. "An analytics is a type of study concerned with an analysis of the specific conditions under which particular entities emerge, exist and change" (Dean, 2009, p. 30). An analytics of a particular regime or discourse of governance sets out to identify the point of appearance of the regime, visibilize its constitutive elements coming from multiple sources, and trace the dynamics and relations that assemble these elements into relatively stable discursive forms of articulatory and institutional practice.

A note is due here that when I use the concept of discourse in the discussion of governmentality and biopolitics I rely upon the notion put forward by discourse theory (discussed in Section 1.3) rather that the less precise Foucauldian notion thereof. One might discern a contradiction in terms here since governmentality studies presupposes a materialist analysis since it puts emphasis on regimes of practices. However, I believe that once we adopt Laclau and Mouffe's materialist concept of discourse that includes regimes of practice and position it in the context of governmentality's assertion that regimes of practices comprise the forms of knowledge and regimes of truth that structure the field of operation, we would need to discern that "this materialism must be concerned with thought" (Dean, 2009, p. 32). Furthermore, practices make

sense precisely because they exist in the medium of thought. Another important aspect of regimes of practice is that they are inevitably invested with relations of power that cannot be conceived of as independent of discourse. Regimes of practices, thus, themselves exist in the milieu of discourse, and their institutional and material locale can be thought of in terms of the degree of sedimentation of their meanings and narratives.

Another important point in this regard is that an analytics of government does not confine itself solely to the regimes of practice in their material-discursive manifestation. It also entails theories, programs, knowledge, expertise, and identities that compose a field that is to be governed in accordance with certain specific modes of seeing, perceiving, and reacting (ibid., p. 37).

In all cases, the nodal concept and the entry point of an analytics of government is problematization. It involves identification of a specific context in which governing is called into question, where it becomes a problem. As Dean contends, these problematizations are to start with what questions actors and authorities ask pertaining to the multiple ways both "governors" (politicians, parents, etc.) and those "governed" (citizens, children, consumers, etc.) conduct themselves (ibid., p. 38).

In sum, a governmentality can be seen as a hybrid discourse comprising problematizations, regimes of truth, regimes of institutions and regimes of practice, all of which get intelligibility within narratives that operate on the meanings necessary for the sedimentation of all the listed practices and regimes. Foucault's work enables a decentred approach to policy analysis that asks how we govern and are governed in and through various discursive settings that need to be historicised. The role of the analyst consists in a critical questioning of the ways these practices emerge, how power operates within them, and how they could be changed or reformed (Lövbrand and Stripple, 2015).

1.2.2 Analytics of Government and Discourse

Now, to conjure up an analytical framework that allows for a productive methodological synergy between analytics of government and discourse theory, I will rely on the field known as critical policy studies (Fisher et. al., 2016; Jessop and Sum, 2016; Yanow, 1997; 1999; Howarth, 2010; Bacchi, 2000). Critical policy studies (CPS) is a set of theoretical orientations and practical tools that seek to move beyond narrower positivist approaches, instead focusing on critical, interpretive, and discursive forms of policy analysis and creative ways of applying qualitative methods such as discourse analysis with an emphasis on both empirical and normative concerns in policy-making and the studies of governance. Drawing from contemporary debates that have marked the interpretive turn in policy research (see e.g. Mráz, 2022a; 2022b), CPS highlights language as constitutive of social relations: in line with Foucault's governmentality and Laclau and Mouffe's discourse analysis, the basic theoretical tenet of this family of approaches is that arguments/discourses do not only describe reality, but rather actively shape it. Thereby, CPS shifts attention from positivist-empirical analysis of institution to the systems of meaning that gatekeep and define institutional practices of government.

In line with the methodological orientation of discursive institutionalism (Fisher et. al., 2016), CPS sees institutions and policies as sedimented discourses that conceal their political nature by appearing stabilized, procedural, technocratic, and neutral, i.e. based upon consensus and deliberation rather than exclusionary articulatory practice. Hence, this line of policy analysis conceives of policy-making as always implicated in power structures in a Foucauldian sense of the term. The aim of critical policy studies is to inquire into how and why a particular issue gets problematized and a particular policy gets envisioned and implemented. "Invariably these processes and practices involve the definition of problems (and thus to some extent solutions),

complex practices of deliberation, as well as the taking of decisions; they also involve complicated logics of inclusion and exclusion, and thus the exercise of political power" (Howarth, 2010, p. 324). The hegemony perspective advanced within the discourse theory is an important framework in policy studies that allows making sense of the complex interrelation of structures and agency in an anti-essentialist and postfoundational way. Specifically, "it offers a dialectical relationship between structure, agency and power; it refashions the relationship between identities and interests; and it provides a way of thinking about identity and subjectivity" (ibid.).

CPS operates with the Foucauldian model of power and, hence, understands power neither as a commodity, nor as a capacity inherent in individuals or institutions. By the same token, the studies of "the conduct of conduct" do not presuppose a sovereign subject, only strategies that situate the particular subject positions. What poststructuralist discourse theory as a methodology of CPS adds to this Foucauldian model "is the role of hegemony as a political practice, and as a way of conceptualizing different forms of rule and their maintenance. The political logics of equivalence and difference enable an analyst to show how practices or policies come into being or are transformed" (Howarth, 2010, p. 324).

Now, with all this in mind, it is possible to sketch a program of critical policy analysis. Following David Howarth, I will adopt an approach consisting of five interrelated steps (ibid., pp. 325-329). First, following Foucault, it starts with problematizing a particular policy, practice, or regime. This analytical step entails scrutinizing the practices of problem-definition within a particular domain, tracing the genealogy of various problematizations of this problematization. Second, the analyst proceeds with the task of a critical explanation aimed at making the phenomenon, be it a policy or a discursive practice, intelligible. Third, the explanation offered must rely on the discursive logics discerned, rather than laws and causal

mechanisms that are “independent” of discourse. This is not to be reduced to a self-interpretation an actor may choose to offer. Rather, a discursive logic "captures the rules that govern a meaningful practice, as well as the conditions that make the operation of such rules possible […]. Logics thus provide answers to questions about the nature and function of various social practices, as well as their overall purposes, meanings, and effects" (ibid., p. 325). A further discussion of discursive logics as well as their typology are offered in Section 2.3.2.

1.3 Poststructuralist Discourse Analysis

The methodological framework of this dissertation is poststructuralist discourse analysis broadly conceptualized as a practice of critical inquiry into the political dimension of public communication and the processes of establishing social identities in discourse (Torfing, 1999). The approach I am adopting builds on the foundational work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (2001), as well as the works of Anna-Marie Smith (1995), David Howarth (2010), Jason Glynos and David Horwath (2007), and Jacob Torfing (1999).

1.3.1 Laclau and Mouffe’s Discourse Theory

The project of Laclau and Mouffe (hereinafter I will refer to it as discourse theory) seems to be the most adequate for my purposes for a number of reasons. On the theoretical level, the ontology of the social and the conception of politics that found their analysis are most complementary with the approaches of genealogy and critical policy studies discussed in the previous sections. This is due to the fact that all these frameworks are founded upon the double gesture of a deconstruction of the notion of totalizing structures and that of the notion of atomized and autonomous social elements. The first gesture entails bracketing the figurative connotation of structure as a self-contained, quasi-transcendental space unified by a fixed

centre. This requires paying attention to the dynamics of meaning production and the instances of rupture, discontinuity, and exclusion that it takes to negotiate a positive discursive constellation laying hegemonic claims to representing the whole of society or imposing closure by silencing certain voices and denying existence of certain subjectivities. In other words, this theoretical stance draws attention to the constitutive outside of any meaning that appears stable, autonomous, and self-sufficient. The second deconstructive gesture entails a dynamic analysis of the ways complex individual experiences are produced within complex networks of discourses and reified into solid formations that allow classification and positioning of individuals in the social and (bio)political hierarchies. In a similar way, as I have shown above, Foucault's genealogy questions the idea of an ultimate centre, origin, foundation, or ground.

At a different level, the discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe offers an understanding of the political that poses a favourable alternative to more authority-oriented accounts. Defined as simultaneously a constitutive and subversive dimension of the social inasmuch as it presupposes reaching a hegemonic consensus at the expense of excluding, denying or reinscribing certain meanings and identities, politics in discourse theory is understood as primary over the social (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001). Contrary to conventional theories that envision politics around the question of authority and the state, discourse theory understands social relations sedimented and thus normalized in the institutional ensemble of rules, regularities, and norms as at best the secondary locus of the political. What constitutes the immediate fabric of the political is the generative character of social antagonism and the ongoing practices of discursive constitution and subversion that happen along the lines of multiple power axes and are thus irreducible to formalized institutions and state authority. Instead, it includes a plethora of discursive relations cutting across the traditionally established boundaries of public/private, personal/political, state/society, and, most importantly, institutions/discourses, thus encompassing the biopolitical discourses and governmentalities of

sexuality, gender, race etc. As discourse theory maintains, the effacement of the trace of forceful repression of certain clusters of problems and relations from the political field effected by dominating governmentalities to constitute the social in one way rather than another, is crucial for the stabilization of a hegemonic project (Torfing, 1999, p. 70).

The primacy of politics in Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory does not mean that everything is political. Rather, it demonstrates that the determination of what is said to be unpolitical is political in itself. Therefore, the state and its institutions can and should also be viewed as political in the sense that those are sedimented framework for political struggles. This is where the affinity between discourse theory and critical policy studies manifests itself fully. Doing away with the methodological statism in the study of power and rule, discourse theory and critical policy studies see identity not as pre-existing and founding politics, but as "something that is constructed, maintained or transformed in and through political struggles" (ibid., p. 82).

Stemming from here, the practical reason for the adoption of discourse theory in my project is the analytical potential of its central categories for the specific material I am dealing with. The conceptual apparatus of discourse theory: the notions of hegemony, constitutive outside, difference and equivalence, as well as antagonism, nodal points and floating signifiers — have proved highly relevant for the analysis of sexual politics, which is evident from the work of Anna-Marie Smith who stresses its multiple advantages for a progressive political struggle aimed at inclusion of LGBT+ citizens and other minoritarian subjects, claiming that this theory "provides a useful framework for the conceptualization of radical democratic pluralist practice, namely the political activism that aims to overthrow oppression and exploitation in all their multiple and hybrid forms" (Smith, 1995, p. 3). Smith maintains that "Laclau and Mouffe have attempted to produce a political theory that captures the specificity of contemporary antagonisms" (ibid.) and has herself carried out an illuminating analysis of Thatcherite

homophobia in the UK within the framework of discourse theory (1995), a phenomenon that is in many ways structurally similar to Putinism.

1.3.2 Hegemony and the Limits of a Discourse

In this dissertation, discourse is understood as a "differential ensemble of signifying sequences" in which meaning is constantly being re/negotiated (Torfing, 1999, p. 85). This presupposes a theoretical model in which all actions and objects are seen as meaningful within a discontinuous field of intelligibility (Howarth, 2007, p. 101). The concept of discourse is thus irreducible to language as if in a binary, referential relationship with its extra-linguistic context. Due to the impossibility of complete totalization, discourse exists as the nexus of text and context, as a volatile field of signification within which a temporary order can be established around multiple, mutually substituting centres and conditional upon the exclusionary effects of a constitutive outside.

According to Laclau and Mouffe (2001), the social is constituted as an unstable formation of discourses competing for hegemony in the articulation and signification of social life. The social is thus understood as a system structured by dislocation that is a structural prerequisite for antagonism. This means that a social formation is articulated out of multiple structures of power relations, and, as such, it may never achieve significatory totality and semantic autonomy. According to Torfing, this negativity entails the impossibility of a final appearance or closure of society. The structural undecidability of the social "turns all attempts to ground social identity into provisional and precarious ways of trying to 'naturalize' and 'objectivize' politically constructed identities" (Torfing, 1999, p. 62).

This temporary fixation of discursive identities and partial stabilisation of a discursive formation are achieved through hegemonic struggles over discursive meanings. The notion of hegemony is taken from Gramsci (1992) and void of the "essentialist remnant" of structural Marxism that theorizes it as a discursive surface of inscription of political demands within a terrain of fixed class identities that themselves originate outside discourse and are in the last instance determined by the economic basis. With these provisions, hegemony can be defined as "the expansion of a discourse, or a set of discourses, into a dominant horizon of social orientation and action by means of articulating unfixed elements into partially fixed moments in a context crisscrossed by antagonistic forces" (Torfing, 1999, p. 101). Essentially, hegemony brings us from the undecidable level of oscillating openness to a decidable, partially fixed level of discourse by instituting nodal points and delimiting the dislocated social into an organized system of differences deployed around political frontiers produced by the expansion of chains of equivalences that temporarily suspend the inner logic of difference.

There is an important difference between the concept of discourse and that of the discursive that are related to the question of the limit and spatiotemporal boundaries of a discourse. The partial fixation of meaning leaves out an irreducible surplus that inevitably escapes the differential logic of discourse. In discourse theory, this terrain of the surplus of meaning is conceived as the discursive which comprises the field of unfixed fluctuating identities. This field does not belong to the domain of extra- or non-discursive, but is itself discursively constituted, providing at once the conditions of possibility and impossibility of fixation of meaning that condition specific discourses constructed in this field of undecidability, yet is never fully absorbed by them (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001, p. 111). The discursive provides a horizon for discursive construction of objects and identities. Thus, one and the same "object" can at the same time be conceived in terms of its belonging to a certain discourse where it

assumes a partially fixed identity, and as floating within the discursive field where its meaning is radically volatile and undecidable.

This brings us to the question of the limit of a discourse. As Foucault showed in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, the provisions of reference to the same object, common style of articulation, constancy of concepts or themes are theoretically unsatisfactory for the task of demarcation. Instead, Foucault and Laclau and Mouffe all concur that with regard to their boundaries discourses are to be conceived as relatively regulated systems of dispersion. In discourse theory, regularity of dispersion is mapped around the common patterns of relations of difference and equivalence, different kinds of logic of overdetermination and structuration around more or less fixed nodal points that hold the discursive space relatively sutured against alternatively available systems of meaning-making within the given field of discursivity. Hence, another way to talk about the limits and internal coherence of a discourse would be to conceive it in terms of a certain continuity of the logical structures that suture the discursive field together determining the regularity of dispersion. A further discussion of discursive logics can be found in Chapter 2.

Chapter 2 Methodology

2.1 Theoretical Analytic

My methodological approach is motivated by the need to explore political communication as imbedded in and representative of larger material-discursive structures, highlighting the relations of mutual interconnections and overdetermination between institutions and political processes on the one hand, and individual articulatory acts on the other. Another important objective is to enable highlighting the ways individual subjectivities and identities are not only constitutive of, but, are also constituted by social structures in which they are discursively positioned, as well as by individual communicative events in which they are inscribed.

The core methodological premise that constitutes the unique position of discourse analysis in the range of research methods across the humanities and social sciences is its focus not on the concrete (linguistic or social) facts with a view to "uncover" their underlying, meanings, but rather on their relational emergence and conditions of possibility (Torfing, 1999, p. 84). According to Laclau, discourse theory asserts that "the very possibility of perception, thought and action depends on the structuration of a certain meaningful field which pre-exists any factual immediacy" (Laclau, 1993, p. 431). The concept of discourse, therefore, we should not reduce to the workings of any particular sign system, as if in an act of close reading, but we should explore the complex socio-historical and epistemological structures that shape, yet never fully predict, oscillating semantics conjured in any particular significatory event.

With this, and the discussion in Section 1.3 in mind, it is possible to define discourse analysis as a systematic critical inquiry into the way articulatory acts constitute a "differential ensemble of signifying sequences in which meaning is constantly negotiated," thus preventing the structure from invoking a complete closure (Torfing, 1999, pp. 85-86).

Unlike in methodologies grounded within the representationalist paradigm, the message does not possess a pure, intentional content, but is discursively articulated in and through hegemonic configurations. Further, not only the message, but the communicator and the audience are discursively articulated in and through forms of power that are not reducible to interest-driven communicative actions on either the sender or the recipient parts. Thus, applying discourse analysis to political communication involves studying these texts as discursive, i.e. socio-political terrains organised out of discursively negotiated meanings, as products of "signifying chains articulated in the texts and shaped by the rules of formation which are defined by the hegemonic forms of discourse" (ibid., p. 213).

The guiding methodological principle is, thus, the principle of articulation as opposed to the principle of representation. Whereas the latter renders communicative events as local inscriptions of identities that originate outside discourse, the former, cutting across the binary, establishes a mutually constitutive relationship between social, political, and cultural elements, including those that might be rendered by the distinction between the "discursive" and "extra-discursive," thus entailing a more multidimensional approach.

2.2 Analytical Protocol

Postfoundational discourse analysis (PDA) differs from other critical approaches in its methodological deficit (Marttila, 2015; Torfing, 1999; Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002). Embarking on a PDA-informed research project, the analyst has at their disposal a rather limited and underdeveloped range of specific coding tools and categories that are often borrowed from other approaches. Attempts at developing an overarching methodological protocol for PDA have been made by Glynos and Howarth (2007), Nonhoff (2007) and Marttila (2015). I will

mainly follow the methodical guidelines developed by Marttila for the reason of their comprehensiveness and methodological holism.

In line with the postfoundational ontology of meaning a research object never presents itself as a brute fact but can only be accessed via procedures of theoretical conceptualization and construction (Marttila, 2015, p. 138). Hence, Mattila suggests a three-stage analytical protocol. The first stage is that of **co-construction** that can proceed from the Foucauldian procedure of problematization (Foucault, 2006), or a more theory-driven activity of deconstruction of socially conceived implicitness. On a larger scale, both of these strategies belong to the Foucauldian matrix of theoretical analytic (Torfing, 1999, p. 12) and their primary function is to effect an epistemological break with common-sense self-evidentialities of the object under scrutiny, retracing its contingent and historical emergence and undermining the apparent fixity it projects onto the articulatory practice.

The second stage of doing the analysis is called **reconstruction** and aims at "render[ing] visibility to the discourse(s) that was responsible for the historical formations and modifications of our research object in the focused spatiotemporal context" (Marttila, 2015, p. 140). Depending on the particular analytical focus in terms of the spatiotemporal dimensions of the research object, reconstruction can adopt a synchronic (archaeological) or diachronic (genealogical) protocol. Crucially, these are not completely separable from each other: rather the diachronic analysis builds on the synchronic one, adding a historical inquiry into the dynamic of sedimentation and reactivation on top of the archaeological analytical framework that proceeds along the lines of Foucauldian and postfoundational heuristics.

Finally, at the stage of **collocation** the analysis is to accentuate the phenomenal aspects of the discourse under analysis that are assumed to reflect the specificity of the discursive construction of the research object.

Since it is the stage of reconstruction that is central to this approach to analysis, I will now describe this process in more detail, including the key theoretical codes that Marttila offers for this work.

2.3 Reconstruction

The main stage of PDA called reconstruction consists of three steps: generation of a corpus of data, conducting the analysis of the data, and, finally, reconstruction of discursive materiality.

2.3.1 Compilation of a Corpus of Data

At this stage the analysis is to identify the set of articulatory practices that the analyst's background knowledge suggests have been responsible for the emergence and sustainment of the social meaningfulness of the research object in the given spatial-temporal context (Marttila, 2015, pp. 146-152). In the diachronic dimension, they are to identify the practices of articulation that have either brought about the conceived social change or constructed and sustained the discourse that was affected by the social change (ibid.).

According to Marttila, theoretical embeddedness of postfoundational discourse analysis entails that "the generation – or sampling – of empirical data is meant to provide visibility to a priori known and conceptualized phenomenal structures of discourse" (ibid., p. 146). To this end, the data generated for analysis needs to be consistent with the already known phenomenal properties of the research object, such as the state homophobia in Russia in 2011-2014 (and beyond, where it benefits the genealogical analysis). In other words, empirical data is valid as much as it allows the researcher to render visible the discourse that "we conceive to have been responsible for the formation of our research object" (ibid., p. 147). Hence, the core criterion

for theory-driven sampling is the ability of the data to allow for the fulfilment of the a priori defined research objective.

In order to ensure a feasible reconstruction of the discourse under investigation, we need to look for the points of paradigmatic and syntagmatic coherence between articulations enunciated by subjects, whom we assume to occupy subject roles in the discourse under analysis (ibid.). Generating data should thus be based on the identification of spatiotemporal structure of the discourse under analysis and the cohort of subjects that are implicated in reproducing it.

The initial sample is necessarily based upon review of already available secondary data. This may include previous research conducted on the research object under consideration or other sources that have attempted to reconstruct the discursive field. When empirical evidence suggests that the collected articulations are structurally coherent, we can proceed to a qualitative interpretation of the discursive relations and identities that make up the discourse (ibid.). In order to attest to the plausibility of the sample, the analyst needs to ensure that the subjects whose articulations are being analysed can be reasonably assumed to occupy coherent subject roles within the given discourse. The sample is deemed sufficient when the point of theoretical saturation is reached, meaning that additional data no longer lends new theoretical insights.

2.3.2 Contents-related Analysis of Discourse

The analyst reconstructs the discourse as visibilized in the selected sample of articulations. It is crucial to keep in mind, contends Marttila (2015, p. 149), that empirical analysis is not focused on meaning-contents but on meaning-generating relations: discourses become empirically observable, as per Laclau and Mouffe (2001), in the form of "temporal fixations of elements," not in the noumenal content thereof. In the diachronic dimension, the analyst conducts a

"contents-related analysis of the contested discourse, which was problematized and changed by counter-hegemonic acts, and the new hegemonic discourse" (ibid., p. 141). The cornerstone theoretical codes of this analysis are *discursive relations* and *discursive identities* that enable us to tackle both paradigmatic and syntagmatic grammar of articulations. As per the outline of the general phenomenal characteristics of discourse that I presented in Chapter 1, this analysis "must identify nodal points, which constitute the overarching identity of the studied discourse and observe the logics and locations of discursive limits that separate our discourse from other discourses" (ibid., p. 141).

Marttila's theoretical coding offers the following typology of discursive relations (ibid., p. 129):

- *contrariety*, which is responsible for the distinction between a given discourse against the totality of other discourses;

- *antagonism*: the identity of a certain discursive element is opposed by the identity of another discursive element;

- *incommensurability*: two discursive elements are perceived to be mutually incommensurable with regard to a third discursive element that represents their logic of incommensurability. E.g. "private property" (A) and "socioeconomic equality" (B) may be incommensurable with regard to "classical Marxism" (C);

- *representation*: The third element (C) represents the point of commonality shared by A and B, such as in the case of "classical Marxism" (C) representing "classless society" (A) and "universal equality" (B);

- *difference*: A and B are mutually distinctive yet combinable elements, whose logic of commonality is represented by C. The example above can be organised around relations of difference as well;

- *equivalence*: two or more elements are mutually equivalent with regard to the nodal point(s) and antagonistic other alike. For example, various identities making up the "LGBT+ community" (C) are equivalent with regard to "sexual diversity" (A) on the one hand, and to "heteronormativity" (B), on the other.

Elements brought together into the last type of discursive relations form a *chain of equivalence* structured around a *hegemonic frontier* that articulates these elements against the *antagonistic other*. The types of relationship that articulate two or more elements as combinable or equivalent are enabled by the presence of a *floating signifier* (element A in the example above), which represents the logic of their similarity with resort to a *nodal point* (a master-element that fixates the connection between the other elements).

Based on the prevalent types of discursive relations and the intensity of the enunciated antagonism with the Other, we may distinguish two types of discourse: *popular* and *pluralist* (ibid., p. 69). The first type is characterised by a strong gravity of relations of antagonism, and an emphasised enunciation of enmity with the antagonistic Other. The common threat allows underplaying the value of a democratic process which could make the discourse more vibrant and inclusive. On the other hand, a pluralist discourse is characterised by either the absence or relative insignificance of the antagonistic Other. In such discourses, identities rest upon relations of dissociation and incommensurability that fixate nodal points through separation from other discourses rather than by pointing to a shared "threat" to unite against.

Now, discursive relations represent the multiple ways relational discursive identities are articulated together in discourse. Marttila (ibid., p. 133) offers the following typology of discursive identities:

- *values* (*ethical ideas* embodied by nodal points on the one hand, and *antagonistic others* that endanger/deny those ideals, on the other);

- *subjectivities* (*protagonists*: champions and protagonists of those ideals; *opponents* who hinder the attainment of the social order that would be based on these values; *helpers*: subjects who support protagonists in their activities; *destinators*: the assumed instigators of a course of action; and *receivers*: individual or collective subjects on whose behalf the actions and interactions are undertaken);

- *activities* (*actions* that are associated with subject roles; *interactions* that interlink the activities of social subjects; *objects* that social subjects act upon and/or manipulate in undertaking actions; *resources* that support the subjects' actions; and *strategies* that social subjects utilise to fulfil their actions).

Igor Zagar (2010), following Ruth Wodak, offers yet another type of identities, namely *topoi*: building blocks of argumentation that belong to inferable premises, either implicit or explicit. Topoi may be defined as "conclusion rules" in that they justify arguments and enable proceeding to conclusions on values, actions, or subjectivities. For example, prevailing topoi in debates on immigration are usefulness/advantage, uselessness/disadvantage, danger and threat, justice, humanitarianism, responsibility, burden, law, etc. Topoi often highlight discursive boundaries as they highlight and justify the separation of the discursive elements structured around a nodal point, and other discursive elements.

Now, discursive identities and relations are heuristic devices that lend visibility to discourses that condition enunciative possibilities and, hence, stabilise discourses. However, discourses are never fully stable and at times undergo significant restructurings or replace each other in time and space. Hence, in addition to the synchronic approach heuristics for which are described above, PDA resorts to diachronic analysis to trace the ways discourses transform and alternate. Two key discursive dynamics for this kind of analysis are *sedimentation* and *reactivation* (Marttila, 2015, p. 63). The former highlights processes by which a discourse is stabilised and naturalised in the form of reproducing relatively stable practices of signification and corresponding social institutions that form discursive materiality. Sedimented categories, relations, and identities conceal the process and origins of their initial formation, which can be once again visibilised by processes of reactivation, such as *hegemonic* and *counter-hegemonic acts*. The former conjure up new or newly modified chains of equivalence, while the latter contest the validity and acceptance of subject roles and institutions that are (relatively) sedimented.

Additionally, I will make use of the approach offered by Glynos and Howarth (2007) that is centred on discerning the logics that support the discourse under analysis. The authors identify three types of logics informing discourses: *social*, *political*, and *phantasmatic*, serving as theory-driven middle-range concepts. A social logic points to a historically specific system of sedimented practice that structure the field of intelligibility of the phenomena the discourse makes sense of. A social logic may also be visibilised by the use of topoi in discourse. Examples can be "the logic of the market" or "the logic of science." Building on the first type, a political logic points to the discursive vision of how a particular social logic "may have emerged" and how it can be transformed or challenged. A political logic can be discerned through a scrutiny of particular patterns of arrangement of discursive elements, such as the enunciation of nodal points, collectivities, and discursive boundaries. For example, the political logic of

neoliberalisation can account for the proliferation of the social logic of the market. Finally, phantasmatic logic is closely related to the concept of affective attachment (Marttila 2015, pp. 37-42) that highlights the affective, emotional grounds for a subject's fidelity to a discourse. One of the key assumptions of PDA is that a discourse becomes self-referential and self-evident only if it is invested with an illusion of its naturalness. Subconscious fantasies render political contingency that lies at the heart of the social irrelevant or invisible, hence a phantasmatic logic tends to essentialize a social order or entity, such as it happens in the case of nationalist fantasies about an organic community defined by "blood and soil."

2.3.3 Reconstruction of Discursive Materiality

At this stage, the analyst identifies the subject roles and institutions that structure the field of enunciative possibilities, thus constituting the material prerequisites of the reconstructed discursive structure (ibid., p. 145). Diachronically, the task is to identify the subject roles and institutions installed by hegemonic acts on the one hand, and the subject roles and institutional affiliations of the hegemonic agents that can account for the social legitimacy of their counter-hegemonic and hegemonic acts, on the other. Here, it is important to trace the way(s) in which transformations of the discursive materiality stand in a mutually conducive relation with the articulatory practice (ibid., pp. 140-145).

Transcending a more conventional approach to defining institutions as sedimented forms of social practice, materiality may also point to larger socioeconomic, cultural, and ideological formations which situate a historically sedimented structural grid of enunciative possibilities. A feature of such structural preconditions delineating a field of discursivity is their higher stability and equilibrium: they can be analysed and described, but they are difficult to reactivate

or challenge with a counter-hegemonic move. Identifying and highlighting these preconditions often necessitates a theoretical analytic which would collocate the phenomenal characteristics identified in the discourse under analysis with theoretical or other analytical scholarship. The objective of such a collocation is to further interpret the phenomenal properties discerned and understand why certain meanings, identities, and relations are perpetually reproduced in the field of discursivity to which the discourse under analysis belongs. Often, this is effected by comparing research findings with other analyses of similar phenomena or on the basis of secondary literature.

2.3 Sampling and Analysis

This dissertation covers the period that, according to literature review and my background knowledge, is marked by the emergence and proliferation of articulate homophobic tendencies in the Russian political discourse – from 2011 to 2014 and, where necessary, beyond, as well as on a corpus of earlier sources that enable a genealogical focus on their emergence and deployment. In sampling, I rely on my background knowledge of the discursive space under analysis, secondary literature, and the inner logic of the analytical narrative as it deploys in the process. Regarding the latter, it is important to note that the initial sample is always but tentative and would highly likely require further sampling as the research generates new findings and the analyst's empirical knowledge about the spatiotemporal coordinates and the subjects belonging to it increases (Marttila, 2015, p. 147).

The sampling is mainly organised around two key theoretically constructed identities of discursive subjects: *organic intellectuals* and *moral entrepreneurs*. The first concept originates in Antonio Gramsci and refers to the thinking groups that a class (dominant of otherwise)

produces from its own ranks "organically" (Gramsci, 1992). The function of organic intellectuals is not to simply reflect social life in accordance with certain scientific rules, rather, they articulate folk wisdom, or common sense, of the political sphere to which they organically belong (Crehan, 2016). Moral entrepreneurs are individuals, groups, or formal organizations whose aim is to influence a community to adopt or maintain a particular set of norms (Cohen, 2011). They take the lead in labelling or stigmatising a particular way of behaviour and facilitate spreading this attribution throughout society. These labels can be positive or negative, and they are always conducive to establishing and sustaining social and political hierarchies. Often, the discursive positions of moral entrepreneurs and organic intellectuals overlap or coincide. Moral entrepreneurs' agency often results in instigating moral panics. Engaging with articulatory practices of organic intellectuals and moral entrepreneurs is conducive to manifesting that the subjects whose articulations are under analysis can be reasonably assumed to occupy coherent subject roles within the studied discourse.

Additionally, the scope includes materials that articulate three nodal points that speak to the analytical concerns of the project: non-heterosexuality, sovereignty, and "traditional values." This triad establishes the particular locus of my research interest in Chapter 4, i.e. biopolitical state racism as a power/knowledge dispositif that shapes the regimes of truth which produce sexuality and its norms in contemporary Russia. The scope includes media texts of various genres discussing the issue or reporting on it, interviews, expertise papers and reports that have been used or referred to in political debates on the issue, state policy documents and legal documents (the only formal criteria is their public availability, i.e. their belonging to the domain of public political communication, which renders them as legitimate samples of the problematized public power/knowledge circuit). At the first stage, I identify theme-relevant materials, then I select a representative corpus of the data.

The original content-related discourse analyses were conducted with the help of the qualitative research software Quirkos. Upon initial conceptualisation of the research material, appropriate codes were set up that then served to discern and reflect the corresponding phenomenal characteristics of the discourse(s).

Chapter 3 Sovereignty and its Outside

This chapter is devoted to interrogating the operative and discursive fields of Putinism, both synchronically and diachronically, as a form of governmentality, via a reading of two of the Russian regime's leading organic intellectuals, Gleb Pavlovsky and Vladislav Surkov. Organic intellectual is a term coined by Antonio Gramsci to denote the thinking groups which a given social class produces from its own ranks, thus distinguishing them from a traditional intelligentsia (Crehan, 2016, pp. 18-43). It is the function of organic intellectuals to articulate the meanings that exist in the form of the common sense in their societal or political communities. In doing so, organic intellectuals serve the political interests of these respective communities by explicating their discourse to a wider society. A key "political technologist"[3] of the Kremlin in the 1990s and 2000s directly responsible for the production of ideological foundations for the Russian leadership, Pavlovsky has recently turned to an analytical critique of what Putinism has become, including under his guidance. Surkov has played a very similar role, the only differences being his positions as a public official in the Presidential Administration directly in charge of the Kremlin's domestic political strategy, and his continued public support for Putinism.

At the heart of Putinism is a perpetual state of emergency that manifests itself in an obsessive preoccupation with (re)defining and defending sovereignty. The chapter will offer a reconstruction of Pavlovsky's account of the Russian regime, and then move on to interrogate the constitutive discursive dynamic that, I argue, marks the transition from the early, more liberal, to the more authoritarian and conservative later stage of Putinism. This transition is

[3] In the Russian context, political technology is often defined in scholarship as a set of tools that "helps the Kremlin to manipulate public opinion as well as election systems using pseudo-experts, technical parties, fake civic organizations and youth movement such as *Nashi*, and covert media techniques" (Hosaka, 2019, p. 750).

marked by the change of emphasis around the nodal point of "sovereign democracy" that can be traced in Surkov's political writings over the span of two decades.

3.1 Major Approaches to Putinism

Extensive scholarly literature has been devoted to defining, describing, and constituting a political genealogy of Putinism in the context of the "sovereign democracy" doctrine (Makarychev, 2008; Orlov, 2008; Morozov, 2015a; Anderson, 2016; Aron, 2017; Fish, 2017; Kara-Murza, 2017; Oliker, 2017; Robertson and Greene, 2017; Shevtsova, 2017; Inozemtsev, 2017; Pavlovsky, 2011, 2015, 2019a; Casula, 2013, 2014, to name but a few). These studies seem to fall in two major approaches. Makarychev, Casula, and Morozov, on the one hand, approach the subject through an international relations-based lens arguing that the discourse of "sovereign democracy" emerged in response to Russia's desire to become regarded "as a "normal" country, a full-fledged member of the international community" (Makarychev, 2008, p. 49) by redefining or adapting some of the key Western political norms, while appearing to retain their core semantics. Conversely, Fish, Inozemtsev, Pavlovsky, and Anderson lay more emphasis on the domestic dynamics and factors that brought about the need to handle internal "non-systemic" opposition by gatekeeping the political discourse through the externalization of dissent and fortifying the boundaries of the ideal Russian political subject.

Fish's more comprehensive approach stresses three distinctive features of Putin's regime that conceives of and promotes itself as a superior alternative to liberal democracy associated with the "West." Fish argues that Putin's autocracy is conservative (understood as prioritizing the maintenance of the status quo and avoidance of instability), personalist (a one-man rule), and crowd-pleasing populist. Many scholars, however, (e.g. Lasilla, 2016; Matveev, 2016;

Gel'man, 2020; Pavlovsky, 2019a) find this latter qualification contestable. Pavlovsky (2015, 2019a) introduces the theoretical-analytical model of #SistemaRF to counter the "one-man rule" generality, Matveev (2016) and Gel'man (2020) believe that the application of the concept of populism is inherently inadequate for a regime whose economic policy is markedly neoliberal, and whose modus operandi in internal politics consists in de-politicization and sedimentation as opposed to mobilisation as a characteristic of populist politics. Casula (2013) describes Putinite populism via a post-Marxist paradigm as "populism from above" contrasting it with a democratic, popular form of discourse that forms against a frontier that separates a wide popular coalition of equivalence from the ruling elite, inaugurating a relation of antagonism.

A number of commentators (Shevtsova, 2001; Triesman, 2011a,b; Petrov et. al., 2014; Anderson, 2016; Herd, 2018) cut across the above divide and describe the Russian regime as 'hybrid', referring, on the one hand, to the existence of liberal democratic institutions that nevertheless fail at providing checks and balances against the strong presidential authority, and to its strong and growing authoritarian tendencies, on the other. Triesman (2011a,b) uses the notions of "illiberal democracy" and "competitive autocracy" as synonyms of the concept of "hybrid regime."

In my view, these discussions, while useful for the purposes of taxonomization in a comparative perspective, have two drawbacks. First, they lead to potentially confusing and unproductive conceptual debates that may land one in the field of abstracted theoretical speculations about the contents of the terminology at stake, of which a lot of the referenced scholarship suffers. Furthermore, the inherent normativity of the concepts involved may hinder a methodologically unbiased comprehensive analysis of a political regime in its singularity. As a corollary, the analyst may fail at grasping the specifics of the unique system that falls outside the available

set of ideal types ranked from “best” to “worst” (e.g. the liberal democracy/totalitarianism continuum). The normative implications of such continuums accumulated over decades of research produced within the “Russia vs. West” matrix would undermine a postcolonial analysis that I pursue in Chapter 6 due to their postcolonial birthmarks. That is why, I believe, this apparatus should be done away with in favour of a more epistemologically “naive” and critical approach that postfoundational discourse analysis calls for.

Thus, cutting across the divisions outlined in this section, I will turn in this chapter to the work of Gleb Pavlovsky whose “conceptual innocence” (the term of Konstantin Gaaze [2019]) allows achieving the first stage of postfoundational discourse analysis, an epistemological break with conceptual commonplaces widely shared in more positivist paradigms of political analysis.

3.2 Epistemological Break: (Re)understanding Russia’s Statehood

In order to situate the state homophobia of the 2010s, a brief exercise in understanding Putinism is in order. A broader mapping of the system’s machinery and a genealogical discussion of its deployment will help us locate the point of emergence of Putinite biopolitics that results from a set of material-discursive structures in which the vacancy for a new biopolitical "threat" emerged and was responded to.

The main purpose of the following discussion is setting the field for a postfoundational discourse analysis which consists in the operation of co-construction (see Chapter 2). This operation comprises three steps. Firstly, it entails a definition of the spatiotemporal coordinates of the object of research which is addressed in the thesis introduction. Secondly, it means enacting an epistemological break: “deletion of the epistemic influence of common-sense conceptions, [and] more or less explicit normative standpoints” (Marttila, 2015, p. 144).

Finally, the operation requires “deconstruction of socially conceived implicitness or necessity related to the construction of the research object” (ibid.). I rely mainly on the works of Gleb Pavlovsky (2011; 2015; 2019a,b) whose postfoundational approach to political analysis is in line with the theoretical framework I laid out in Chapter 1, while bringing in the added value of destabilizing some of the rather unhelpful commonplace binaries (primarily those of state/society, personalism/institutionalism, etc.) that, as I argued in Chapter 1, would preclude an understanding beyond the positivism and normativity prevailing in mainstream political science.

3.2.1 Putinism as a Governmentality

> #SistemaRF is a trickster, simulator, and liar in nature. Thereby, it enjoys an incredible agility unimaginable to most nations. By abusing it, the Kremlin court corrupts capable mechanisms of the System.
>
> Gleb Pavlovsky (2019a, p. 31)

Gleb Pavlovsky’s (2011; 2015; 2019a) analyses of the political system in Russia are exceptional in comparison with the numerous works by political scientists and commentators reflecting on Putinism. Konstantin Gaaze sees Pavlovsky’s approach as a kind of "Renaissance” form of political thought:

> Having not tasted the forbidden fruit of the idea of "progress" that separates utopias from conceptualizations and metaphors from concepts, Renaissance thought turns to its object "in general," addressing it in a modus of contrived […] epistemological innocence[4] (Gaaze, 2019, p. 7).

[4] Hereinafter in the thesis, all translations from Russian are mine, unless indicated otherwise.

Although Pavlovsky's approach indeed flees theoretical holism and terminological solidity, its innovative tropes are easy to link with Foucauldian governmentality studies due to Pavlovsky's emphasis on discursive-material technologies of power. In defining his main concept, "#SistemaRF," as "our cum-savvy" (Pavlovsky, 2019a, p. 17), and his book as "a collection of the system's dogmas and survival skills" (ibid.), he implicitly (though, perhaps, unintentionally) aligns his phenomenological approach with the Foucauldian dispositif analysis which is based on a postfoundational ontology of the political (discussed in Chapters 1 and 2).

The other feature of Pavlovsky's "Renaissance" political thought that brings it close to Foucault's is the inseparability of theory and praxis. The circumstances in which Pavlovsky's thought deploys cannot be distilled out of his biography as the Kremlin's chief "political technologist" of the 2000s. In the 2010s, Pavlovsky, however, withdrew his support for Putin and endorsed Dmitrii Medvedev to run for a second term. As a result, Putin's administration declined his further services, after which he turned to writing. Pavlovsky's thought is thus heavily informed by his experience as one of the architects of the system he then proceeds to critique, the singularity of his concepts and metaphors resulting from the singularity of the system itself that was not modelled on an ideal type, but rather represents a contingent assemblage of ad hoc administrative solutions in the spirit of *Realpolitik*. With the explicit peculiarity of his descriptive language, he then attempts to grasp the rhizomatic nature of the system's genesis and structure.

In its avoidance of the operational apparatus of positivist political theory with its ongoing arguments about Russia's hybrid political regime (see e.g. Shulman, 2018) and inherent normativity and teleological boldness, his "epistemological innocence" enacts the double gesture of deconstructing the common evidentialities of the Russia scholarship and that of

conjuring a space of "liquid scaffolds" that aspire to grasp the fluctuating discursive materialities of #SistemaRF[5].

This neologism is a heuristic concept that marks the space in which one may start thinking the "Russian authoritarianism" (Gaaze, 2019, p. 8). It stands in for the merging of the concepts of the statist society and "the society of power." The former refers to a type of society where “the citizenry has its expectations focused on the State for solving its problems” and does not participate in communitarian associations (Laraña, 2009, p. 1). The latter term, on the other hand, originates in the work of the Soviet political philosopher Mikhail Gefter (2014) and denotes a society in which power substitutes for all types of social relations.[6] In the society of power, social relations are organised in hierarchies of ranks and categories of subservience, or as *estates* in the terms of the Russian sociologist Simon Kordonsky (2016). This is a type of society that is completely dissolved in the state; the corollary of this “embeddedness” in rigid hierarchies of state power is normative anomie and a seemingly infinite elasticity of the social.

Yet, unlike Kordonsky, Pavlovsky maintains that the institutional locus of the assemblage of #SistemaRF does not qualify for a state. In his understanding, #SistemaRF is rather an

[5] Pavlovsky never addresses the morphology of the concept whose most peculiar element, the hashtag character #, can be explained, in the laziest possible way, by the author’s usage of the hashtag #SistemaRF in his multiple analytical social media posts. To me, however, the hashtag character invites an association with indexing and colonisation of individual meanings, their submission to totalizing, yet always necessarily unstable, shifting, passing (and sometimes re-emerging) memes that govern the digital landscape. Expanding geographically and discursively, #SistemaRF integrates a heterogeneous assemblage of discursive materialities into a pastiche-like tactically useful narrative where individual meanings are never fixed for good. Rather, they endlessly fluctuate reflecting the agility of the depersonified algorithms that govern the space of enunciation.

[6] Gefter used the concept of power in a more conventional way than that of Michel Foucault. Gefter, presumably, was unaware of the latter’s works as they were not available in the Soviet Union at the (only roughly determinable) time of Gefter’s writing. Gefter own works that addressed the concept of the “society of power” were never published in the Soviet Union; his manuscripts have only recently been collected into edited volumes by his heirs.

operational environment (Pavlovsky, 2019a, p. 14) or, using Foucault's terminology, a dispositif. Foucault defines the disposif (sometimes translated into English as apparatus) as:

> [F]irstly, a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions – in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the apparatus. The apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements (Foucault, 1980).

The system Pavlovsky describes is deployed in a space of negativity: a space of a never-born state which is replaced by continuously reproduced, while at the same time performatively shifting practices of domination (Gaaze, 2019). "#SistemaRF is an ensemble of weak interactions without a fail point. There is nowhere to blow to make it collapse" (Pavlovsky, 2019a, 15). The main task of #SistemaRF is to restore a homeopathic balance at any cost, beyond anyone's legal and moral assessments (ibid., pp. 21-22).

The system is successful as a *statehood*, while insufficient as a state — at best qualifying for a state prosthesis, contends Pavlovsky (ibid., p. 19). The integrity of state institutions that should define a state is not a priority: the priority is the operational agility of the authorities acting in the interests of their security and (allegedly) the survival of the people of Russia. Just like the flexible institutions, the centre of power lacks fixed political notions, except topoi of usefulness. Falling short of being a state, "the System services operations of power throughout the entire space of the Russian Federation," with its spatial identity reaching far beyond its sovereign borders (ibid., p. 26). Taking advantage of the weak statehood, Pavlovsky argues, the Kremlin:

> skilfully utilises the weaknesses of institutions as a motive for flexibility in behaviour — *agility*. [...] Russia is moving in an encapsulated time, supporting its relevance by a recombination of weak means. Some of these tools are disgusting, unacceptable, and all of them are very dangerous. The risks are growing. […] The machinery of the system works almost without our efforts. No one really likes the way it comes out; the picture is increasingly scary. And no one believes that the future of Russia is secure" (ibid., p. 16).

In #SistemaRF, the leader figure is a loner, but, for Pavlovsky, “this is but a condition of his (sic) usefulness” (p. 17). Complicating the commonplace of the "personalist rule" in the scholarship on Russia (e.g. Fish, 2017) that results in the privileging of individual agency over the structures that condition it, Pavlovsky argues that the leader is merely the System’s "frontman," a "monopoly service" provided by the system to the population; he functions as a "jammer" to distract the observer's attention from important structural details. “Skilfully depicting a gargoyle, Putin covers the System’s machinery and the circle of people enriched by his decisions and, mostly, by his connivance” (Pavlovsky, 2019a, p. 24).

Pavlovsky insists that #SistemaRF should not be reduced to the notion of a "political regime." The latter concept stands in for “a set of rules, procedures, and understandings which govern relations between the state and society in a particular country” (Macridis, 1986, p. 2). This widely held definition conceals precisely what Pavlovsky’s model highlights: the confusion of society, state, and nation, which is typical for the "society of power" (Pavlovsky, 2019a, p. 24). Although a totalizing concept that at times fails to hold against my analyses in the following chapters, it invites a useful reflection on the reasons for the weakness and amorphousness of what is said to be the Russian "civil society" or "political nation" against the ever expanding state that exists in a constant quest to colonise further spheres of the population’s life. In the view of Gefter and Pavlovsky, it is the permanent generation of new threats that sutures the "society of power" into a monolithic unity that highjacks the political subject of "the people":

> Russia’s is a society of power, a machine of power. It has existed for protection against threats and no less for the generation of threats. Without threats, our society of power fails to work. It needs to generate threats by itself in order to respond to them on a large scale, on an increasing scale. Indeed, a terrible mechanism ... a system that (from the point of view of the world’s normal course of events) has been solving simple problems in ways that had not been applied before (Gefter as quoted ibid., p. 18).

Likening his approach to Alexander Etkind’s theory of internal colonisation (Etkind, 2011), Pavlovsky conceptualizes #SistemaRF as the latest incarnation of the centuries long dispositif

for integrating the Russian geographical space that relies on the derivatives of Western progress — an artificially renewed regime of eternal survival (Pavlovsky, 2019a, p. 26). By reiterating administrative invasions of the same territories, the dispositive integrates the "distressed" space of Russia, each time reinaugurating the System. #SistemaRF deems the population of Russia isotropic to the country's territory: it functions as an anthropological and biopolitical interface between the authorities and the space of the RF. The claim to guardianship of the population by the ruling elite is a flipside of their claim to the country's sovereign space:

> The operational phantom of the population interprets the human mass of the RF as a trusty anthropofauna which attests to the importance of the authority. The authority is the only force concerned with the population which is a chaotic force that is difficult to control and dangerous to the state (ibid, p. 128).

The real foundation of Russian statehood, in Pavlovsky's opinion, is random improvisations. The source of change is never political programs and platforms, it is always political technologies. These technologies seldom rely on the actual political divisions that would define a civil society: they operate on chains of artificially created conflicts that do not have to correspond to the factuality of public watersheds, since those are relatively stable and, hence, useless in the game of agility. "Electorates are not social groups, but artificial constructs with unstable goals" (ibid., pp. 165-166). The lines of a conflict are drawn so that the potential majority could, if only for a moment, experience a unity around a newly crafted political agenda — similar to the way a hashtag brings together a heterogenous set of individual subject and enunciations in an unstable narrative structure.

Caught in a circle of continuous reinvasions, the System's routine is, hence, a state of emergency that provides for a remarkable agility of political terraforming, both within and outside of the Russian borders. At the same time, the state of emergency routine turns emergency into a performance. Each new state of emergency becomes a reality show that, as it were, "reboots the media appearance of the "dictatorship-without-a-state" (Gaaze, 2019, p. 10).

Therefore, contends Gaaze, unlike a junta, a military dictatorship or a police dictatorship, #SistemaRF does not need large scale mass repressions to reproduce itself. Instead, it selects any of these shells adequate at any given moment for the needs of a new emergency, and then simply discards this shell to assume a new one. In order to re/conjure a state of emergency, the system needs “on-call spectres” (Pavlovsky, 2019a, p. 31). I argue, in 2011-2014, the urgent need for the "spectre" was filled with the group of LGBT+ citizens.

3.2.2 Genealogy of #SistemaRF

#SistemaRF is an agile assemblage of quasi-institutions that arose in the normative void left by the demise of the USSR. Although the years of Boris Yeltsin’s presidency are habitually thought of in a framework of emerging and fragile (liberal) democracy, Pavlovsky discerns a vast continuity between the years of Yeltsin and Putin.

Addressing the question of the System’s genealogy, Pavlovsky states that the RF is a historical contingency (2019, p. 16). Challenging the widespread reflex of explaining away any political or societal issue as "Soviet legacy," he argues that the new political formation is far removed from the Soviet Union as well as fundamentally foreign to it in nature. The argument here is not that the RF constitutes a complete break with the Soviet experience, rather, it draws on that experience to conjure up an operative environment that is peculiar and distinct.

Unlike the Soviet system, #SistemaRF does not impose onto the population a strict procedure for the acceptance of rules, norms, and values. Living environments in Putin’s Russia are mostly opaque to the state since it is mostly not interested in working with personified, singular subjects that do not fall easily under a readily available administrative category. The Soviet system rewarded one for impersonality — the institute of reputation was virtually non-existent. Anthropologist Alexei Yurchak (2013) has shown that, in the late Soviet Union, compliance

with the state and its ideological narratives was largely simulated, which was the price paid by the citizens for the preservation of the relative security of their emerging private sphere. Putinism has reactivated this disciplining reflex by providing dispersed incentives in the form of social benefits to some and corruption bonuses to others. To a large degree, these measures allowed for the depoliticization of the mid-2000s, as well as the unanimous voting by the State Duma on reactionary bills from 2012 on. “From the Soviet society, #SistemaRF adopted the style of mimicking impersonality” (Pavlovsky, 2019a, p. 134).

Notwithstanding this borrowing, as such, #SistemaRF, in Pavlovsky’s view, contains no metanarrative continuity with the Soviet experience, its epistemic structures and forms of culture. The Russian Federation emerged regardless of a “Russian idea” or any consistent project of the future, there was no value package compatible with the new statehood: “the new state was born into a vacuum of new ideas” (ibid.). What this vacuum ultimately resulted in is the discovery of the advantages of an “unburdensome statehood”: a dispositif that possesses some features of a state, but requires no compliance with the tedious "rules of the game":

> Russia’s system took into account the weaknesses of the Soviet one and made up for them with new qualities. The Soviets were a tough, ideological and strong state: the new System was a rather weak statehood, a lack of power, a mess. The Soviets disciplined the population and enlightened it; the Kremlin finally left everyone alone in front of the TV, which can always be turned off. The Union rested on the suppression of individual inequality: #SistemaRF is a myriad of private transactions, involuntary, but not profitable, reinforcing the inequality (ibid., p. 20).

Rather than an offspring of the Soviet project, Russia’s emergence may be considered a corollary of the “century of imitations," to use Ivan Krastev’s concept (Krastev, 2017). Krastev deems the period of 1988–2018 in Central and Eastern Europe the years of mimesis: the process of active appropriation of Western liberal institutions and continuous attempts by the countries of the former socialist block to achieve inclusion into the "normal" Western political framework. According to Pavlovsky, Russia spent these years developing a similar, yet in many

ways distinct simulation model. While the national democratic communities of the CEE were genuinely aspiring to accept the new institutions and partake in their imitation on the grassroots level, the population of the RF was largely uninterested in partaking in the imitations the Kremlin had to offer (Pavlovsky, 2019a, p. 129). From the standpoint of normative political science, then, the RF poses a relative anomaly: its weak statehood is an insidious development path that resulted in the subversion and corruption of the decorative democratic institutions that progressed faster than in most of the CEE.

Along with the many commentators who use postmodern theory to describe Russia's formation as a "controlled democracy"[7] (e.g. Pomerantsev, 2013), Pavlovsky calls Russia an "ironic empire."[8] The ironic "does not mean comic, joyful, and least of all, alas, funny. The ironic is a way of being alienated[9] from everything that it is operating with, including facts, ideas, and principles" (Pavlovsky, 2019a, p. 30). President Putin is the ironic face of the System. In Pavlovsky, the president is the function of #SistemaRF rather than its mastermind: the system "uses Putin, conceals him from us" (ibid.). Operating on and with ironic media, ironic facts, and ironic ideologies, the Kremlin's propaganda impacts the Kremlin leaders themselves: it is "a theatre of one spectator, drowning in expensive telephantoms" (ibid.). The irony of ideologies in the System leaves little room for sincere political indoctrination: the System is the only ideology for itself and remains so until the end" (ibid., p. 30).

[7] This term is frequently used in Russia scholarship as a synonym or critical alternative to "sovereign democracy" discussed below, enacting a critical distancing from it.
[8] The concept will be addressed in detail in Chapter 6.
[9] "Alienation" stands here for the instrumentalisation and commodification of claimed values, its meaning drawn from the context of the above discussion of agility. In the context of sexual politics, an example would be the widely rumoured homosexuality of some of the architects of the Putinite shift to "traditional values." Being unsubstantiated duly, these rumours are nevertheless symptomatic of a discursive structure in which the ruling elite is seen as disconnected from the principles and values it imposes onto the population in the spirit of *Realpolitik*.

Pavlovsky himself is often credited as the creator of the post-ideological, "technocratic" form of governance that set in the post-Soviet Russia and achieved its peak in the 2000s (Pomerantsev, 2019). By exercising it, the Kremlin has learned how to attract individual social groups to polling stations without uniting them in any way, but simply mobilising them for the "right" cause in the right place, such as a vote or a rally. This operative agility is incompatible with an orthodoxy, be it in the form of the church, the genuine left or the hostile, nationalist right. Rather, the various actors can at best serve as the system's on-call tactical allies, at times providing a rhetorical inventory for a certain new regime of truth, and instrumentalized for the purposes of a yet another iteration of ideological agility. I shall return to a more comprehensive discussion of "irony" in Chapter 6.

3.3 The Discourse on Sovereignty

This section focuses on the process whereby the sovereignty topos gradually rose to prominence in #SistemaRF's political discourse over the 2000s and early 2010s. I shall argue that this process constituted the core development of the two waves of depoliticization that Russia underwent in the 20 years of President Putin's rule.

3.3.1 The Moments of the Political

According to postfoundational political theory (Marchart, 2007), political difference presupposes two plains: the ontological (the political) and the ontic (politics). While the political is conceived as an ontological condition of possibility for politics, the ontic belongs to the factual level (ibid.) and accounts for the structurally complex landscape of the struggle to intercept the momentum of political agenda. In a depoliticized corporation-like state such as the 2010s Russia, this landscape thins out and becomes discrete: in place of the continuum of

politics, the flow breaks down into relatively separate acts of politicization, or reactivation. What remains is a chain of dispersed and unresolved upheavals, breaks of dissent alternating each time over time.

These acts are always contingent and overdetermined: in order for such a contingency to emerge, a historical constellation of specific circumstances is needed (Marchart, 2007, p. 30). As a result of such a constellation, "a "moment" of contingency will arise and is realised from the viewpoint and within the language of those discourses in which it is encountered" (ibid.). In postfoundational political theory, such a moment is called "the moment of the political."

In the course of the thirty years of its history as a separate post-Soviet state, Russia is sometimes argued to have undergone two consecutive stages of almost equal timespan: fifteen years of politics (1990-2004) and fifteen years of depoliticization, or sedimentation (2005-present). According to Pavlovsky (2019b), the first period of politics is seen to have resulted from an expansive politicization of Perestroika (1986-1989), reflecting the political turbulence of the first decade of Russia as a separate state. The transit of power of the 2000 that ushered Vladimir Putin in power marks the first move of depoliticization, which consisted in a massive backlash against independent media and any political actor who posed a perceived threat to the system which was aware of the democratic deficit of the power transit.

Within the depoliticization era since the 2000s, one may discern several moments of (attempts at) repoliticization. The interim presidency of Dmitrii Medvedev (2008-2012) was a period of "easing off the screws." A new, short era of somewhat more liberal governance inspired the intelligentsia and the urban middle classes: the new president seemed to be undoing a share of the harm inflicted on the political system by his predecessor between 2000 and 2008 (Triesman, 2011b). However, the hope was abandoned when, in 2011, betraying the expectation of many systemic and non-systemic forces, Medvedev announced that he would not be running for a

second term. In response to Putin's announced return, liberal urban opposition took to the streets of Moscow and other big cities with a set of political demands (Ross, 2015, 2016). The "White Ribbon Movement," as it came to be known, was not purely reactive to the trigger, but overdetermined by a set of factors and developments (Volkov, 2015). Among them was the relative prosperity of the 2000s that enabled the subjectification of an educated urban middle class longing for political reforms; the ripeness of the protest movement with a large palette of fresh charismatic faces (Alexei Navalny, Sergei Udaltsov, Yevgeniya Chirikova, Dmitrii Goudkov, Kseniya Sobchak, and others); the inspiration of the Arab Spring and the Occupy movement, to name but a few.

The protest activity lasted for approximately two years, till 2013, when the Kremlin, using a mix of measured concessions and targeted repressions, succeeded in dividing and largely demoralising the movement. In March 2012, Vladimir Putin was re-elected President and immediately embarked on undoing the relative liberalisation achieved by Medvedev and constructing a new supermajority around a new chain of equivalence. This systemic reconfiguration in the wake of Putin's re-election in 2012 was (until recently, for obvious reasons) sometimes referred to in literature as the transition to late Putinism (Galeotti, 2019), or Putin's "cultural turn" (Robinson, 2017; Edenborg, 2018), which still stands. The aim of this chapter and the next one is to delineate its discursive genealogy.

3.3.2 Sovereign Democracy

An insightful way to conceive of this transition is to explore the specificities of the change to the practices of governance through the reshuffle in the Kremlin's staff in 2012. In the Russian

model of "guided democracy,"[10] a lot of the political processes are overseen and even scripted by the Presidential Administration and, particularly, by its key ideologue, First Deputy Chief of Staff in charge of internal politics (Sakwa, 2008; Bovt, 2008; Thomas, 2016). Throughout the depoliticisation of the 2000s, this position was occupied by Vladislav Surkov (1999 - 2011) who is often credited as the mastermind of the political system I described, via Pavlovsky, in the previous section. In 2012, Surkov was replaced by Viacheslav Volodin (2011 - 2016) whose approach to the formation of the hegemonic process was considerably different. However, in disagreement with personalizing historicism, I shall argue that there is much more operational continuity between these two periods than meets the eye.

In this section, I interrogate the logic of Surkov's major political ideas and map the discursive field that took shape during his tenure, constituting the prerequisites for the cultural turn initiated by Volodin's team. Surkov is probably best known for coming up with the doctrine of "sovereign democracy" that laid the ideological foundation for the first two terms (2001 - 2008) of President Putin (Sakwa, 2008; Bovt, 2008). Therefore, I am going to interrogate the specificities of the discourse of "sovereign democracy" through the analysis of Surkov's essays. My ultimate objective is to explore the ways the doctrine formed a condition of possibility for the politicisation of sexuality that in fact took place after Surkov left the office and the new ideological regime was installed under Volodin's team. The first set of data I am analysing here, is retrieved from the book *Vladislav Surkov. Texts 97-07: Articles and Speeches* (Surkov, 2008) that offers a comprehensive (and the only available to the general reader) overview of the strategist's public activities. The second set of data, analysed in Section 3.3.3, comes from the

[10] The concept, developed by Walter Lippmann (1997), denotes a formally democratic government that functions as a de facto autocracy. It is a commonplace ideologeme in Russia, where it was popularized, among others, by Gleb Pavlovsky

late 2010s, comprising Surkov's policy essays that reflect the overall discursive shift that happened in the wake of Putin's return to the presidential office in 2012.

The nodal point in the Surkov corpus is comprised of *democracy* and *sovereignty* (these are also among the most frequently occurring lexemes), supported by a range of other ethical floating signifiers such as *freedom*, *competition*, *stabilisation*, *statehood*, *justice* and *legality* that bear discursive relations. These terms are semanticised with resort to a set of discursive topoi (i.e. parts of argumentation belonging to obligatory premises), such as *market rationality, lawfulness, adequacy, efficiency, competitiveness, comfort and utility*. On the basis of those we can define the overall discursive setup as liberal.

The discursive boundaries around the nodal point are drawn through relations of incommensurability and, much less, dissociation. The first set of antagonisms is established against the Soviet Union as the constitutive outside of the current political system but pointing out only one of the key elements, i.e. "sovereignty." The value topoi that represent the logics of incommensurability between the Soviet Union and the Putinite RF are *rationality, efficiency, competitiveness* ("A huge problem was that such a closed society, in which results were evaluated from a party-dogmatic point of view rather than from a pragmatic one, reproduced an inefficient elite"), and *comfort* ("[That society] failed to live up to material challenges - it lagged behind in satisfying material needs" [p. 83]). The Soviet society is articulated as unfree, over-regulated, unjust, inefficient, and the Soviet ruling elite is deemed incompetent.

At the same time, the Soviet Union figures in a set of chains of commonality denoting ideational continuity ("In no way does the Soviet Union deserve a kind of sweeping condemnation: these are all our closest relatives, these are, indeed, ourselves" [p. 82]), where the nodes of equivalence are *modernisational outlook, industrialisation* and *vestiges of democracy* (the

corresponding topoi partly coincide with those figuring in the articulations of incommensurability).

The next segment of the discursive boundary (with the corresponding second sets of antagonisms) of "sovereign democracy" is played out against the post-Soviet decade of 1990s. Here, both key elements of the nodal point are at play: the constitutive outside is implicated by "others," namely *oligarchy* and their reign of *arbitrariness*. These are articulated not only against the ethical values of *statehood, lawfulness, stabilisation* and *justice,* making up how the current regime is to be seen as a formation of *sovereignty,* but also as a matter of *freedom* ("Can a poor person be free? What is freedom?" [ibid.]). It is the antagonism with the Russia of the 1990s that primarily defines the boundaries of the new discourse at first.

The figure of Vladimir Putin as "sovereign democracy's" destinator is said to be "returning the true meaning of democracy to the democratic institutions" (p. 88). Putin's name figures in almost each hegemonic act, as in: "The question was: to be or not to be. Russia, as it has always been characteristic of its people, said "To be!" — and elected Vladimir Putin" (p. 87).

Most appearances of the Putin figure are amplified by an ecstatic chronotope and point to the metanarratives of historic progress that align with a classical liberal teleology that manifests in the above discussed topoi.

> (1) The question was: to be or not to be. Russia […] said "to be!" And elected Vladimir Putin.
>
> (2) The country was on the verge of losing its sovereignty (about the years preceding Putin's election) [p. 87].
>
> (3) We're only transitioning from the politics of stabilization to the politics of development [p. 93].

The same metanarratives are used to bear the relations of incommensurability with the Soviet Union.

> Rejection of such a society was inevitable […] There was an objective process […]. The Russian people themselves chose such a fate — they abandoned that social model because they saw that in their search for freedom and justice, they had turned the wrong way (p. 83).

Now, after the demise of the Soviet model and the desolation of the 1990s, Russia is articulated to be at a crossroads: "we're only transitioning from the politics of stabilisation to the politics of development," or, referring to the nature of Russia's membership in G8, "this is how we live: between legacy and advance pay" (p. 93), which adds a sense of historic mission to President Putin's rule. The use of deixis (the "we" of the text) and the imperative modality support this kind of chronotopic arrangement.

Perhaps, the most interesting set of relations has to do with the constitutive outside "the West." Here they mainly oscillate between equivalence and contrariety, the weight of the latter increasing as the internal discursive boundaries (vis-à-vis the constitutive outside of the Soviet Union and the 1990s Russia) settle and "new threats" are introduced into the picture. The corpus transmits a set of articulations of representation where Russia is represented as a part of the "European civilisation." This metahistorical chronotope is later narrowed down to a set of contemporary and rather urgent chains of equivalence: *combatting terrorism, working together to establish a more just global order* ("Free nations should collaborate and compete under fair rules" [p. 93]). However, relations of incommensurability and even antagonism soon come on stage: Surkov stresses the danger of a "*soft takeover"* of Russia: he mentions the use of "*orange technologies*"[11] [pp. 43, 94, 100] (pointing to the West's alleged involvement with the chain of

[11] Although the term "orange revolution" refers specifically to the events in Ukraine in 2004-2005, it often figures in the Russian political discourse in a broader sense, referring to the events in Ukraine, as well as those in Georgia, Armenia, and Kyrgyzstan.

"orange revolutions" in the post-USSR space) and voices complains to the effect that "the double standards of Western politics result in disappointment with democratic values" (p. 104).

The nodal point *sovereignty* is further used to establish relations of incommensurability with the other post-Soviet nation states that are alleged to have been giving up their newly acquired sovereignty:

> […] unlike many of our friends from the late Soviet Union and many other countries, we have always been carriers of the state idea. It is clear that some countries that declare their national idea as joining the EU are very happy ones: they don't have to think much. Everything is very simple for them. [Russians] are bad, they are to blame for everything, so we will now run to Brussels, and everything will be fine with us. It must be remembered that all these nations have not been sovereign for a single day in their history, they do not possess the skill of state existence. Therefore, it is quite clear that whenever Moscow fails to do as they want, they immediately, without hesitation, flee to another owner (pp. 92-93).

Thus, in terms of the overall discursive regime, Surkov's early works oscillate between the pluralist and popular types of discourse. The first type characterises chains of equivalence that bear on empty signifiers and structure an inclusive political space where opponents are rendered through relations of competitive, pragmatic partnership and occasional friendly collaboration. At present, pluralist discourses generally characterise neoliberal democracies with their relatively sedimentational or, as per Hanna Arendt, "associative" (Marchart, 2007) model of the political. On the contrary, the popular model presupposes "dissociative" chains of equivalence drawn against a common frontier separating protagonists from the constitutive antagonist. Hence, the doctrine of sovereign democracy can be argued to combine a pluralist liberal and popular antagonistic discursive regimes.

I shall now turn to Surkov's later political writings to interrogate the process of evaporation of "democracy" and the strengthening of "sovereignty" at the expense of the valence of the pluralist discursive relations.

3.3.3 The Deep People

In the 2019 essay entitled *Putin's Long-Lived State* (Surkov, 2019) and published in the loyal *Nezavisimyia ("independent") Gazeta*, Surkov completely abandons the liberal topoi contained in his early essays. Overall different is his writing style, much more esoteric (or, in his own terms, *heretic*), striving for an epistemological break with the 2000s language of sovereign democracy: the latter is rather completely ignored than discarded, criticised or dismantled. The chronotope, as already signalled in the title, is majestic, pointing to the world history and Russia's imaginary future, and works in conjunction with a sequence of hegemonic acts.

The core floating signifiers are: *Putin's system of rule* (elsewhere referred to as *Putin's Big Political Machine*) and *deep people*, supported by the topoi of *trust* and *fairness*. They bear the relations of antagonism with the "Western democracies." that are said to be dependent on the "illusion of choice, freedom and superiority" and characterised by the overall dysfunctionality resulting from a lack of trust and commonality:

> A bastard cannot be allowed to go too far for the simple reason that he is a bastard. And when there are (supposedly) only bastards around, you have to use bastards to deter other bastards. One nail drives out another, one …bastard kicks out another. There is a wide selection of bastards and intricate rules designed to contain their struggle among themselves to a more or less draw result. Thus, a beneficial system of checks and balances arises — a dynamic balance of meanness, an equilibrium of greed, a harmony of cheating. And if someone gets caught in the game and behaves disharmoniously, the vigilant deep state rushes to rescue and, by an invisible hand, drags the apostate to the bottom. […T]he Westerners begin to turn their head around in search of different patterns and ways of existence. And they see Russia (ibid.).

In contrast to Western democracies' cynical "deep state," Putin's rule figures as holistic and transparent: it "begins and ends with trust." Its counters are drawn in a sequence of naturalisations that suture the hegemonic acts: the Russian political model is articulated as "organically formed," "predestined," "natural," and resulting from "the very logic of historical

processes." The hegemony, thus, rests on an inherently anti-democratic, sedimentational, esoteric meta-narrative that conceals a phantasmatic, rather than political logic.

The magnification of the sovereignty topos is enunciated as a break with the subalternity of the liberal democratic project of the 1990s:

> Since, after the failed 90s, our country rejected ideological borrowings, began to produce its own meanings, and switched to an informational counter-offensive to the West, European and American experts began to make increasingly mistaken forecasts. They are surprised and enraged by the paranormal preferences of the electorate. Confused, they announced an invasion of populism. One can say so — if one has no words (ibid.).

Surkov moves on to offer an alternative. The primary discursive subject of the text is what he terms "the deep people." It sutures the core hegemonic act of the text whereby a popular frontier is drawn around this empty signifier:

> At different times, it was conceived as peasants, proletarians, non-partisans[12], or hipsters, or state employees. One "looked for" it, "went into" it. One called it the God-bearer, or the opposite. Sometimes it was thought to be fictitious and non-existent, [those in power] would initiate galloping reforms taking no regard of it, but would quickly break their forehead against it, coming to the conclusion that "there is something." It repeatedly retreated under the pressure of invaders, but it always returned and prevailed (ibid.).

Similarly to Gefter's society of power, the "deep people" essentially resists subjectification by representational institutions of liberal democracy. Crucially, then, on the other side of the frontier we find not only the "West," but also these institutions and their filler, the "Russian elite":

> On the glossy surface, shines the elite, century after century, actively (we must give it its due) striving to involve the people in some of its activities — party meetings, wars, elections, economic experiments. The people participate in those activities, but somewhat distantly, they do not show up on the surface, living in their own depths a

[12] "*Bespartiynye*" is the term used in the Soviet Union to denote non-members of the Communist Party.

> completely different life. Two national lives, surface and deep, sometimes live in opposite directions, sometimes coincide, but never merge into one (ibid.).

Similarly, Pavlovsky argues that the population of the Russian Federation did not recognize Krastev's "imitated statehood," seeing it as a "lordly amusement" with the objective of indulging in corruption, and a waste of money. Democratic institutions did not enjoy the wide population's support: "the simulation programs of Russian nation-building sagged without reaching the level of grassroots. Until the late 1990s, about half of the citizens of the Russian Federation recognized neither the new Russian borders, nor the new state" (Pavlovsky, 2019a, p. 129).

Yet, in Surkov, the elite eventually sides with the "deep people":

> With its gigantic supermass, the deep people constitutes an irresistible force of cultural gravity which unites the nation and pulls (pushes) the elite to the earth (to their native soil), even if from time to time it tries to soar into cosmopolitanism (Surkov, 2019).

In this treatment, "the people precedes the state." Ideology, like in Pavlovsky, becomes nothing more than an ironic face, a changeable and volatile assemblage, or discourse that the elite uses to grasp and address the "deep people" at different times in history:

> In Russia, you can start with anything — conservatism, socialism, liberalism, but you will eventually end with the same thing. That is, with what, in fact, there is (ibid.).

The subject of Putin occupies the position of an omniscient mediator that oversees the national unity:

> The ability to hear and understand the people, to see them through and through, to the full depth, and to act accordingly is the unique and core advantage of the state of Putin. It is adequate to the people, along with it, and therefore not subject to destructive overloads from the oncoming currents of history. Therefore, it is effective and durable. […] In the new system, all institutions are subordinated to the main task: confidential communication and interaction of the supreme ruler with citizens. Different branches of government converge to the personality of the leader, being considered a value not by themselves, but only to the extent that they provide a connection with him. In addition to them, informal methods of communication work around the formal structures and

> elite groups. And when stupidity, backwardness, or corruption interfere with these lines of communication with people, energetic measures are taken to restore hearing (ibid.).

To sum up, the nodal point *sovereign democracy* receives a new treatment: whereas Surkov's early writing tended to emphasise the democratic component conceived in a normalising liberal framework, here we see an amplification of sovereignty, whereas *democracy* (barely figuring in the text) is filled with a new, inherently illiberal set of meanings.

What kind of political ontology does Surkov advance in the piece? To answer this question, I will now turn to the theory of sovereign dictatorship laid out by Carl Schmitt.

3.3.4 Surkov's Political Theology

By describing his mode of thinking as "heretic," Surkov appears to challenge the secular normativity of liberal political theory: he seems to argue, in line with some conservatives, that liberalism has morphed into a kind of secular theology thus replacing religion in the modern society of prevailing secularism.

In my view, and as noted by some commentators (Krastev, 2006; Lewis, 2017), Surkov's thought owes much to the political theology of Carl Schmitt and his critique of liberalism. Schmitt's conceptions of sovereignty and the state of emergency are often seen to inspire the calls for a strong executive power unconstrained by considerations of procedural legality (Scheuerman, 2006; Vinx, 2019). Liberal constitutions, Schmitt argues, tend to do away with a bearer of sovereign authority. In his view, however, a functional legal order is impossible without a sovereign authority (Schmitt, 2006, pp. 5–35).

Three Schittean tenets are crucial for this juxtaposition with Surkov's discourse. First, the notion of sovereign dictatorship whose mission is not to defend an already existing

constitutional order — instead, what it aims at is to create one from scratch. Second, the sovereign does so not by his (sic) own authority but in the name of the people (Schmitt, 2003, pp. 112–131). Crucially, Schmitt's view assumes the existence of a people in advance of the creation of any functioning constitutional order.

In the Schittean model of popular sovereignty, like in Surkov's "long-lived state of Putin," the sovereign serves as the sole mediator and representative of the political community. Distinct from liberal politics, this representation does not require a buffer in the form of a system of legal constrains, checks and balances: in fact, the sovereign is defined as someone who possesses the ability to freely bypass those to take a decision on the state of exception. When there is a sovereign, his authority does not require legal recognition: the applicability of the law itself depends upon a situation of normality inaugurated by the sovereign (Schmitt, 2006, pp. 12–13).

Thus, like Pavlovsky's SistemaRF, Schmitt's sovereignty can only function in a state of emergency characterised by a normative deficit and political chaos. Legal norms presuppose a general condition of social normality. In a completely abnormal situation, Schmitt argues, a depersonified, technocratic application of the law through normal administrative and judiciary procedures is going to lead to dangerous and unpredictable results, while blocking effective actions (ibid., p. 13).

The figure of Putin, upon which the inauguration of the state of normality depends in Surkov, functions as a Schmittean sovereign. However, it seems reasonable to abandon Schmitt's personalistic account in favour of Pavlovsky's model of "collective Putin," or the system's "ironic face." The reason for this is that in postfoundational political analysis one does not deal with personified actors but with discursive subject positions. The merit of such an approach is that it precludes writing off complex systemic processes to a reified personal will of a single

actor or a few actors. Thus, a space opens up for analysing governmentality as a differential, dispersed ensemble of discursive subject positions and technologies of power that mutually condition and constitute each other.

To sum up, collocated with Pavlovsky[13] and Schmitt, Surkov's sovereign emerges as the discursive subject "Putin" that, on behalf of the political community, serves to protect, but also continuously reinaugurate the said community by establishing a "long-lived" constitutional order and exercising powers unconstrained by positive legal checks and balances.

As to the political community that the sovereign is articulated to be "acting on behalf of," the third crucial Schmittean tenet is that its formation is tied to the concept of the political as a moment of the drawing of the distinction between friend and enemy.

The political differs from other spheres of life in that it is not based on a substantive, that is externally justified, distinction of its own. The distinction between friend and enemy cannot be reduced to moral, cultural, economic, linguistic, ethical, or other external considerations, nor to any particular distinction in general that may serve as a marker of collective identity and difference (ibid., 2006, pp. 25–27). A community conceived as political is deemed to exist where a group of people are willing to separate themselves from an outsider by drawing a distinction of friend and enemy (ibid., 2006, pp. 43–44). A people that emerges in such a distinction will have an existence prior to any particular legal or institutionalised form of communitarian organisation. As long as a community ("a people") exists in such a way, it may legitimise a sovereign dictatorship exercised in its name (ibid.).

Externally, there is no one, according to Schmitt, who possesses the right to determine whether a group is morally justified to define its own identity around the given frontier — only members

[13] In is worthy to note here that Pavlovsky served as an advisor to Surkov during the decade of 2000s.

of the group in question are in a position to decide whether the "otherness" of a group entails some kind of a threat to their own way of life and thus has to be fought (Vinx, 2019). Schmitt's account thus "relies on a collectivist version of the logic of self-defence" (ibid.), thus presupposing a world in which different groups are mutual and permanent existential threats to each other. This proviso mirrors Surkov's privileging of the topos of sovereignty in his later political writing.

Now, crucially, the emergence of the political difference through the establishment of the said distinction is never a reaction to a pre-existing threat to the community's form of existence. Rather, it actively constructs the political identity of the people and decides who belongs to this group and who is to be excluded from it. Belonging is premised on one's identification with a certain substantive characteristic that defines the identity of the people (Vinx, 2019), hence, this move is always public rather than private. For this to take effect, the political community has to agree that this characteristic defines a form of life that is worthy of preservation.

Hence, Schmitt's framework, with its inherent critique of liberal technocratic depoliticisation, in fact attributes the political distinction to the external plain of enmity, thus constituting the disposition of a homogeneous people immune to internal emergence of the political on the one hand, and a threat that is external to the constitutional order on the other. However, in his account of "biopolitical state racism," Michel Foucault (2003) argues that war, rather than belonging to the external plain, is equally characteristic of the modern form of governance in the form of the internal "clash of races." Unlike Schmitt's monolithic people that is ready and willing to wage war against an external threat to its sovereignty, Foucault's account turns to the internal frontier that separates the core of the people (the dominant "race," or, as per Gramsci, the ruling class) from a perceived threat to its predominant form of life from within. This consideration is important as it mirrors the dual set of antagonisms enunciated in the whole

Surkovean corpus — the external threat is collocated with its "internal agent." In the context of LGBT+ citizenship in Russia (as we shall see in the following chapters), like it is the case with illiberal regimes in general, the external threat is too vague and unsustainable without its internal representative. In the absence of this representation, the external plain alone cannot sustain a political community whose form of existence is threatened from the outside of the constitutional order. At the same time, since this internal agent needs to be externalised, this disposition results in a double gesture in the form of the discursive effect that I shall term existential ambivalence. Whereas at one time the existence of the internal agent is recognised, at other times LGBT+ citizens are articulated as non-existent within the borders of the people. I shall return to this discussion in Chapter 4.

To sum up, in Schmitt (and in Surkov), the sovereign is conceived as acting on behalf of a pre-existing communitarian formation emerging from a moment of political difference. The sequence of the formation of a political order thus can be presented as follows:

(1) a moment of the political: emergence of a constitutive outside;

(2) the formation of a community;

(3) the inauguration of a sovereign power.

However, from the vantage point of a postfoundational analysis (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001), this rendering falls into the trap of the representationalist logic, thus disregarding the performative powers of discourse. In the light of Laclau and Mouffe's critique of the representationalist paradigm and Foucault's theory of governmentality, it seems to hold better to see the discursive subject "Putin," that plays the part, per Pavlovsky, of #SistemaRF's jammer, as the destinator of constitutive discursive boundaries. Rather than representing a pre-

existing political community with a fully formed antagonistic subjectivity, #SistemaRF channels onto the subject "Putin" the discursive authorisation for the enunciation of the constituting political antagonisms. Thus, per Pavlovsky with the underlying Geflter's model of the society of power, the logic presented above reshuffles: stage three (the inauguration of #SistemaRF) precedes stage two (a society of power cannot precede the instance of sovereignty), while stage one may emerge both before (being constitutive of) and after (as a localised act of politicisation within) the inauguration of the sovereign authority. At the same time, departing from Pavlovsky with his operationalisation of the society of power model, and coming closer to the postfoundational theory of discourse in its synchronic dimension, it seems to hold to view all the three stages as dialectically intertwined.

The next chapter is devoted to interrogating the dialectical interplay of these three elements of a political order in the process of the crystallisation of Putinism's new supermajority around a paleoconservative discourse of sexual sovereignty, and the way the Surkovean "deep people" is constructed within the governmentality of #SistemaRF and its underlying discursive logic.

Chapter 4 "Traditional Values" and Putin's Cultural Turn

> In Gefter, culture becomes a mechanism of asymmetrical compensation for the absence of a nation-state: Tolstoy's *War and Peace* and the essayism of Slavophiles and Westernizers emerge on the site of an absent social contract.
>
> Konstantin Gaaze (2019, p. 9)

This chapter is centred around the sex and state nexus. Its objective is to interrogate the political homophobia of the 2010s in Russia as a result of the contingent development of Putinism as a peculiar form of governmentality.

As I argued in Chapter 3, at the heart of Putinism is a perpetual state of emergency that manifests itself in an obsessive preoccupation with (re)defining and defending "sovereignty." The latter has had several faces but the core context of its semantisization in the decade of the 2000s was the topos of liberal democracy. The new iteration of sovereignty that came about marking Putin's return for a third term, I argue in Chapter 4, has to do with the propagation of "spiritual-moral values" and an emphasis on sexual biopolitics. Tracing the emergence and deployment of the discourse of securitization of "traditional values" through the foundational work of a number of key organic intellectuals and moral entrepreneurs of Putinism, I am going to undertake a genealogical examination of the discursive and material preconditions of the 2012-2013 sexual panic that manifested themselves as early as the 1990s and 2000s. I argue that those need to be discussed in detail beyond writing them off as a mere manifestation of a "centuries long," "deeply entrenched" homophobia of the Russian society. In line with my genealogical approach, I will be mapping out a chain of contingent points of emergence that (re)invented, (re)activated, or reframed the narratives that project themselves onto the past to naturalize something in the present as "obvious," "logical," "unavoidable" or "always already there." At

stake here is a depsychologization of the "hidden essence" of the history of Russian sexual politics through a deconstruction of its common-sense evidentialities.

My research in this chapter unfolds within a framework conjured by a vast pool of literature on Russian "cultural sovereignty." Borrowing its insights and bearing concepts, expanding on them, and testing them against a detailed look at the discourses under analysis, this narrative will allow for me to delineate the concept of "sexual sovereignty" that brings in the added value of highlighting the biopolitical dimension of Putinism's "cultural turn."

4.1 Major Approaches to Russian Sexual Politics

Addressing internal ideological foundations of "sovereign democracy" and the varying signifieds of the underlying notion of sovereignty, Sharafurdinova (2014), Østbø (2017), Wilkinson (2014), Edenborg (2018), Tsygankov (2016), Stepanova (2015), Muravyova and Kondakov (2018) stress the underlying "cultural turn" (Robinson, 2017) or a shift to "moral sovereignty" as the basis for Putin's new, traditionalist "supermajority" in the wake of 2011-2012 urban protests. Anderson (2016), Agadjanian (2017), and Köllner (2016) take a closer look at the role of the Orthodox Church in preparing, lobbying for, and effecting this shift arguing that "'[t]raditional morality' has become the signature discourse of the Russian Orthodox Church which is attempting to construct 'tradition' by drawing upon a partly imagined ethos of imperial Russia and the late Soviet Union" (Agadjanian, p. 39). The contemporary West is perceived as posing an imminent threat to these values: the religious language of traditional morality is hence translated into a political rhetoric of patriotic solidarity. This "ideological rhetoric has direct political implications and analogies in the agenda of Putin's regime" (ibid.).

The case of the feminist group Pussy Riot is seen by many as inaugural or paradigmatic in this regard (e.g. Suchland, 2018; Sharafutdinova, 2014, Smyth and Soboleva, 2014). Sharafutdinova suggests that the trial was used by the Kremlin to advance the new discursive frame in the public domain, a "divide and rule political tactic, whereby the establishment has tried to marginalize the protesters from the rest of the Russian public that the regime is attempting to reconsolidate based on traditional, conservative values" (p. 615). Smyth and Soboleva (2014) argue that this reconsolidation strategy leans on three related mechanisms to relegitimise the regime and ensure a wide social support: coercion, alliance building, and symbolic politics. At heart of the latter is the systemic tendency at securitization of what has previously been confined to the domain of the private. The nodal point of this arrangement is the notion of "spiritual security" (Østbø, 2017). By "introducing a 'state of siege' to the sphere of fundamental moral values, this securitization aids the construction of a national identity that is incompatible with basic human rights," thus establishing "a new social contract in which modernization is sacrificed at the altar of security" (p. 200).

Demographic concerns and the corresponding moral panic reified in the ever threatened figure of the child function as a symbolic glue in this newly emphasized pro-natalist agenda of the Russian state. Wilkinson (2014), Borenstein (2019), Stepanova (2015), Makarychev and Medvedev (2015) emphasize the workings of the trope of the child as figure for political futurity in the discourse of traditional values. Traditional gender roles and family structure are seen as not just desirable but indispensable to ensure national survival conceived in natalist terms. This has paved the way for a biopolitical thematization of sexuality that reached its peak in 2012-2013 as several oblasts, including the Federal City of Saint-Petersburg, and then the federal centre passed laws banning "propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations."

Richard C. M. Mole sees homophobia as implicated in a nationalist ideology which premises the nation's survival upon adherence to traditional gender roles that ensure procreation. As a response to the "demasculinization" brought about by the postsocialist transition, in which many men found themselves unable to fulfil their traditional role as "breadwinners" (Riabov and Riabova, 2014), and the loss of the Cold War, the project of national "remasculinization" emerged as a source of a sense of purpose and continuity for a society in crisis. Thereby, traditional masculinity, along with the patriarchal family, becomes a nodal point of ethnonationalist discourses, while homosexuality is seen "not simply as deviating from but actually threatening the norms upon which the nation is built" (Mole, 2019, p. 8).

A vast literature on sexual citizenship and the uses of "political homophobia" in Russia (e.g. Kondakov, 2013, 2014, 2017; Stella, 2007; Stella and Nartova, 2015; Healey, 2017; Kon, 2010; Essig, 2014) addresses the heteronormative foundations of Russian sexual politics, sometimes tracing them to a long tradition of cultural and political homophobia in the country's history, both pre-revolutionary and Soviet alike. In his study of the Russian "cultural citizenship" of homosexuality in the span of the twentieth century, Baer (2016, p. 184) uncovers a set of qualities attributed to the figure of the homosexual in the Russian culture: suffering, meekness, and asexuality, overall associating it with qualities wholly incompatible with political activism. Since Perestroika, a new social contract has been in the works, aimed at replacing of the figure of the suffering homosexual, yet the task is hard since replacing "'spiritual homosexuality' with homosexuality that is sex-affirming and pleasure-seeking is open to the charge of co-opting Western models and propagating a 'global gay' culture, perceived as threatening to Russian traditional values" (Baer, 2009, 119).

4.2 Spiritual Supermajority

As I showed in Chapter 3 through the analysis of the discursive dynamic of the texts by Vladislav Surkov, one of Putinism's key organic intellectuals, the strengthening of the topos of sovereignty takes place over the decade of 2010s. It is symptomatic of the gradual augmentation of a set of internal and external antagonisms, which turned out to be conducive to the constitution of a new supermajority around the nodal point of "traditional values." This new supermajority is presented as enjoying a direct political representation by the sovereign, the figure of President Putin. Having served as one of the most prominent enunciators of this discursive shift, Surkov, nevertheless, was dismissed from the position of the chief of inner politics and replaced by Viacheslav Volodin, whose team was put in charge of effecting the corresponding reorientation of internal policy. Unlike Surkov, it is not in Volodin's habit to make public intellectual's interventions: he prefers to keep a low profile and say things that do not aspire to high-brow political analysis. Arguably, his best-known utterance made in the position of the Kremlin's coordinator of internal policy is: "If there is Putin, there is Russia. If there is no Putin, there is no Russia" (Galochka, 2014).

The early ideological manifestations of the discursive shift to "traditional values," I argue, begin to emerge in Putin's rhetoric in 2011-2013 and crystallise in his public appearances in the first years of his third term in office (2012 - 2018). However, the bifurcation point that marks the accompanying augmentation of the topos of sovereignty is visible in an earlier speech that is often argued to mark Russia's turn away from the West (Stent, 2008; Trenin, 2008; Baev, 2017): the Munich speech delivered on February 10, 2007. I consider these articulations a vantage points in the genealogy of the new spiritual supermajority founded upon a conservative political formation.

The speech delivered at the annual Munich Security Conference, as argued by Baev (2017), did not in fact contain much of what had not previously been enunciated by Russia's top executive officials. Yet, for many, particularly in the West, it marks the final crystallisation of a coherent, holistic anti-Westernist discourse Putin would stick to during the following decade (Stent, 2008). The speech was an "inflammatory" political commentary "detailing Russia's deep dissatisfaction with the world order" (Baev, 2017). Marking a decisive departure from the rhetoric of strategic partnership, its overall discursive effect is that of reactivation: Russia emerges as a country in a state of siege, the relations of antagonism with "the world's one master, one sovereign" — the US — have never been enunciated so clearly on the highest level of leadership:

> It is a world in which there is one master, one sovereign. And, at the end of the day, this is pernicious not only for all those within this system, but also for the sovereign himself because it destroys itself from within.
>
> And this certainly has nothing in common with democracy. Because, as you know, democracy is the power of the majority with consideration for the interests and opinions of the minority.
>
> Incidentally, Russia – we – are constantly being lectured about democracy. But for some reason those who teach us do not want to learn themselves (Vystuplenie, 2007).

Contesting Russia's perceived position of a subaltern on the world stage, national sovereignty figures as a central topos of the speech, supported by the topoi of respect, trust and transparency: "We expect that the OSCE be guided by its primary tasks and build relations with sovereign states based on respect, trust, and transparency" (ibid.).

According to Immanuel Wallerstein, a fundamental feature of sovereignty is that a claim to it must be recognized and accepted by others: sovereignty is, first of all, a question of political legitimacy which is premised upon reciprocal recognition: "Sovereignty is a hypothetical trade, in which two potentially conflicting sides, respecting de facto realities of power, exchange such

recognitions as their least costly strategy" (Wallerstein, 2004, p. 44). Now, as I showed in Section 3.3, Carl Schmitt conceived the political as an autonomous domain whose foundational distinction between friend and enemy need not be based on any substantive distinction pertaining to another domain, such as ethnicity, ethics, or aesthetics. However, as the same section makes clear, such a distinction is not drawn by the sovereign who is yet to emerge within the political moment. This move needs to be preceded by the instance of a political community whose prerogative it is to decide on the disposition of enmity.

As I showed in Sections 3.2 and 3.3, Pavlovsky's model of #SistemaRF brings about the flipping of this logic: sovereignty becomes a given that precedes and inaugurates the political community that is dissolved in it and does not possess a substantive power of agency on its own. In order to inaugurate such a community, #SistemaRF (the sovereign) hence needs an "ironic ideology," that is, a tactical arsenal of substantive distinctions. These distinctions crystallise in a nodal point drawing a political frontier against which the community may conceive itself. In this chapter, I argue that such an "ironic ideology" was constructed in the years 2011-2014 and its formation consisted in a "moral turn" whereby, retroactively, a Schmittean sovereignty was established around a discourse of "traditional values."

* * *

Since 2001, the Kremlin, in cooperation with Russia's major television channels, holds an annual, special television Q&A show, *Direct Line with Vladimir Putin*, broadcast by all major TV and radio stations and facilitated by the President's Press Secretary. During the program, Russian citizens ask Putin questions on the telephone and from the studio audience, in live stand-ups from different Russian cities, towns, and villages, and online. Their geographical distribution is to represent the touch with what Surkov calls the "deep people." A single session

usually lasts for several hours, and the questions asked normally reflect a broad palette of the current political, societal, economic and global agenda.

As has been reported by independent Russian media on multiple occasions (Borodina, 2012; Slobodchikova, 2016; RBC, 2016) the Direct Line is always preceded by rehearsals in which several hundred people from all over the country get auditioned as to the questions they are planning to ask. The questions selected are then edited and reformulated: participants are often offered different questions from those they themselves came up with; then the final group is selected. Citizens who participate through live stand-ups also undergo a special selection, after which they are given questions that should be asked when they go on air. Since 2008, the program format allows guests in the studio to ask pre-coordinated questions.

Most questions asked during the Direct Line observe the political and societal agenda of the moment as gatekept by the country's major official mass media. However, a lot of the respondents are also given the space to complain of local bureaucracy, corruption, and to communicate personal grievances. The President is then positioned as a careful listener who gives direct orders to the corresponding government or local officials to solve the issue as if the "efficient leader." Follow-ups to these grievances are usually presented in news programs of the main federal TV channels, addressing how timely and satisfactorily the grievance was addressed. The pleader then extends a warm gratitude to the Head of State. Often, Putin gets asked highly personal questions (such as about his dog, his leisure activities, sports, or his personal tastes), to which he usually responds with humour and (studied) simplicity.

According to Putin himself, the Direct Line is the most powerful sociological survey that allows citizens to convey their position and concerns to the country's leadership (Fedotova, 2017). Having no direct analogues in most liberal democracies where a dialogue between the senior leadership and citizens is normally mediated by the press, the talk show's format may be

considered in the context of the discussion in Section 3.3.4 in which I presented Vladislav Surkov's model of direct representation whereby "the sovereign" needs no institutional mediation to initiate a dialogue with "the people." At the same time, the pre-selection and the rewording or discarding of questions to be asked, as well as the overall careful choreography of the show as evidenced in its smooth dramaturgy untypical of unscripted live shows, supports the thesis that the political community that lends legitimacy to the "sovereign" is in fact carefully tailored and channelled to meet the representational needs of the Head of State.

Yet another format of Putin's public relations is the annual press-conference where it is professional journalists rather than the "people" who ask the President questions about domestic and international politics. While Russian journalists usually abstain from tough questions and inquire the President in line with the official discourse, foreign journalists usually enjoy more freedom, embodying the "outside opponent" figure and setting the agenda in line with what is considered to be of interest to foreign (predominantly Western) public. It is thus characteristic that the discourse of traditional values made the first extensive appearance after having been institutionalised in the federal law not in the Direct Line, but at the press conference. The corresponding question, tellingly, was asked by a foreign journalist rather than a member of the "people." Jill Dougherty, a CNN correspondent, addressed Putin with the following question:

> Vladimir Vladimirovich, I worked here in the late 1990s and early 2000s. And, upon returning here now, I noticed that much attention is now paid to religion and moral values. I don't remember that. I would like to know why it has become so important to you. And why is criticising Western values so important to you? (*Press-konferencija*, 2013)

The answer Putin came up with offers a comprehensive summary of the newly formed ideological apparatus of traditional values, and I will quote it in full:

> Let us start with the latter. What is important for me is not to criticise Western values — it's important for me to protect our population from certain quasi-values that are very difficult for our citizens and our people to perceive.

> The question is not to criticise someone, the question is to protect us from the rather aggressive behaviour of certain social groups, that, in my opinion, not only live as they want, but they also aggressively impose their point of view on other people and in other countries. That explains my position on some issues that you hinted at.
>
> As for our traditional values, I really think that we should pay more attention to them due to simple circumstances.
>
> It is known that in the Soviet Union one ideology dominated. And no matter how we relate to it, there were quite understandable, essentially quasi-religious, values. The Code of the Builder of Communism, if you read it, is a mere copy of the Bible: do not kill, do not steal, do not wish your neighbour's wife. In the code of the builder of communism, everything is there, only stated in a primitive language and monstrously abridged.
>
> This code has long reposed in the Lord; it does not exist. A new generation of Russian citizens, young people, generally do not know what it is. And only those very traditional values that you referred to can replace it. Without these values, society is degenerating. Of course, we must return to them, understand their value and move forward on the basis of these values.
>
> […] This, of course, is a conservative approach, but let me remind you once again Berdyaev's words that conservatism is not something that impedes the movement forward and upward, it is rather what prevents the movement backward and downward. This, in my opinion, is a very true formula. I would like to endorse this formula, in fact. There is nothing unusual for us here. Russia is a country with a very ancient profound culture. Not only focusing on the future, but also relying on this tradition, on this culture, we can feel confident, go forward, and develop (ibid.).

The population of Russia is thus articulated as standing in need of protection from a threat that, referring to the existential ambiguity thesis I put forward in Section 3.3.4, is located both inside (as in Foucault's war of races) and outside of the body of the people. This community is in disarray, in a state of a value vacuum that came about as a result of the decomposition of the Soviet morality that is articulated as but an historical avatar of a value package that is eternal and religious in essence. Thus, a continuous tradition of moral sovereignty (the "ancient profound culture") is conjured that serves as the only conceivable way of moving forward and upward.

The same signification is echoed in Putin's speech at the Valdai forum[14] made in the same year.

> Russia is not only experiencing the objective pressure of globalisation on its national identity, but also the consequences of two national catastrophes that happened in the twentieth century, when the dissolution of the state was faced twice. As a result, we received a terrible blow to the nation's cultural and spiritual code. We experienced a disruption of tradition, a disruption of our continuous history. We faced the demoralisation of society, a deficit of trust and responsibility (Zasedanie, 2013).

A further hegemonic move transcends the particularity of Russia's subject position in a universalising move. Russia is not only acting on behalf of its own tradition — rather, it is articulated to be successfully standing up to the challenged the Western world has willingly fallen prey to:

> We see how many Euro-Atlantic countries have in fact chosen the path of cutting ties with their roots, including their Christian values, which are the foundation of the western civilisation. They abandon moral foundations and all traditional identities – national, cultural, religious, and even sexual. Their policies place large families and same-sex partnerships, belief in God and belief in Satan, on the same level. At the extreme end of political correctness, they seriously consider registering political parties that openly intend to propagate paedophilia. People in many countries of Europe are ashamed to speak about their religious beliefs [...] And these countries are aggressively trying to impose this model on everybody, on the entire world. I am certain that this is a direct path to degradation and primitivisation, to a deep demographic and moral crisis (ibid.).

The following section will offer a genealogical study of the ways intellectual grounds for this discursive regime and its rhetorical inventory came about.

4.3 Genealogy of Russia's Moral Sovereignty Discourse

> Russia is not merely a country, but a separate civilization. It is a multinational country with a lot of traditions, cultures, religions.
>
> Vladimir Putin (vesti.ru, 2020)

[14] Valdai Forum was established during Putin's second term; "the conference plays a key role in the Russian government's effort to burnish Putin's image and influence outsiders" (Roxburgh, 2013).

Although the narrative of traditional values that forms the basis of the discourse of moral sovereignty was solidified during the "pre-Crimean" years of 2011-2014 in response to the need to construct a new supermajority around the figure of President Putin involving a set of internal and external antagonisms, it did not come about from scratch. This section argues that early conditions of this shift emerged immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union and Russia's transition to liberal democracy. The construction of the Russian "spiritual-moral" tradition was an eclectic process — it drew from various, often heterogeneous sources, discourses, and narratives. In an attempt to delineate a genealogy of this crystallisation, this section lays out the key sources and junction points of this process.

4.3.1 Contradictory Political Alliances

The term "moral entrepreneur" was coined by sociologist Howard S. Becker (1997). Theorising the ways various actors engage in and drive the social dynamics of exclusion/inclusion, Becker's conceptual framework helps explore the relationship between law and morality, by highlighting the ways certain social identities come to be regarded as deviant and excluded. Moral entrepreneurs perform their functions by attributing/removing negative or positive labels to certain behaviours.

Many authors stress the role of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) as a leading moral entrepreneur in solidifying the early discursive prerequisites of the shift to moral sovereignty in Russia (Stepanova, 2015; Köllner, 2016; Anderson, 2016; Agajanian, 2017). As the key proponent of spiritual indigeneity and tradition, the church has been advocating for a version of a continuous Russian tradition since as early as its gradual inclusion into the public discourse during Mikhail Gorbachev's Perestroika over 1985-1991 (Vorontsova and Filatov, 1994).

Agajanian argues that, since the 1990s, these topoi "were voiced in various contexts and combinations, with various degrees of a specifically religious component. The emotional tone of this rhetoric has been continually increasing" (Agajanian, 2017, p. 17). This agenda has been projected beyond the ecclesiastic domains into the secular spheres of society, politics and biopolitics.

The relationship of the Orthodox Church with the Soviet state throughout the latter's existence was anything but stable or peaceful (Ellis, 1986; Pospielovsky, 1998; the following brief historical account is based on these sources). It was only for the first few months after the October Revolution of 1917 that the Bolsheviks refrained from obstructing the activities of the church. On January 23, 1918, it was separated from the state, deprived of the rights of a legal entity and property, and faith was declared a private matter of citizens. Following that, the church experienced a series of schisms inspired by the authorities.

In 1927, Metropolitan Sergius issued an epistle recognising the Soviet Union as the church's "civil homeland," called on the church members for loyalty to the state and demanded full loyalty from overseas clergy. The message led to protests and refusal of subordination by a number of groups within the Patriarchal Church, as well as to the "termination of relations" with the Patriarchate of the majority of Russian bishops in exile.

The year 1943 saw a noticeable correction of the policy of the Soviet state in relation to the Patriarchal Church as Joseph Stalin decided to win over the religious share of the USSR population. Thousands of churches opened in the territory occupied by the German army continued to operate after its liberation by Soviet troops.

In 1947, the anti-religious policy was tightened at the ideological and propaganda level. During 1947-1957, thirty eight monasteries of the Russian Orthodox Church were shut down. A new

wave of anti-religious policy began during the reign of Nikita Khrushchev (1959-1964); the hard line persisted afterwards. A significant number of clergymen participated in the dissident movement during that period.

Since 1987, within the framework of Mikhail Gorbachev's *glasnost'* policy, control over religious life was liberalized and restrictions on the activities of religious associations were lifted. An important milestone was the year 1988 which saw the celebration of the millennium of the Baptism of Rus and the holding of the jubilee local council of the Russian Orthodox Church. The ban on television coverage of religious life in the USSR was lifted. In 1988, the Russian Orthodox Church had 8,500 parishes and 76 dioceses in the USSR, as well as 120 foreign parishes and 20 monasteries.

In the turmoil of the first post-Soviet decade of 1990 with its overall political and moral disarray, the ROC's politics, despite the unprecedented institutional rise, were mainly subdued and introspective, overall characterised by assuming a "protective position of a vulnerable minority resisting an alien world" (Agajanian, 2017, p. 20). Then, gradually throughout the late 1990s and early 2000, the ROC rose to a new role of an outspoken moral entrepreneur with a claim to represent a moral majority of a society that had until recently been undergoing the post-Soviet secularisation. This process was accompanied by a steady rise in the overall approval among the population of the church's solidifying standing (Tulsky, 2000).

Yet, the moral entrepreneurship of the ROC cannot be argued to constitute a complete break with the militantly atheist Soviet ethos. Rather than enacting a decisive break with the Soviet moral legacy, the church has effectively re-Christianised and subsumed this ethos into a "longer continuity of Russian Christian history, which has been associated, if only anachronistically, with both the pre-Revolutionary imagined Gemeinschaft and the Soviet collectivistic conservatism" (Agajanian, 2017, p. 7).

Jarrett Zigon (2011) discusses the anomie of the first post-Soviet decade in Russia as a struggle over competing moral frameworks. The more conservative forces, including the church, saw the years of transition as a reign of materialism and individualism propagated by the western culture of popular entertainment accompanied by a rise of publicly expressed sexuality. Western liberalism was experienced as a program of shameless propagation of permissiveness in the pursuit of individual self-interest (Stepanova, 2015). Amid this anomie, the conservative forces had to turn to the near past for two main reasons: to find the material for conjuring a new narrative of traditional values, and to be able to connect with a broader support base that comprised the law-abiding Soviet citizens of yesterday. Paradoxically, hence, while the Church spent the decade of 1990s liberating itself from the institutional and moral grip of communism, which indeed was seen as a positive change, it also "actually served as one of the channels of transmitting continuity with the Soviet past, thereby assuming some substantial elements of the late Soviet, predominantly conservative ethos, in the sphere of morality" (Agadjanian 2017, p. 5).

Sonja Luehrmann (2011), too, argues that the late Soviet "atheist didacticism" with its inherent faith in standardised programs of personal transformation as solutions to wider social problems was "recycled" and renarrated into the post-soviet Orthodox rhetoric. However, this seeming continuity has been argued to be at odds with the lived realities of the late Soviet period. Alexander Agadjanian, Alexei Yurchak (2013), and Yuri Levada (2003) show that the late Soviet ethos was characterised by a wide-spread double-think where a clear-cut line existed between the totalising ideological doxa of the state and the actual habitus of practical behaviour of Soviet citizens. This double-think, nevertheless, is not to be thought of as intentional hypocrisy — Yurchak theorizes this subversion of the Soviet ideological narratives in the process of their "trickling top down" as a Butlerian (Butler, 2006) "performative shift" by which Soviet citizens were partly reclaiming personal agency under the seemingly highly omniscient,

authoritarian regime. This resulted in a widespread discrepancy between public aspirations and private behaviours. Agadjanian draws a tentative list of norms in question and their corresponding lived realities, pointing out that the church has almost always preferred to rely on the official ideals rather than the actual habitus:

> the rhetoric of the 'solid Soviet family' as the basis of a stable society, in spite of, and in contradiction with, the high rates of divorce and abortion; a tacit inequality of gender roles, in spite of official propaganda to the contrary; an emphasis on responsibilities rather than rights; an emphasis on intra-collective social control and solidarity (both as a mechanism of power and an accepted ideal); an emphasis on the priority of the 'spiritual' over the 'material'; sexual (self)restraint; homophobia; and the subjugation of individual interests and expressions to the collective good (p. 7).

Furthermore, even the process of reception of the official Soviet ethos could not but be partial and fastidious[15]: after all, the Soviet society officially conceived itself as a scienticist, progressivist formation with a highly rational biopolitical approach to the population development (Geyer and Fitzpatrick, 2008). Thus, Agadjanian warns that:

> while considering the resemblances between current Orthodox morality rhetoric and late Soviet ethics, we must understand the highly selective process of references used by today's church leaders and activists […]. In some cases, such as homophobia, the continuity seems to be unquestionable. By contrast, in the case of abortion, today's church moralists would find no support within Soviet ethics since abortion was hardly seen as a moral topic at any level of the Soviet ethos (p. 6).

Crucially, on the rhetorical level, the thesis of "continuity" as enacted in these borrowings from the official Soviet didacticism is not specifically linked to the Soviet past, rather it is extended into the pre-Soviet time thus including the Soviet period into a longer, continuous, tradition of moral sovereignty (Stepanova, 2015). Agadjanian references the Patriarch's address to the Russian parliament in early 2015, in which he "firmly integrated the Soviet period into the narrative of uninterrupted, millennial continuity" (p. 5).

[15] Which allows, as per Pavlovsky, to view it in the overall framework of the "ironic ideology" whereby the articulated continuity is not inherent to #SistemaRF but constitutes an "on-call" rhetorical avatar of an iteration of sovereignty.

In light of the above discussion, it does not come as a surprise that this reception and reframing of the Soviet tradition by the ROC is not at odds with the official rhetoric of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF), the biggest opposition force in the 1990s and 2000s Russia and the direct successor to the ruling class of the Soviet Union. In the sphere of morality and values, the CPRF stands in firm continuity with the late Soviet project of "conservative modernisation" (the term of Vishnevsky, 1998) upholding its socially conservative, puritan moral politics.

The all-time leader of the CPRF Gennadii Zyuganov, in his 1997 autobiography entitled *My Russia,* writes:

> I believe the ideology [of the new popular movement] must be based on national security, preservation of traditional values, and ideals of social justice, truth, and goodness. Of course, it is not possible to create a program that would entirely suit everybody. But the suggested basic values have already become a foundation for our unity (Zyuganov, 2015, pt. 1).

The floating signifier of traditional values as a foundation for Russia's statehood has consistently figured in policy papers of the CPRF throughout the whole period of its existence (Nikolenko, 2017). In the official discourse of the party (the quote below is taken from an election year CPRF policy statement), it mainly appears in collocation with the nodal point of patriotism — a key ideological junction of KPRF. In its consistently popular discourse, the CPFR has constructed a hegemonic frontier that separates "the Russian people" from the corrupting influence of the "bourgeois West" through relations of antagonism and around its inherently Marxist set of topoi such as the class struggle and social contradictions:

> Since the moment of its foundation, the Communist Party has taken a completely clear and unambiguous stance towards defending national, family values, spiritual shrines of the Russian people destroyed and mocked by the bourgeois regime. It is all the more relevant for us today to give a class analysis of those social forces and those contradictions that turn the attitude towards traditional values into a matter of current politics, into a conflict of interests between key social-class forces (CPRF, 2012).

Crucially, the ROC, as well as the other main organised religions, has figured in the discourse as an ally conceived through a relation of representation. As in the case of the ROC discourse, the articulated continuity extends beyond the late Soviet ethos into the longer history of the Russian people.

> The Soviet Union became a virtually renewed form of existence of historical Russia, which, under the Bolshevik-Stalinist rule, not only regained its territorial integrity and nation-state sovereignty, but also managed to qualitatively develop specific national forms of life and internal organization (ibid.).

While implying a different set of topoi (science, evolution, progress), this rhetoric bears a relation of equivalence with the religious discourse:

> In traditional religions, there are fixed forms of social relations, ethical norms, stereotypical models of relations between man and woman, parent and child, teacher and student, elder and younger, that have passed the test of time and have proved their ability to ensure sustainable reproduction of human communities. From the point of view of a believer, this is explained by the fact that God gave people the most reasonable and appropriate laws for life on Earth. From the point of view of the materialistic methodology of cognition, too, this is not surprising: in the form of religion (and more broadly, traditions as such), the fruits of thousands of years of social evolution were crystallized and framed, the result of natural selection that enshrined those norms and rules that best ensured survival and procreation of the human community in ever-changing conditions. These two explanations, by the way, do not contradict each other and may well turn out to be identical, equivalent ways of describing the same phenomenon, similar to the particle-wave dualism of the electron. (ibid.).

Crucially, on the side of the "bourgeois corruption," we find the "leftie" forces of cultural revolution and progressivism: a "genetic kinship between 'market-based' fundamentalist liberalism and anti-traditional leftism" bear another important antagonism:

> If the Stalinist style of socialism constituted an overcoming of the February bourgeois turmoil and a means of a qualitative restoration of centuries-long Russia, socialism in the Trotskyist style was a radical continuation of February, bringing in the danger of an absolute, final destruction of all traditional values and shrines, everything that constituted historical Russia. It is precisely in this that the fundamental difference and fundamental opposition of the two political directions consists, the directions that go by the same names of socialism and communism (ibid.).

Although having a firm discursive presence, as I pointed out, from as early as the first years of the existence of the new, Post-Soviet Russia, a reactivation of this rhetoric comes about in the years of 2011-2013 when this agenda receives a strong populist traction in the public discourse, thus including the CPRF into the new hegemonic formation of "spiritual supermajority."

4.3.2 Civilizational Critique of Liberal Universalism

Secular intellectual elements shaping the rhetorical inventory of Putin's cultural turn were articulated by the Russian philosophical and political movement known as Eurasianism, and its 1990s revival sometimes referred to as neo-Eurasianism (Larielle, 2004) or new Eurasianism (Peunova, 2008). Having originated shortly after the Bolshevik revolution and flourished in the post-October Russian emigre community, Eurasianism's ideological roots date back to the imperial Slavophile movement (Laruelle, 2004; 2008). In the context of the destabilization of the first decade of the post-Soviet Russia, neo-Eurasianism came up with a geopolitical solution for the territory of the ex-USSR. It argues for the existence of a third space, a geopolitical continent of its own between East and West and upholds the idea of "an organic unity of cultures born in the zone of symbiosis between Russian, Turkic, Muslim, and even Chinese worlds" (Laruelle, 2004, p. 115). In this framework, Russia is argued to be at the heart of a distinct, unique civilization rather than, as posited by the long rival tradition of Westernizers, be but a particular form of culture within the European family. This uniqueness is embodied in the geopolitical concept of Eurasia and can only be expressed in a multi-ethnic, Russia-led empire (ibid.).

Neo-Eurasianism, Mariane Laruelle argues, "is the main ideology born among the different Russian conservative movements in the 1990s" (ibid.), and the political rhetoric of Putinism

owes much to its civilizational critique of Western liberalism (Horvath, 2016). This section will discuss the key ideas of three prominent Neo-Eurasianists Aleksandr Panarin, Aleksandr Dugin and Natalia Narochnitskaya in the context of the genealogy of the new Russia's rhetoric of moral sovereignty, before I return to Eurasianists in a larger historical context in Chapter 6 to argue that their thought constitutes a vivid discursive symptom of the postcolonial paleoconservatism of the Russian right.

Similar to the ideas of the European proponents of the New Right, neo-Eurasianists uphold a traditionalist outlook and call for the return to their version of Russian values and spiritual foundations. This vision is sedimented in the conception of *russkiy mir* ("Russian world"): a perceived social totality associated with panslavism with an imperial, magnified version of the Russian culture at its core. This construction extends beyond the geographic borders of the Russian Federation or its historic predecessors and comprises both the Russian diaspora and the Russian culture together with its influence upon the larger world (Tishkov, 2008). Building such a foundation necessarily entails an "imaginative ideological labour that brings together disparate cultural elements, selected historical memories, and interpretations of experiences" (Suny and Kennedy, 2001).

Aleksandr Panarin (1940–2003) was a Soviet and Russian political philosopher and, arguably the most significant advocate of imperialist, or "civilizationist," nationalism in Russia (Peunova, 2008). This type of nationalism stands in contrast to ethnic Russian nationalism that is characterised by an anti-imperialist and often (and, in the recent years, increasingly) westernizing agenda founded upon the idea that the non-Russian periphery of the RF takes more than it contributes and stands in the way of the ethnic Russians building a "normal" nation state. Contrarily, civilizationist nationalism is not content with the perspective of an independent nation state conceived in the framework of Western political normalcy. Instead, it attributes to

Russia the mission of holding together a multi-ethnic civilizational form organised into a vast empire.

Peunova characterises Panarin's later oeuvre as a "mish-mash of culturalist, particularist, anti-liberal, anti-Western, imperialist, anti-globalist, Russian Orthodox and geopolitical ideas that qualify him as an extreme nationalist" (p. 408). Panarin's thought is marked by a ferocious anti-modernism: in his perspective, the price of the West-imposed modernity with its inherent globalism is the dehumanization and commercialisation of life and a deconstruction of sovereign nation states with their cultural indigeneity. The remedy for this malaise Panarin saw in the primacy of culture over economics and preservation of the national cultural heritage. Such a "natural" formation would be a collectivity brought together around a shared cultural ground where geography, nature, and history form a synergy (Panarin, 1994, pp. 241-250).

Like other Eurasianists, Panarin conceived Russia as the core of a separate civilization distinct from both Europe and Asia, but with more affinity with the latter (ibid.). Geographically, it corresponds to the borders of the former USSR; at its core it has a shared cultural heritage that dates back both to the imperial and Soviet pasts conceived as a continuous process of becoming[16]. Despite the changing avatars of statehood, Russia has always been a unique multi-ethnic empire with a messianic mission and should remain so, rejecting futile efforts to become a nation state.

[16] For the most part, Paranarin avoids rigorous work of reflection on the causes of the collapse of the both Russia-led empires. However, extrapolating the typical stance of Eurasianists (including Narochnitskaya) on this issue, one could infer that these thinkers do not see the fall of the empires as resulting from inner contradictions at the heart of their multi-ethnic basis. Rather, the failures are seen to result from geopolitical confrontations, ill will, betrayal of the elites, poor governance and, in the case of the Soviet Union, the ultimate lack of a spiritual foundation in the form of a continuity with the Orthodox civilization.

The source and carrier of this natural heritage is not the intelligentsia or the elite, but the people (*narod*). Similarly to Surkov's *deep people*, Panarin's *narod* is articulated as a sole, unmediated guardian of collective consciousness, a source of a centuries-long continuous tradition of value integrity that can only be preserved through an ethos of collectivism and communality (ibid.). This thesis connects, at the same time, with the Soviet ethos of collectivity, as well as the pre-revolutionary imperial idea of *sobornost*, a spiritual community of many jointly living people.

A similar topos is found in the oeuvre of another vivid representative of neo-Eurasianism, Aleksandr Dugin whose thought is often characterised as "fascist" (Shekhovstsov, 2008; Umland, 2008). In his book *The Eurasian Path as a National Idea,* Dugin writes:

> Various historical and philosophical schools argue about who, in the final analysis, is the subject of history. This question remains open. But when we talk about the country, about the historical community, about culture, about the form of a specific civilization, we mean the subject of history that we are considering is "the people". Types of statehood, economic mechanisms, cultural models, ideological superstructures are changing, succeeding each other through generations. But something remains constant through all these transformations. This constant value, living for many centuries and in vast spaces, is the people. Speaking and thinking about Russia, we think not so much about the state, but about that inner life of the State, which is the people. The state is only a form, the people are the content (Dugin, 2002, Foreword).

Predictably, Panarin and Dugin's thought is marked by an articulate anti-Americanism. Panarin's criticism of the US is played out through the concept of the "Protestant North," which he calls the "referent group" for the Occident and which is defined by "aggressive political influence of Americanism, a culture of hedonistic individualism, hostile to certain collectivist values, to collectivist heroism and asceticism" (Panarin as quoted in Peunova, 2008, p. 414). Any attempt at a rapprochement with America could be fatal for Russia for, as a passive recipient of Western values, which has marked Russian history at certain points (e.g. during Perestroika), it would always be subject to "demoralization" and "corruption." Russia, therefore, can only preserve its identity if it resorted to a cultural autarchy.

Both Panarin and Dugin see the universalist discourse of human rights as a US-inspired sham that covers "real" American interests (Kipp, 2002). This critique was taken up by, arguably, the most representative and respectable contemporary voice of "soft" neo-Eurasianism Natalia Narochnitskaya, a historian and diplomat, who currently (as of 2018) serves as director of the Paris-based Institute of Democracy and Cooperation that has strong connections to the Russian state and is referred to as the flagship of the Kremlin's soft power (Horvath, 2016, p. 869), although its exact sources of funding remain unclear (WikiLeaks, 2008).

The institute describes its aims as being:

> part of the debate about the relationship between state sovereignty and human rights; about East-West relations and the place of Russia in Europe; about the role of non-governmental organisations in political life; about the interpretation of human rights and the way they are applied in different countries; and about the way in which historical memory is used in contemporary politics[17].

Narochnitskaya and her work remain underresearched. Yet, Hovarth defines her as no less than "the architect and builder of the Putin regime's human rights doctrine":

> No other polemicist argued so insistently that human rights was a weapon wielded by the West against Russia. No other scholar made such a seminal contribution to the fabrication of a historical justification for Russia's civilisational uniqueness. No other lay thinker cooperated so closely with the Orthodox Church to mould that ideological blueprint into a 'tradition'. No other representative of the Russian state waged such a tireless struggle in the international arena to promote the cause of 'civilisational' cultural relativism and to undermine the post- Cold War human rights consensus (Horvath, 2016, p. 888).

Like Panarin, Narochnitskaya considers human rights to be a rhetorical tool to conceal the realpolitik of the Euro-Atlantic West (Narochnitskaya, 2008). Having enjoyed a revival and the role of a discursive foundation in the Russia of the 1990s, the topos of human rights gradually deteriorated under Putin (Wilkinson, 2014). Gradually into the decade of the 2000s, "human

[17] Quoted from the IDC official website: http://www.idc-europe.org/index.asp/en (unavailable as of April 2022)

rights defenders" (*pravozashchnitiki*) begin to figure in the public discourse as a negative signifier infused with xenophobic connotations. The international human rights movement with its emphasis on individual rights as a weapon against abuse by the state increasingly figure as a kind of Troyan horse that is used to smuggle foreign values into the national polity. Narochnitskaya and the Institute of Democracy and Cooperation played a pivotal role in assembling an uncanny coalition of authoritarian states, developing economies, and indigenous peoples to oppose the Western version of human rights on the international stage (Horvath, 2016). Their attacks mainly focused on the generation of rights connected to gender and sexuality, weaponizing the rhetorical inventory of cultural relativism and dismantling the universalist consensus dominant in the international human rights movement. At a Russia-funded United Nations conference, Narochnitskaya publicly confronted the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay; Horvarth views this exchange as marking the beginning of the Kremlin's campaign of promoting "traditional values" in the global arena (ibid.).

Summarizing Narochnitskaya's contribution to the Putin regime's assault on universalism and the solidifying of the alternative framework of civilizational nationalism, Horvath identifies three aspects of her work:

> First, as a public intellectual, she fabricated a Russian 'civilisational' critique of human rights, which she reinforced through collaboration with leading clerics to enshrine its basic tenets in a series of statements on rights promulgated by the Russian Orthodox Church. Second, as a political figure, she used her position in the Duma and in Kremlin-aligned NGOs to lobby for the adoption of an official human rights doctrine, which Russian diplomats would in turn use to challenge the West at an international level. Third, as a practitioner of 'soft diplomacy', Narochnitskaya brought erudition and patriotic zeal to Russian parliamentary and diplomatic missions that confronted the West over human rights in international forums (pp. 869-870).

Similar to other "invented traditions," the vision of the "Russian civilisation" commodified by Neo-Eurasianists collocated their version of Russia's cultural heritage with the Russian nation

to exclude any dissidence from the body of the "Russian people" as a Troyan horse of the US-imposed universalism that functions as a smoke screen for aggressive geopolitical expansionism. The same discursive frontier I discerned in the rhetoric of Surkov, the Russian Orthodox Church and the CPRF, is thus articulated by resort to the nodal points of the "Russian civilisation" and *narod* against the constitutive outside "the West." In their works, Neo-Eurasianists stress the discursive subject "the people" as the destinator of the value package. However, until the emergence of the Putinite cultural shift, neither Eurasianism nor the Orthodox-Communist hybrid alliance had, historically, enjoyed the role of an official, institutionally sedimented or mainstream ideology in the USSR or the Russian Federation. Being imperialist rather than ethnic nationalist constructions, they were selectively summoned into the official discourse at a time when there was a demand for a new iteration of an imperialist supermajority. Neo-Eurasianism's imperialist overtones and its ready-made construction of *narod* have played the role of a filler of the ideological vacuum in the place of a never-born nation state. The underlying discursive logic, thus, agrees with Gefter's model of the society of power: figuring as the discursive destinator, *narod* gets subjectivated in and through these selective articulations.

As a presidential candidate in early 2012, Vladimir Putin published a series of policy essays that focused on various spheres of the state policy and development. One of the essays entitled *Russia: The National Question* and published in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* (Putin, 2012) constitutes, arguably, the most vivid case when the neo-Eurasianist rhetoric enters the Russian political discourse at a top level. In the essay, Putin declared his mission to strengthen the "civilization-state" (*gosudarstvo-tsivilizatsiya*), in order "to fulfil the task of integrating organically different ethnic groups and confessions." To proceed with this, he called for an active participation of Russia's four "traditional religions," which, despite their differences, have the same foundations: "basic, common ethical, moral, spiritual values: charity, mutual aid, truth, justice,

respect for elders, ideals of family and work. These landmark values are impossible to replace with anything else, and we must strengthen them" (ibid.).

4.4 From Moral Particularism to Sexual Sovereignty

As I argued above, Russian politics underwent a hegemonic reconfiguration since 2011. The official political discourse shifted towards what is called right-wing populism (Wilkinson, 2014; Fish, 2017), conservatism (Kaylan, 2014) or nationalism (Riabov and Riabova, 2014; Wilkinson, 2014). The global economic crisis of 2008 affected Russia and resulted in the deterioration of living standards (Klapper et. al., 2013). Putin's return for a third term in office in 2012 was followed by a sudden and powerful rise of the urban middle class oppositional movement (Koesel and Bunce 2012; Robertson, 2013).

The reconfiguration I referred to consisted in an intensive centralization and consolidation of the political space and toughening of an anti-liberal and anti-Western rhetoric in the public discourse, similarly to Edenborg's (2020) observations. This rhetoric eventually crystallised in a new hegemonic discourse built inter alia around the nodal point of "traditional values," and around an anti-modernist (anti-Western), normative and moralizing biopolitical discourse on sexuality and gender.

"20 years of Putin," a joint project of the online media dekoder.org and the Research Centre for Eastern Europe at the University of Bremen, has conducted a longitudinal analysis of the Russian president's public rhetoric over the span of twenty years. According to the data that the website generates for the request "traditional values", the years 2011-2013 were marked by the peaking of the collocation "traditional values" in President Putin's public rhetoric. Before the

sudden surge in 2011-2012, this collocation barely figured in his speeches, interviews, and public statements indexed by the project.

I shall interrogate this reconfiguration, the process of gradual crystallisation of the moral particularism described above into a biopolitical discourse of sexual sovereignty in the following section. I shall argue that this process was played out by a securitization of "traditional," or, as they are often referred to, "spiritual-moral" values that paved the way for a discourse of moral panic concerning the sexual behaviour of Russian citizens and the overall problematic of "public hygiene."

4.4.1 Securitization of "Spiritual-Moral Values"

In the year 2015, the Russian Security Council adopted the new Russian National Security Strategy (Strategija, 2015), marking the process of securitization of the "spiritual-moral values" in the political imaginary. Unlike the previous editions of the NSS, the 2015 document, for the first time within the Russian official policy discourse, articulates "spiritual-moral values" (SMV) as a matter of state security. However, attempts to securitize SMV root back to the early post-Soviet period (Østbø, 2017) and were from the very beginning used as a way of justifying political measures such as the multiple proposals at the regulation of abortion proposed by the ROC. Reflecting the genealogical examination of the moral sovereignty discourse conducted in Section 4.3, during the decade of 1990s and the early 2000s it was mainly the CPRF and the Russian Orthodox Church who made references to the need of safeguarding spiritual-moral values as the desired countermove of what they saw as the decay and disintegration of society. Since 2012, statements linking the SMV with state security have been made regularly by top

political actors in order to justify both routine policy and extraordinary political measures (Mitrofanova, 2019).

The 2011-2013 wave of protests around the 2012 national elections, saving Putin's third term in office, was reacted to with a crackdown on the opposition and civil society. Since the Kremlin habitually understands political decent as inevitably inspired and funded by the Western secret services conspiring with Russian liberals (Yablokov, 2018), the violent measures were reinforced with a surge in the anti-Western, traditionalist symbolic politics that gave a new traction to the rhetorical inventory of SMV. This arrangement was to redefine the hegemonic frontier separating the Kremlin's loyal constituency ("spiritual supermajority") on the one hand, and the marginalized and stigmatized opposition labelled as "the West's agents" on the other, excluding them from the national body.

This move is seen as part of the regime's relegitimation. It is called the "civilizational turn" by Tsygankov (2016) and defined as a shift toward "sovereign morality" (Sharafutdinova, 2014). However, Østbø (2017) takes issue with this approach and argues that it fails to capture the full scale and meaning of the shift. In his view, the strategy is rather aimed at preventing the spread of values produced by modernization and at conceiving a new social contract.

> Unwilling to initiate meaningful reforms, the regime responded by "identifying" threats […] to what were presented as Russia's traditional values. According to the regime's narrative, the very foundations of the Russian way of life were in danger, and extraordinary measures (in breach of fundamental rights) were called for. By spreading fear and anxiety, the regime sought to establish a new social contract: in exchange for tolerating repression and relative economic hardship, the people were offered "security." (Østbø, 2017, p. 202)

Within constructionist theories of international relations, securitization is viewed as the process whereby actors of state politics problematize certain discursive objects into matters of security. Such a problematisation constitutes an extreme version of politicization that enables extraordinary measures to be used in the name of the population security. The discursive object

is thereby framed as pertaining to a special kind of politics or positioned above politics. A *securitizing move* occurs whenever a political actor articulates an object as an existential threat – elevating the issue beyond the realm of the political, in order to justify extraordinary measures (Buzan et. al., 1998, p. 25). Securitization is achieved when the general audience accepts this hegemonic move. Such an acceptance has the effect of endowing the state with a right to use force, mobilize, or take special powers. In a way, the collocation of "security" with a certain issue of policy has the effect of a declaration of emergency. As I shall argue in the following section, the securitizing move pertaining to SMV and its corollary, the discourse of sexual sovereignty, was played out by a moral panic campaign.

Crucially, in the case of SMV, securitization entails a certain commodification. Thus, Østbø points out that SMV were quickly commodified in the Russian political discourse as a resource that various political actors, communities, and moral entrepreneurs "sold" to the state to assist it in enhancing national security. In this dynamic, moral entrepreneurs use SMV as a commodity that may be "sold" for political leverage or financial support, as in the case of various GONGOs: "by "producing" SMV, the organization actually increases security, and for this, the state should support it (more), financially and otherwise" (p. 205).

Østbø defines SMV as an emotionally charged term conveying a feeling of ressentiment and strong anti-Western undertones, enunciating a frontier with a particular, constructed image of the West and its agents within the national body — mainly "liberals." Proponents of human rights and democratic activists are thus excluded from the Russian nation, thus justifying their persecution which does not need to necessarily follow legal formalities since the securitization of SMV entails conjuring an emergency. "In the struggle for control over the people's "moral compass," the regime is not only allowed, but – as Putin himself has stated – obliged "to do everything possible" (ibid., p. 212).

Collocating the matters of sexuality and procreation with national security is characteristic of nationalist discourses (Mole, 2016). Upholding the myth of endogenously reproducing extended kinship, nationalisms often entail an essentialization of the patriarchal family and the imperative of strict adherence to private and public social roles that the latter is built upon (ibid.). The imperative of social uniformity and homogeneity are translated into compulsory heterosexuality. Within this regime, gays and lesbians are seen to upset the monolithic national body by their alleged refusal to procreate and simply by the fact of their perceived difference. National security is historically strongly collocated with traditional masculinity (Riabov and Riabova 2014) that is premised upon a regime of homosociality that gay men are seen to subvert by their sexual cathexis and affective attachments, while lesbians are seen to pose a threat to the patriarchal ideal of femininity and the social roles of women conducive to procreation and national reproduction (ibid.). It is with the help of this imaginary that the discursive logic of securitisation laid the foundation for the discourse of sexual sovereignty that was eventually enshrined in national law.

4.4.2 From Moral to Sexual Sovereignty

As a corollary of the formation of the new hegemonic bloc, there emerges a new, moralising discourse on sexuality in the public domain in 2011-2013. It was fuelled and institutionalized by the passing of a number of new laws and initiatives aimed, according to Russian officials, at improving the demographic situation, upholding public morality and "traditional" dispositions in the private sphere (Makarychev and Medvedev, 2015). These legislative measures include the so-called "Dima Yakovlev Law"[18] (among other "measures of influence," banning the

[18] Federal Law No. 272-FZ of December 28, 2012 "On Measures of Influence on Persons Involved in Violations of Fundamental Human Rights and Freedoms, Rights and Freedoms of Citizens of the Russian Federation".

adoption of Russian orphans by U.S. citizens), a number of laws on "public hygiene" (such as laws regulating smoking, use of slurs and obscene words, age-limited access to various mass media content, making noise in public, etc.), a notorious legislation introducing fines and jail sentences for wounding religious feelings,[19] and "a set of measures aimed at increasing the birth rate, supporting family values, and regulating the sexual life of citizens" (ibid.). The most widely discussed of these (both domestically and internationally) was the legislation banning propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations among minors.[20]

Within this discourse, the firm division between the public and private spheres that used to be established in the Russian society before the 2010s (Rodin, 2015) comes to be reconfigured via publicly thematizing sexuality as a key arena of social, cultural, economic, and political importance. A corollary of this foregrounding of sexuality has been the articulation of a binary division between the (proper) people and the "dangerous" subversive others (LGBT+-citizens, feminists and paedophiles, all lumped together), in terms of attributing to the latter an alleged social and biological threat, such as dissolution of the "traditional" Christian family, decrease in birth rate, and spread of HIV/AIDS (discussed in more detail in Section 5.4), etc. Homophobia was thus turned into a proxy for anything that comes to be defendable in the name of ideal "traditional values."

[19] In June 2013 amendments were adopted to the Criminal Code to increase liability "for insulting the feelings of believers," including those establishing criminal liability in the form of imprisonment for "public actions expressing clear disrespect for society and committed with the intention to insult the religious feelings of believers" (Article 148 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation).

[20] Effective at the federal level from June 30, 2013, after similar legislation had been passed by several federal subjects earlier the same year, Federal Law 135-FZ supplemented the Code of Administrative Offenses of the Russian Federation with Article 6.21, which establishes administrative liability for "promoting non-traditional sexual relations among minors". It also amended the federal law "On the Protection of Children from Information Harmful to Their Health and Development," supplementing the list of information prohibited for dissemination among children, with "information promoting non-traditional sexual relations." In addition, the law amends the act "On basic guarantees of the rights of the child in the Russian Federation," which stipulates that the state authorities of the Russian Federation take measures to protect the child from information that promotes non-traditional sexual relations.

The way this thematization of sexuality as a common-sense topic in public discourse came about is through the instigation of a moral panic. Stanley Cohen defines a moral panic as occurring when a "condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests" (Cohen, 2011, p. 1). A moral panic drives society into a mass hysteria over the issue or event that is singled out as a threat: the public believe that what is reported upon is occurring everywhere and undermines the society's security. According to Cohen, there are five key stages in the construction of an effective moral panic:

- A certain actor or group is defined as a threat to the norms and interests of the wider society;
- The threat is then stereotyped and repeatedly depicted as such by the media;
- The repeated representations trigger public concern;
- The public arousal invites a response from authorities and policy makers "in due course";
- The escalating moral panic brings about (uncontested) social changes (ibid.).

This sequence reflects the unfolding of events in the case under analysis. Thus, a rampant public campaign instigated by the ROC and those Cohen calls moral entrepreneurs that featured the said symbolic figures was followed by the passing of the legislation in a number of federal subjects that peaked in the passing of the federal level legislation. It is important to point out, though, that it is difficult to substantiate the claim that the campaign was originated and orchestrated by the Kremlin from the very beginning since the decision-making machinery across Putin's so-called "vertical of power" has been getting increasingly opaque (Makarychev and Medvedev, 2015).

Two elements are essential to the formation of a moral panic (Cohen, 2011, pp. 162-201) – a clear-cut delineation of the moral aspect of the particular concern and the idea that the deviant conduct or phenomenon in question constitutes a symptom of a bigger development, which generalises the problematic beyond its particular societal locus. As Cohen emphasises in his

original case study (ibid., p. 61), the reactions of "society's guardians" tend to go beyond the immediate issue, linking it to other disturbing symptoms of malaise and presenting claims about related problems and wider implications. These two elements – the moral aspect, and the symptomaticity – point to the important implication of the underlying disturbance: the concern on the part of certain social actors that the hegemonic value system that they act on behalf of is being threatened.

In our case, the symptom narrative was played out by the framing that the alleged rise of deviant sexualities is symptomatic of the general moral decay coming from the "West." Hence the need for emergency measures to strengthen/foster/recreate the society's sexual sovereignty by dealing with these alien elements – particularly queers, feminists etc.

One of the cases in which anti-Western rhetoric was featured richly was the prosecution of the feminist punk band Pussy Riot in 2012 that resulted in two of its members, Maria Alekhina and Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, convicted to jail term of two years each. In general, comments of a number of pro-Kremlin figures in connection to the Pussy Riot case were framed within the paradigm of anti-Westernism: they argued that behind the band's actions is the "West," which stands in for American governmental organizations, secret enemies of the Russian culture and globalists (Sharafutdinova, 2014; Wilkinson, 2014; Stepanova, 2015; Edenborg, 2020).

Tested on the Pussy Riot case, the rhetoric soon became the blueprint for the wider biopolitical discourse in the public sphere. An interview with a professor of history in a widely read national tabloid reads:

> Our world started collapsing after World War 2. During that war, the planet's population was being destroyed physically. It was clear to everyone, so the individual's spiritual consciousness was on the rise. World elites understood how difficult and sometimes impossible it was to kill people in the battlefield. […] So, they started to blow a new kind of strikes at humanity, one after another, spiritual strikes: crime, sexual revolution and feminism, drugs, Satanism, sodomy ... (Chernykh, 2015).

Dmitrii Smirnov, a priest of the Russian Orthodox Church and Chairman of the Patriarchal Commission for Family, Maternity and Protection of Childhood, echoes the same narrative in his statement on HIV prevention, harm-reduction, and sexual education programs:

> Where do all these innovations come from? They come from the West. Is there at least one friend of Russia there? No. And those who promote these programs here, these are the NGOs that are granted the "honourable" title of a "foreign agent." Is it really that hard to understand?" (Novaya Gazeta, 2018)

Similarly, the ROC Patriarch Kirill argues that "[w]estern recognition of same sex unions amounts to approving sin and codifying it into law in order to justify it" (Healey, 2017, p. 15). Here, the timing of entry into the national conversation is of note: in 2012-2013, almost nobody was seriously advocating for equal marriage in Russia — it was much more urgent to deal with the new vital threats the LGBT+ community was facing (ibid.). Much more careful in his public rhetoric and avoiding any ambiguous statements that could be perceived as homophobic, Putin collocates this narrative with the sovereignty problematic. His interventions in the conversation on homosexual propaganda come down to the effect that Russia is a tolerant nation, yet also determined to regulate morality according to its particular traditions in its resurgence of sovereign power (ibid.).

To sum up, the anxieties over homo/sexuality were firmly collocated with the signifiers *national security*, *cultural sovereignty*, and *traditional values* – thus qualifying for a biopolitical discourse.

4.4.3 Putinite Politics of Childhood

In 2014, the Russian government passed the new Concept for State Family Policy till 2025 (Konceptcija, 2014) authored by the Duma deputy Elena Mizulina who is also credited as the

author of the anti-gay legislation. The collocation “traditional values” figures 14 times on the 20 pages of the document. At the core of this policy document is a constant appeal to the figure of the child - in Lee Edelman’s wording, “as figure for the universal value attributed to political futurity” (Edelman, 2004, p. 19). Overall, the state has in recent times mainly spoken of children in the context of the concern for the nation’s demographics (Rivkin-Fish, 2003). The 2014 Concept represents a shift towards the so-called “traditional family values” aimed at preserving the institution of the “traditional family” in order to facilitate population growth (Shapovalova, 2014).

Discourses of moral panics that deploy around the child figure tend to re/produce the ideology that young people are innocent and as such in need of enhanced protection and surveillance. The "myth of childhood innocence" is drawn on this notion of fear (Giroux, 2000). This ideology articulates children as naive, innocent, careless, and always endangered, while the society is perceived as full of various dangers and traps. Furthermore, this disposition performs the ideological work of moralizing that covers up the contradiction that the innocent/corrupt binary implicates the “adult” world as harmful, yet it is that world that vindicates the entitlement to the protection of the former – immediately justifying that some adults are safe, and others are dangerous. Thus, the moral/biopolitical divide is reproduced.

Such an ideology results in the depoliticisation and disempowerment of children and youth: authoritative figures and moral interpreters consider children’s agency to be by default self-destructive, while protecting them from these perceived threats by limiting their agency and taking away their voice is always beneficial to them (ibid.). The child’s autonomy thus comes to be invested with the ideological meaning of “danger” – then though the symptomatization move it can be extended into “all adults” in general, except those who are to trust to know what is right and wrong over those who are “naturally” dangerous, reinforcing the denial of autonomy

of the adult citizens as well. The biopolitical discourse on childhood was instrumental to the instigation of the moral panic over "non-traditional" sexualities in 2011-2014.

In the 2000s, there were other attempts in Russia to pass an anti-gay propaganda legislation, but none of them successful. During 2003-2009, State Duma deputy Aleksandr Chuyev introduced a similar bill to parliament three times. The document proposed amendments to Chapter 25 of the Criminal Code "Crimes Against Public Health and Public Morality" and established criminal liability for persons "promoting homosexual lifestyle." Individuals engaging in these acts would be banned from activities involving teaching, education and other work with children and youth, as well as senior positions in the army and penitentiary facilities (Shkel, 2006, Healey, 2017, p. 9). Although the text of the bill itself did not contain references to children, the memorandum pointed to the "particular danger" of homosexual propaganda for children and youth, especially through the media and educational curricula. Unlike the Chuyev initiative, Mizulina's bill was framed specifically as aimed at protecting children — it says nothing explicitly about propaganda among adults. To explain the failure of these earlier attempts, it is helpful to situate them as politically and socially irrelevant and uninvited initiatives of the depoliticisation period (see Section 3.3.1). Putin's first two terms in office (2001-2008), although already marked by a crackdown on independent media and political opponents, were characterised by generally neoliberal technocratic governance where the need for political enemies was satisfied by targeting oligarchs and those the Kremlin perceived as their voices. Given the strong public/private distinction in society and the overall political invisibility of the LGBT+ community, Chuyev's initiatives did not get much traction in society. The ruling elite, in its turn, presumably did not see any need in going along with a measure that the nation largely saw as irrelevant, while the West (at the time still, to a degree, a reference group for the political class) would certainly perceive with irritation.

Another way the child figure is featured in the discourse is through its constant association with the danger of paedophilia. For instance, Mizulina attacked Alfred Kokh, one of the critics of the legislation she proposed,[21] by alleging that he acted on behalf of the "paedophile lobby" (Gazeta.ru, 2013). In general, she has consistently explained away all criticism of her initiatives as coming from the "paedophile lobby" (e.g. Kamyshev, 2011; Tretyakova, 2016). Besides, in some federal subjects that passed regional bills banning so-called homosexual propaganda, these laws were adopted in a single package along with laws against propaganda of paedophilia.

Yet another invention in addition to the previous legislative takes on undesired sexualities, consisted in abandoning the exact list of "perversions" ("homosexualism," "lesbianism," "bisexualism," "transgenderism"), inaugurating instead the distinction between traditional versus non-traditional sexual relations. The exact wording of 135-FZ is as follows:

> Propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations among minors, expressed in the dissemination of information aimed at the formation of non-traditional sexual attitudes in minors, attractiveness of non-traditional sexual relations, a distorted idea of the social equivalence of traditional and non-traditional sexual relations, or the imposition of information on non-traditional sexual relations, causing interest in such relations if these actions do not involve a criminal offence (KoAP RF Stat'ja 6.21, 2013).

This euphemistic terminology had already been widespread in the media and public discourse; the effect of its legalisation in the bill was the shifting of the focus from individual identities to the affirmation of "tradition" (Healey, 2017, p. 12). These epithets assert that "the range of sexual activity under consideration is novel, alien and, by implication, not indigenously Russian" (ibid.), but coming from abroad. As Healey points out, "the new legal concept of traditional sex enshrines an old myth of Russia's sexual innocence in national law" (ibid.). Furthermore, this shift from individual to collective and from identity to behaviour allowed for

[21] On social media, Kokh pointed out that Mizulina's son worked for a Belgian law firm whose statement on values explicitly stated support for LGBT+ and which has been active in advocating for marriage equality. In her response, Mizulina avoided addressing this claim.

the bill's advocates to evade accusations of violating human rights (ibid.; Wilkinson, 2014, p. 370): it is not an "innate" sexual identity of citizens that is being outlawed, not even its public display in general, but only that directed at children. This "anti-essentialist" reframing of sexuality fits in a broader strategy of relativizing human rights by laying emphasis on moral sovereignty, cultural particularity and traditional values. Thus, LGBT+ people could be argued to be able to continue to enjoy the same rights as heterosexual and cisgender citizens (Wilkinson, 2014). After all, as advocates of the bill have stated on multiple occasions, "traditional values" similarly discourage straight people from displaying intimate impulses in front of children. At the same time, the absence of the term heterosexuality from the conversation around the bill testifies to the heteronormative matrix inherent in the Russian legal discourse on sexuality (Kondakov, 2010; Gorbachyov, 2014). In other respects, the bill's memorandum was almost a verbatim of Chuyev's memorandum from 2003.

4.5 What is Left of the "Homo Soveticus"?

In the public discourse and some of the literature (Kon, 2003, 2010; Kondakov, 2014; Healey, 2017), homophobia of the Russian society and state is naturally often traced back to and explained by the longer historical legacy of heteronormativity and repression of non-normative sexualities. Indeed, important and diverse continuities may arise when the frameworks of sexual citizenship and biopolitics are utilised to highlight the broader structures of legal and cultural silencing that made it possible to articulate the queer as the constitutive other of the national body. The figure of omission of the Soviet ideological discourse can thereby be seen to morph into the "existentially ambiguous foreign agent" who cannot be conceived as "having always been here."

In a comprehensive analysis of the regimes of sexual citizenship in the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation, Alexander Kondakov (2014), following the Russian sociologist's Elena

Zdravomyslova's (2004) periodisation of Soviet gender and family politics, distinguishes three periods of sexual citizenship, characterised, I would add, by specific regimes of truth about sexuality. The first, or revolutionary, period of sexual citizenship (1917-1930s) is characterised by the progressivist rejection of bourgeois morality with its underlying idea of shame attached to bodily acts. Since the "truth" of one's sex thus came to be articulated within a repressive paradigm of resisting the multifaceted violence of the old order, the underlying regime of truth can be called emancipatory.

The repealing of the imperial criminalisation of homosexuality and the proclamation of sexual freedom in the first years of the Bolshevik rule were nevertheless soon to gradually vanish from the initial democratic outlook. The involvement of citizens in policy debates was gradually decreasing, and all attempts to conjure a more democratic public conversation around this and similar issues ceased by the beginning of the 1930s. This swift shift, among other factors, is explained by the fact that "since the very beginning, Bolshevik politics were 'etacratic' (statist), the state government was the only source of the legal and political agenda" (Kondakov, 2014, p. 157).

The Stalinist regime of silence brought about the second period, the reinvention of a "traditional" sexual order, whereby a comprehensive biopolitical dispositive was conjured that embraced repressive state policies and totalistic surveillance into the "private" matters of reproduction and sexuality (Zdravomyslova, 2004; Geyer and Fitzpatrick, 2008). This imposition of "tradition" "included institutional prohibitions of suspicious research and legal bans of certain sexual practices as well as the monopolisation of political power and discourse" (Kondakov, 2014, p. 157). Any deviation from the newly established norm was regarded as dangerous for the wellbeing of the public body that the state claimed to protect. This period quickly escalated into mass repressions of homosexual citizens: in 1933, the police reported

arrests of 130 men who were involved in homosexual intercourse, and in 1934, the criminalisation of voluntary homosexual encounters among men was enacted in the Criminal Code, while female homosexuality was relegated to the sphere of psychological medicine (ibid.). The effect of this shift was the creation of a veil of silence around sexuality as the ideological state apparatus gained totalitarian control over the lives of Soviet citizens across the public/private divide that was effectively dismantled. Borrowing Igor Kon's term, this regime of truth can be characterised as that of state "sexophobia" (Kon, 2010).

The third period, the late period of Soviet sexual citizenship (1960s - 1980s) is characterised by a limited liberalisation of the sexual discourse, in which "it became possible to form different points of view on sexuality," and the official norms were somewhat relaxed, or at least their imposition was less totalizing (Kondakov, 2014, p. 159). The expansion of the citizens' private domain facilitated by the mass relocation from shared to individual apartment housing changed sexual practices and made them more varied (Zdravolyslova, 2004). Yet, it was not until the epoch of glasnost that this new disposition entered the public level, when different sexualities were articulated in the public discourse due to the relaxation of censorship the growing appeal of democratic values: "In other words, societal changes in Soviet Russia preceded government policy" (Kondakov, 2014, p. 159). This dynamic of the gradual emancipation of the social from the totalling structures of state policies underlie two consecutive regimes of truth. The first one that I would like to call privatisation (1960s - early 1980s) reflects the gradual process of the relaxation of the state anatomopower whereby Soviet citizens got back some of the rights to their bodies. The second one, dispersion (1986 - 1991), denotes for the process whereby the state gradually gave up (or was stripped of) its prerogative to gatekeep the articulation of truth in multiple spheres, including that of sexuality. Instead, there emerged multiple competing subjects of speech and the process of negotiating a new, liberal regime of truth began.

In his analysis, Kondakov argues that, while contemporary Russian law describes homosexuality in different words, the discourse is still structured around the same set of heteronormative meanings. In his view, the post-communist Russia inherited the same heteronormative ideas about homosexuality that continue to condition the citizenship regime in the Russian Federation. While this is largely true, what this analysis fails to account for is the urgency with which the homophobic campaign of 2011-2014 was devised and enacted after over two decades of gradual (though often highly hampered) improvement in the visibility of the queer communities. The inherent heteronormativity of the Russian public discourse was indeed successfully weaponised by the state and turned, in Pavlovsky's words, into a "paper tiger" of "ironic ideology," thus contributing to the overdetermination of the discourse of sexual sovereignty. And yet, its historic contingency is well evident from the fact that right before the "legislative marathon" the public indifference towards homosexuality was as strong as ever, while the overall reluctant tolerance of sexual dissidence was shared, roughly, by half of the population (RBC, 2019).

These considerations lead to another important angle which concerns the alleged political gravity of the very "deep people" of Russia. The concept of the "Soviet man" also known as the *homo soveticus* is a widespread explanatory trope in the Russian public and sociological discourse. First introduced by the Soviet writer and sociologist Alexander Zinoviev who wrote a book with this title in 1982 (translated into English in 1986: Zinoviev, 1986), it is often summoned to explain the failures of the transition to market democracy and social liberalism in the Russian Federation. The inertia of the Soviet man's inherent conformism, hypocrisy, double think, his avoidance of responsibility and chauvinism, the concept's proponents argue, is to blame for most, if not all, of the new Russia's political and economic failures, which echoes the well-known observation by Alexander Pushkin that in Russia, "the government is the only

true European." The following description by Maria Domańska captures best the nature of this infamous "deep" figure:

> The "Soviet man" is characterised by his tendency […] to adopt an attitude of mistrust and anxiety towards anything foreign and unknown, and is convinced of his own powerlessness and inability to affect the surrounding reality; from here, it is only a step towards lacking any sense of responsibility for that reality. His suppressed aggression, birthed by his chronic dissatisfaction with life, his intense sense of injustice and his inability to achieve self-realisation, and his great envy, all erupt into a fascination with force and violence, as well as a tendency towards "negative identification" – in opposition to "the enemy" or "the foreigner". Such a personality suits a quasi-tribal approach to standards of morality and law (the things "our people" have a right to do are condemned in the "foreigner") [Domańska, 2017, p. 40].

The gravity of this discourse is difficult to evade, and it is impossible to move forward without addressing it. The aim here is to try to see to what extent it may be argued to have been complicit in the various regimes of truth concerning homosexuality that were utilised in the 2011-2013 campaign of queer scapegoating.

Tracing the state homophobia of the Russian Federation to the Soviet ideology and sexual morality does helps highlight some rhetorical continuities in the process of the construction of the "tradition" of moral sovereignty. Furthermore, the concept of sexual citizenship applied by Alexander Kondakov offers helpful insight into the ways the silencing and forced "privatisation" of the queer community in the Soviet Union contributed to the legal and cultural matrix of heteronormativity of the Russian society after Perestroika.

Nevertheless, a direct attribution of the homophobic campaign of 2011-2013 to "vestiges" of the Soviet ideology and social morality offers little explanatory value. Undoubtedly, and notwithstanding the unprecedented sexual liberation of the years following the October Revolution (Kondakov, 2014), the late Soviet social project as traced from the years of Stalinism was founded on compulsory heterosexuality (Healey, 2017), while the almost complete public invisibility of non-heterosexual subjects couldn't but contribute to the

repulsive reaction of the post-Soviet society to the public emergence of queer communities after Perestroika. Yet, it is all too easy to explain away the state homophobia of the Russian Federation with the "rotten legacy" of the *homo Soveticus* whose only "sin" regarding the "sexual pervert" was the almost complete unawareness of their very existence. In fact, the public acceptance of homosexuality, as evident from opinion polls, was gradually but steadily increasing over the decade of 1990s, in the wake of the decriminalisation of homosexuality in 1993, and that of the early 2000s (Kondakov, 2013b). Tellingly, it continued to improve towards the end of the 2010s, with a fast abrupt drop in 2011-2014 (RBC, 2019). In the 1990s and early 2000s, many sincerely believed that the country was moving towards the "normalcy of tolerance" conceived in Western terms. For instance, among the most popular and in-demand media entertainers of the times were people with openly "non-traditional" sexual or gender performances, such as the singers Shura, Zemfira, Boris Moiseyev, Valerii Leontyev, and the drag performer and stand-up comedian Verka Serduchka, to name but a few,[22] while the overall sexual morality, such as on issues like extramarital sex and abortion, remained, until the recent traditionalist spell, quite liberal.

Nevertheless, the rampant homophobic campaign of 2011-2013 was bound to be a successful operation of the regime's relegitimation because the new liberal discourse of tolerance, although gradually expanding, had not yet been embraced by the "broad masses" of the Russian society who, in the above visible figures of popular culture, mostly saw amusing, histrionic, comical or "bohemian" characters whose private life, while richly spilling out from the pages of tabloids, was considered "their own private" circumstance even if repulsive. Yet, this kind of passive, spontaneous homophobia of the ex-"Soviet man" resulting from a lack of basic

[22] This list could be severalfold longer if it included multiple television hosts, showbusiness stars and public figures who enjoy widespread national acclaim but chose to "formally" remain in the closet. Their sexuality, however, has been a virtually open secret.

knowledge is different from the predatory, deliberate, and relatively "informed" hatred and animosity like one incited during the "legislative marathon" (Kon, 2010). This point was best highlighted in April 2020, when one of Russia's main pollsters, Levada Centre (2020) published a poll on "social distancing"[23] in which LGBT+ citizens figured among "prostitutes," drug addicts, "extremists and radicals," feminists, "gypsies" and "HIV-positive individuals" in a list of "social deviants" (BBC Russia, 2020). The poll questioned Russians on the possible policy measures to apply to these groups (sic); the options were "liquidate," "isolate," "leave alone" and "help." 18% of the respondents were found to be willing to "liquidate" gays and lesbians (Levada Centre, 2020). The poll triggered a heated debate in the Russian media and the professional community as to the pollster's framing and gatekeeping, with many commentators arguing that the proposed list of "deviants" as well as the presence of the "liquidating" option on the table made the poll highly performative (Rosbalt, 2020) in the sense of inviting and enacting the "discursive violence" it claimed to be giving a snapshot of.

Public opinion pollsters in Russia are often described as an apparatus for manipulating sociological data: respondents are offered carefully framed questions that are to invite agreement with the expected stance; suitable figures are then achieved and announced in the media as if transparent and reliable non-biased results: "sociology has turned into bureaucratic sociometry — a strategic tool for controlling the masses and manoeuvring power among opponents" (Pavlovsky, 2019a, p. 159). Each time, "Putin's majority" is used as a pillar for a new policy, and the manipulation with framed questions "turns into the general style of Russian sociology and propaganda[3]" (Pavlovsky, 2019: 159-161). In Kondakov's analysis of opinion polls on LGBT+ issues over the span of two decades, the salience of this framing aspect is well

[23] This framing has no bearing on the COVID-19 related social distancing policy; the poll was aimed at measuring to what extent Russians are willing to "distance themselves" from groups "traditionally conceived" as deviants.

attended to (Kondakov, 2013b). Levada Centre, known for its highly controversial works on the *homo Soveticus* and the ways this "bad species" conditions the xenophobic policies of the (presumably otherwise "good") state, found itself under heavy criticism from some members of the sociological community (Rosbalt, 2020).

By the same token, seeing the state homophobia as a grassroots initiative of the resurrecting and inherently xenophobic *homo Soveticus* results from losing sight of one of the key characteristics of Putinism. As many authors have argued (Casula, 2013; Pavlovsky, 2015, 2019; Matveev, 2015), what often passes as Putinite "populism" is always a top-down cascade of power. Being, to say the least, increasingly suspicious of upwards mobilisation, the Kremlin almost never takes actual grassroots initiatives as input into decision-making, instead fabricating them in carefully orchestrated campaigns of relegitimation.

It might indeed be argued that the regional "legislative marathon" of 2011-2012 was a grassroots campaign, but it is well known that, in the Russian "Federation," both executive and legislative branches of regional authority are carefully controlled and instructed from the Kremlin (Aleynikov, 2015), and I have managed to find no vestiges of evidence that the case under analysis was different. Moreover, even if this were true, there appears to be no ground to assume that the democratic aspect in policy making is stronger locally than it is on the federal level, and the Dumas of Arkhangelskaya and Kostromskaya Oblasts, as well as the Legislative Council of the Federal City of St. Petersburg, were acting on the "concerned citizenry's" demands rather than avidly sensing the political climate in Moscow. Furthermore, what the *homo Soveticus* framework fails to explain is why this figure's "inherent homophobia" reactivated (or was summoned) in a particular place and time: after all, the earlier attempts to outlaw the Russian queer, such as those by Deputy Chuyev, received no political traction or even enough popular support in the 2000s.

This is where the differentiation of the two genealogical outlooks that I discussed in Section 1.1.2, *Ursprung* and *Herkunft*, comes into play. Arguing, in the manner of *Ursprung*, for a teleological, determinative continuity of the Soviet homophobia with the sexual sovereignty of #SistemaRF, we lose sight of historical contingency inherent to a hegemonic re/configuration of the social. Projecting the events of the present to a perceived singular point of appearance in the past, we end up shaping the multiplicity of contingent becomings into a teleological chain culminating in the present moment. Conversely, when pursuing a genealogical approach informed by the *Herkunft* hypothesis, we see the present not a result of a consistent linear development, but an intermediate and unstable nexus of heterogeneous power relations, including their less mobile (but also local and context-dependent) forms.

With all this in mind, it seems legitimate to discard the *homo Soveticus* - pleasing "populism"[24] argument and proceed with Gleb Pavlovsky's claim that as a governmentality, #SistemaRF is in no determinative continuity with a Soviet metanarrative project. One needs to narrow down the focus and search for this continuity in loci where it is more likely to occur. While the state homophobia campaign of 2011-13 responded to the urgent need of the regime's relegitimation, the expert knowledge that supported it was not made up from scratch. Being virtually absent from the popular discourse, biopolitical knowledge on homo/sexuality existed and was produced in the Soviet Union through two main institutions: penitentiary praxis and medicine. In the next chapter, I will begin by discussing this dispositif of knowledge production and then move on to tracing its remnants in the post-Soviet expert knowledge on homo/sexuality that lent its rhetorical apparatus to the public discourse on homosexuality in the Russian Federation.

[24] Naturally, whether the term applies to the case depends on the preferred definition. While I believe that Casula's model of Putinite "populism from above" holds water, I find it unhelpful to proceed here with the notion of populism that is premised upon popular mobilisation and democratic grassroots politics as the main trigger of policy making (Laclau's model).

Chapter 5 Russia's Biopolitics of Homo/sexuality

This chapter will focus on the production of what has emerged as expert knowledge on homosexuality, by experts and moral entrepreneurs, that facilitates nation-building by drawing the lines of inclusion/exclusion. It begins with a general overview of the place of biopolitics in Putinism. I will discuss the reasons for the salience of biopolitical governance in Putinism with the help of the models of biopolitics offered by Foucault and Agamben (liberal and illiberal biopolitics, respectively). I shall argue that discerning their interplay helps us move beyond a number of unhelpful dichotomies. Overall, the functions of biopolitics in Putinism, I argue, consolidate around the project of nation-building and found the new biopolitical iteration of sovereignty.

Second, I will offer a historical account of the criminalisation and medicalization of homosexuality in the USSR and Russia, in order to situate my discussion of the current absence of a medical consensus on homosexuality. I will argue that there is an interplay between the repressive legacy of Soviet psychiatry that, in the Russian Federation, has morphed into a medical narrative supporting the discourse of sexual sovereignty, and the current normalisation trend. This interpretation is supported by a discourse analysis of a textual sample comprised of articulations of Russia's most salient "experts" on homosexuality to interrogate the social and political logic it is informed by that, I argue, broadly reflect those discerned in my research in the previous chapters. Finally, I will discuss the Russian state's peculiar approach to the biopolitics of HIV/AIDS that relies on the affirmation of traditional values, reinforcing the lines of division discerned in the psychiatric discourse.

5.1 Russia's Biopolitical Project: Between Foucault and Agamben

As I established in Chapter 4, biopolitical governance rose to prominence in the Russia of the 2010s. The introduction of issues of corporeality and sexuality as top priorities of the political agenda was a corollary of the mainstreaming of the "traditional values" discourse and manifested in a set of legal initiatives aimed at the normalisation of human bodies and role identities. In particular, the issue of the "traditional family" that stands in need of protection from the multiple corrupting influences from both within and outside the Russian borders played the role of an empty signifier that consolidated a rather heterogeneous set of initiatives relating to natality, nutrition, consumption, standards of fitness and lifestyle. Defending family values was the main excuse for the decriminalisation of domestic violence (Makarychev, 2018b) and the key rationale for the introduction of a number of measures of economic support for families with children. The "family trouble" also figured in the debate around the notorious Dima Yakovlev bill banning adoption of Russian orphans by foreign nationals who at best might prove negligent and irresponsible, and at worst could happen to be gay. Selective migration policy solidified the distinction between the "good" and the "bad" migrant (Kosmarskaya and Savin, 2016) in terms of attributing to the former a set of cultural and biopolitical qualities, while the anecdotal "Cats' Brattle" bill passed by the city assembly of St. Petersburg and aimed at regulating the allowed levels of noise in apartment housing initiated a heated public debate on the levels of noise produced by snoring, making love and, properly, the brattling of domestic cats late at night (RBC, 2013).

In general, at the core of the Russian biopolitical project is a set of nodal points articulated into the empty signifier "traditional values" in opposition to the Western emancipatory biopolitics. Grounded in hegemonic masculinity and the idea of collective hygiene, a lot of the public debate around this biopolitical turn was framed in direct opposition to the agendas of gender equality,

anti-discrimination and tolerance (Makarychev, 2018b) that had been gaining more traction in the EU and during the liberal presidency of Barak H. Obama in the US. Indeed, the eastward enlargement of the EU and NATO has often been portrayed in Russia in terms of the expansion of "gayness," which sedimented in the neologism "Gayropa" frequently used by traditionalist and state-affiliated media (Foxall, 2019; Suchland, 2018) and marking the "big other" of the Russian national body: the pervert.

Ultimately, argues Makarychev, biopolitics "offers a particular way of anchoring the dispersed and uncertain Russian identity in a set of consensually understood nodal points with the biopolitical category of family at its centre" (2018b, p. 65). This is realised via the four consecutive functions that biopolitics performs in Putinism. Firstly, it is a tool of stabilising and sedimenting power relations around various norm-based regimes of care. Secondly, it inaugurates a set of social roles and political subjectivities along the lines of regulatory tools that target human bodies. Thirdly, if offers a basis for a new form of post-ideological legitimacy (ibid.: 64), meaning that it is grounded not on a sense of a shared set of ideas about a "good state," but a feeling of belonging to a biopolitical community grounded on a shared notion of a "good life." This paves the way for the submission of citizens to mechanisms of biopolitical control and regulation that are believed to be conducive to ensuring longevity, good health and the right conduct of the population. Finally, therefore, biopower promotes nation-building through the interplay of inclusion/exclusion where standard ideological tools have largely failed and the national identity is unstable and diffuse, stuck in the process of transformation and becoming (Makarychev and Yatsyk, 2017).

There are two aspects to biopower that could be called positive and negative (Makarychev, 2018a) and that broadly reflect the two main theoretical analyses of biopolitical governance undertaken by Michel Foucault (2009) and Giorgio Agamben (1998). The first one puts the

emphasis on productive forms of population control and is mainly concerned with the crystallisation of a form of biopolitics that plays a paramount role in the making of liberal and neoliberal practices of governance in Europe, to which his historical study undertaken in *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2010) is more or less limited. Foucault did discuss what today is referred to as illiberal and non-democratic forms of biopolitical governance, and yet his focus is mainly laid on fostering a better productivity of the "human capital," thus retaining a West-centric normativity. In his analysis, the rise of biopolitics coincided with the demise of the traditionally conceived model of sovereignty as the monarch's (or dictator's) power to "let live and make die."

Conversely, for Agamben (1998), rather than a recent invention that occupied the vacant spot of the King whose head was "cut off" by the social transformations of Western modernity, biopower dates at least as far back as the Ancient Greek distinction between *bios* and *zoe* and the Roman legal category of *homo sacer*. Laying emphasis not on the fostering of the "human capital" ("making live"), but on the submission of bodies to the sovereign power ("making die") — not necessarily through physical killing, but through mechanisms of exclusion and relegation from political life to bare life — Agamben attests to the illiberal biopolitics as a machine of policing by law and coercion.

As globalisation transforms traditional models of sovereignty, a political community is increasingly less defined by territory and increasingly more in terms of the differentiation between "our lives" (that are subject to protection) and "alien lives" (subject to physical or political extermination, i.e. relegation to bare life) [Makarychev 2015; 2018a,b]. The ban on the adoption of "our kids" by foreign nationals, and the strict control over their living conditions by the authorised officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs where such adoptions took place in the past are the expressions of that stance. The newly reactivated doctrine of *russkiy mir* (the

"Russian world") that is used to justify aggressive meddling into the internal affairs of countries with sizeable Russian-speaking minorities is also symptomatic of these concerns. Traditional geopolitical categories thus become less salient, while the disciplinary language of commonplace political analyses (democracy/autocracy, freedom/unfreedom, internal affair/international relations) fail to grasp the intricate interplay of positive and negative biopolitics whose mixture can arguably be discerned in regimes across the whole of the traditional political spectrum. From Agamben's perspective, the distinction between sovereignty and biopower is relative and fluctuating: their nexus offers a new language for political analysis in which domination and exclusion are always infused with productive biopower, while the latter is necessarily premised upon the exclusion and relegation to bare life of the biopolitical Other.

Now, as I spelled out in the "existential ambiguity" thesis formulated in Chapters 3 and 4, the interplay of exclusion and inclusion is not simply mutually conducive. As Derrida argues, it always constitutes a double gesture in relation to the same object (Direk and Lawlor, 2014). By the same token, when one is banned from a political community, she continues to have a relation to that group exactly through the fact of being outlawed. It is this thesis that helps to grasps the way the state homophobia campaign (discussed in Chapter 4) is radically different from the state homophobia of the Soviet Union that was premised on silence, invisibility, and omission. Indeed, the Soviet public was almost completely unaware of the existence of non-normative sexualities (Baer, 2016). Much literature is devoted to the invisibility of the LGBT+ citizens in contemporary Russia as well, yet this invisibility, unlike the Soviet period, does not constitute a void. The spectre figure of the "sexual pervert" is a strong presence in the Russian public biopolitical discourse. In the previous chapter, I looked at the way this "on-call spectre" is summoned in the public discourses around state policy. Yet, the figure is also produced by various channels of expert knowledge production through the discourses of medicalization,

personal growth, "overcoming," reproductive health and lifestyle. This is where a continuity with the Soviet sexual politics can be discerned: while absent from and unspeakable in relation to the official ideological discourse, "sexual perversion" was completely relegated to the spheres of medicine and penitentiary correction. This is where one may begin to delineate a genealogy of the contemporary expertise discourse on "sexual perversion" in Russia that supports, empowers and channels the discourse of sexual sovereignty.

5.2 The Figure of the Soviet Homosexual: Between Prison and Mental Hospital

In the third and last edition of the Great Soviet Encyclopaedia, homosexuality did not figure as a single phenomenon. Two different entries were devoted to it: "pederasty" (*muzhelozhstvo*) and "homosexualism." The first is defined as a criminally prosecuted "sexual perversion consisting in sexual intercourse of man with man" (Prokhorov, 1969, v. 17), while "homosexualism" (ibid., v. 7) denoted the medical side of the same phenomenon. This dual conceptualisation reflects the two institutional loci of knowledge and two corresponding and intertwined regimes of truth on the phenomenon. In a way, the edition of the Encyclopaedia that appeared in the time when conditions for a relative sexual liberalization were gathering in the Soviet society pinned down a century-long dispositive of knowledge production.

5.2.1 Criminalisation of *muzhelozhstvo*

Alexander Kondakov (2018) notes that prior to the 1917 Revolution, despite some already ongoing research and conversation, homosexual relations between men in general did not constitute a significant policy issue and there was no consensus thereon, neither a basic understanding of what exactly their nature consisted in. In fact, seen against the global context,

homosexual relations between men were subjected to legal punishment in Russia relatively recently — much later than it happened in Europe. In the middle of the 19th century, it was entered in the newly adopted Code of Criminal and Correctional Sentences, but the authorities proved reluctant to apply this norm. Kondakov notes that, in introducing the norm, Russian legislators copied the German criminal code almost word by word (Kondakov, 2008, p. 25). Most often, homosexuality was referred to as the "Sodom sin," as in the Codex of Ivan the Terrible in 1551. However, observes Marianna Muravyova (2016), this term was used to denote practically any sexual contact that deviated from the default "missionary" position — both homosexual and heterosexual. But again, we know that this norm was rarely applied, although in-depth research on this issue is virtually non-existent yet (ibid.).

Following the Bolshevik revolution, homosexuality made a brief appearance in the public discourse. While some of the progressive members of the Bolshevik cohort sincerely believed it to be an acceptable deviation from the bourgeois morality (Kondakov, 2008; 2014), some claimed that while understanding the "pathology" inherent in the development of "homosexualism," the society cannot lay the blame for it on the carrier of this trait (Kon, 2010, p. 133). On the other hand, male homosexuality was often understood as a kind of "traditional value" of some of the Asian (predominantly Muslim) peoples who were part of the Russian Empire and later of the Soviet Union, and, together with other "traditions," it was considered a remnant of the obsolete past (Kondakov, 2018). An example would be sexual activities involving younger adolescent men or boys (*bachi*) and older men (Healey, 2001, p. 160). Overall, this "revolutionary" period (in Kondakov's periodisation) can be described as a time of dithering attempts to symbolise the phenomenon of male homosexuality in the public discourse and settle on an acceptable ideological stance thereon in relation to the newly forming ethical, political, and legal makeup of a society that considered itself a bold experiment in

fostering new, dominance-free forms of life. This period, therefore, can be qualified as pre-biopolitical.

Everything changed with the advent of the rule of Joseph Stalin (since 1929). In 1933, the deputy chairman of the OGPU (Joint State Political Directorate) Genrikh Iagoda reported to the Secretary General on the uncovering of a "circle of pederasts" and the arrest of 130 men (Kon, 2010, p. 133; Healey, 2001, p. 184). Iagoda explained to Stalin that those individuals engaged in the establishment of a network of salons and other organized groups with a view to transform these associations into spy cells (ibid.). Making use of the "caste isolation of the pederastic circles" for direct counter-revolutionary purposes, Iagoda claimed, they engaged in "political corruption" of the youth, in particular the working youth, while also trying to infiltrate the army and the navy. Stalin ruled to deal with the issue (Ivanov, 2013; p. 184, Clech, 2018, p. 122).

In another note to Stalin, Iagoda informed him that "the pederasts were engaged in the recruitment and corruption of perfectly healthy youth, Red Army men, Red Navy men and individual university students" (Kon, 2010, p. 133). This is an important move in the production of the male homosexual figure: establishing the collocation of the homosexual with the meaning of "alien, corrupting influence." At the same time, the deputy chairman of the OGPU complained of the absence in the Criminal Code of a law that would allow for prosecution for male same-sex intercourse. It is noteworthy that Iagoda's project only concerned men and had nothing to say about homosexual women: this subject was tabooed (Healey, 2001, p. 185).

On December 17, 1933, the Central Executive Committee Presidium ruled to extend criminal liability to sodomy. A day earlier, this decision was approved at a Politburo meeting (ibid.). The article was added to the Criminal Code of the USSR on March 7, 1934. On the way to its final approval, some of the wordings underwent adjustment and refinement. In the final version, a "default" sexual intercourse between two men was to be punished by a minimal term of three

years; sodomy involving violence would entail a more serious sentence (Healey, 2001, p. 186). The criminal codes of the other Union republics were also supplemented with the new provision, although it underwent certain changes to comply with the local "national traditions" (ibid., p. 179). For example, in Uzbekistan, it was part of the chapter on "the remnants of primitive customs" rather than that on "sexual offences" (ibid., p. 160).

The issue of the criminal procedural interpretation of sodomy raised concerns among Communists in the West. In 1934, English journalist Harry Whyte wrote a letter to Stalin under the title "*Is a Homosexual Worthy to be a Member of the Communist Party?*" (ibid., pp. 188-189) The reporter attempted to prove by his own example that homosexuals could be socially active and honest communists. Stalin read the letter and wrote on the margin: "idiot and degenerate." Writer Maxim Gorky responded to Whyte on the paged of Pravda by implicating the issue of homosexuality in the propaganda war between Communism and Fascism, with the latter seeking to corrupt the "pure" Soviet people (ibid.).

There is very little information about trials against homosexuals (Kondakov, 2018; Kon, 2003, p). From the fragments of cases that historians were able to retrieve, Kondakov notes (2018), we know that it was mainly "passive" homosexuals who were prosecuted. Often, "active" homosexuals appeared in court as witnesses only. The police often kept lists of homosexual men who were blackmailed into becoming informants (Healey, 2017, p. 96). Whenever a case was opened, the usual evidence was collected: testimonies of witnesses, and, if possible, medical examinations (such as medical doctors' reports on the remains of sperm in the body of the accused [ibid., p. 61; Kondakov, 2018]).

Over the span of 45 years, according to the most recent research, about thirty-eight thousand people were convicted by the article (Volodin, 2017, p. 5). However, we know that the article was widely used against "ideological enemies" of the state (Healey, 2001; 2017). Thus, it was

used to bring to the trial multiple high-profile figures, such as the acclaimed film director Sergei Parajanov and anthropologist Lev Klein who, presumably, had nothing to do with homosexual relations, but were condemned under this article (Healey, 2017, p. 152). At the same time, it was used against multiple high-ranking communist political figures that Stalin and his circle were seeking to get rid of, such as Georgii Chicherin, Dmitrii Florenski, and Nikolai Yezhov (Kon, 2003).

To conclude, the criminalisation of homosexuality in the USSR enacted the banishment of the male homosexual figure from the biopolitical community through his relegation to lawlessness: the bare life. The main enunciated justification for this move was a biopolitical concern for the ideological and physical health of the "youth." At the same time, this dispositif is best captured in Agamben's negative terms: no substantive "scientific" knowledge on homosexuality that we know much of was produced through these practices (Kon, 2003). This negative aspect of the Soviet biopolitical project does not offer much in terms of establishing a continuity with the Russian Federation as such. The first years of the Soviet period were marked by the elite's aspiration to break free from the repressive legacy of the past, seeing the repealing of the criminal article and the legalisation of homosexuality. Although this did not bring about an immediate acceptance of queers into the body of the biopolitical community and the negative biopolitics of post/Stalinism certainly contributed its share to the widespread homophobia in the RF's society, a way was paved for such an inclusion by the decriminalisation in 1993, and the unprecedented flourishing of queer culture (Essig, 1999) in the 1990s, albeit mostly hidden from the wider public's eye. Outlawing homosexuality marked a pronounced biopolitical shift Stalinism brought about: it coincided with a proliferation of other biopolitical policies such as the ban on abortion and a stricter regulation of divorce (Geyer and Fitzpatrick, 2008).

At the same time, a "positive," knowledge generating dispositif was beginning to slowly emerge, especially in the post-Stalinist period, in the sphere of medicine and psychiatry, and this is what I shall turn to in the following section.

5.2.2 The Medical Dispositif

A notable exception to the overall silence on homosexuality in the pre-revolutionary Russian psychiatry was Pyotr Gannushkin (1875-1933) who is widely credited to be the pioneer of the Soviet school of psychiatry (Healey, 2001, p. 136). Gannushkin's understanding of homosexuality, in most general terms, coincides with the Freudian explanation of homosexuality as resulting from an arrest in psychosexual development. Thus, Gannushkin deemed the formation of homosexuality a corollary of an "insufficient differentiation of the sex drive" resulting from a delay in the childhood stage of development: i.e. from "psychosexual infantilism." The "abnormal forms of satisfaction," in his view, are sedimented patterns formed through early, childhood sexual experiences:

> Without completely denying the importance of the moments that determine the sexual constitution, we are inclined, however, to consider more correct the point of view about the acquired, rather than constitutional origin of homosexuality. It is absolutely certain that, as a rule, sex drive is highly volatile and unstable in most people before full puberty […]. Random impressions, temptations of comrades, and finally, direct seduction by older homosexuals imprint in the sexually unstable, psychopathic young man a form of satisfaction of the sex drive in which he lived his first, most vivid sexual experiences. Repetition sediments a habit, and communication with other homosexuals and the attitude of condemnation with which society treats homosexuals lead to a one-sided, sectarian attitude towards people of the opposite sex; in parallel with this, elements of a normal sexual feeling gradually disappear and freeze — however, far from always completely (Gannushkin, 2010, p. 164).

Persistent references to and various interpretations of Gannushkin's model, some more rigorous and feasible than others, are abundant in the contemporary Russian social media communities devoted to dismantling the "political agenda of LGBT" from a "scientific" viewpoint or offering advice and support to self-questioning non-heterosexual persons. Some of these, such as in the

community "*Homosexualism is not a norm. There is a way out!*"[25] in the social network *VKontakte* are supplemented by the hashtag #RussianSchoolofPsychiaty.

For years, since Gannushkin's theorisation of perversion and the Stalinist homophobic campaign, scientific research on homo/sexuality was effectively banned (Kondakov, 2018). It was not before around the 1970s when medicine started to look for an explanation of the "sexual pervert's" phenomenon beyond the ideological commonplaces similar to those discerned in Iagoda's reports to Stalin. The Soviet psychiatry universally and officially regarded any deviation from the socially approved heteronormative sexuality as a disease (Kon, 2003). The universally held view on the necessity of the correspondence between one's biological sex and their sexual cathexis led some in the medical community to assume that both female and male homosexuality attested to an "error of nature" that could be corrected by sex-reassigning surgery (Essig, 1999). Apparently, this intervention was not widely practiced as a compulsory treatment — rather, it was offered as "the best practice" to those who willingly sought medical assistance. The practice of sex reassignment involved both the appropriate hormonal therapy as well as a plastic surgery on the body, including the genitals. The practice was officially recognised and financed from the budget of the USSR (Essig, 1999, p. ix). Naturally, some of these operations did not concern homosexual men and women but were applied to genuinely transgender persons who sought sex reassignment (Kondakov, 2018).

Despite the state-proclaimed "equality of the sexes" and the wide inclusion of women in practically all professions and the public sphere (which, however, wore thinner on the way to top leadership positions) the Soviet gender contract (especially in its post-Stalinist version) was inherently patriarchal (Zdravomyslova, 2004). This, arguably, explains the fact that homosexual women were even less visible to the ideological and biopolitical meta-narrative of

[25] https://vk.com/topic-115049803_35002385 (Accessed on June 4, 2018)

the “Soviet man” and the conceivable catalogue of deviations thereof in comparison with the male homosexual. Francesca Stella shows that, for exposed lesbians, a psychiatric hospital treatment was the most likely outcome (Stella, 2015). The usual “treatment” included electroshock therapy and neuroleptic medication such as thorazine, an early anti-psychotic drug primarily used for the treatment of schizophrenia, with long-lasting, debilitating side-effects Gessen, 2013).

These protocols were developed and implemented by the pioneer of Soviet sexology and female sexopathology Abram Sviadoshch, in collaboration with co-author Elizaveta Derevinskaya (Healey, 2001, p. 240). In 1967, at a psychiatry conference in Karagandinskaya Oblast, these practitioners presented two papers (Sviadoshch, 1974; Derevinskaya, 1967) based on the results of a 10-year-long psychological study of 96 homosexual women (Sviadoshch later specified that most of them were prisoners serving sentences for criminal offenses, who were divided into “active” (who “felt like a man”) and “passive” ones on the basis of the their own self-identification [Dorovskaya, 2013]).

Sviadoshch and Derevinskaya reported that, according to the results of the study, they were able, firstly, to refute the hypothesis that there is a necessary connection between homosexuality and another (sic) form of psychopathy; secondly, to conclude that the majority of “active” female homosexuals were excitable and sthenic (“strong” characters), while the majority of passive ones were persons of the asthenic (exhaustible, weak) characters of a suggestible psychotype. Thirdly, the prevalence of hysteroid and cycloid personalities was revealed in their total population. As for the results of the “compound treatment,” the papers claimed that, out of eight homosexual women (four active and four passive), “three passive and one active women demonstrated positive results.”

Regarding the treatment of female homosexuality, the authors noted that their experience allowed for them to draw the following conclusions. Hypnotherapy of female homosexuality delivers a positive result in very rare cases (in general, positive changes were sometimes noted after four to eight sessions). Hormone therapy did not prove effective, that is, although it could temporarily strengthen or weaken one's sex drive, the latter's orientation is not affected in either "active" or "passive" female homosexuals. Treatment with the antipsychotic chlorpromazine inhibits the sex drive completely, but after the drug withdrawal, the strength of attraction and its homosexual orientation are restored.

The authors proposed their own combined method of the therapy of female homosexuality: suggestion and persuasion amplified by the medication with the antipsychotic chlorpromazine with its gradual withdrawal as "new heterosexual conditional connections develop and consolidate." According to the observations of Derevinskaya and Sviadoshch, positive results of the method were especially noted in women with the "passive" form of homosexuality. According to Sviadoshch, a prerequisite for success is the fact that homosexuality, in most cases, is "incomplete": certain elements of the "healthy sexual orientation" persist to some degree, often hidden from the patient herself. This is where the therapist could ground her efforts, "with the support of neurophysiological and neurosurgical interventions" (Sviadoshch, 1974).

The 1983 edition of the *Soviet Manual of Sexual Pathology* (discussed in Kon, 2003, pp. 88-89) summed up the existing approaches to the therapy of homosexuality aimed at the "rebuilding of the personality," relying on the non-medication, suggestive elements of Sviadoshch's approach and "autogenic training." This therapy, reflecting a gradual shift from psychiatrisation to psychologization, comprised three stages. The first stage aims at a gradual weakening of the "pathological desire." The second stage, consisting in the patient's

introduction to the skills of “easy and natural” interaction with persons of the opposite sex, apparently should result from a perceived causal link between situational homosociality and homosexual desire that, I assume, is derived from the understanding of the social order of the penitentiary system and orphanages. Finally, in the last stage, the patient forms an “adequate” erotic attitude towards the opposite sex, thus adding the sexual “superstructure” on top of the previously acquired heterosocial “basis.” However, the manual is silent on the exact methodology and clinical protocol on which this work should rely (ibid.).

The 1980s saw an almost revolutionary re-emergence of homosexuality in the public discourse. It was as early as the late 1970s when the widely read magazine *Ogoniok* published a series of stories on sexuality, touching upon homosexual relations (Kondakov, 2018). While the phenomenon received an overall negative representation in the articles, it had the effect of lifting the veil of silence around same-sex relations. In the mid and late 1980s, the proclamation of *glasnost* by Mikhail Gorbachyov contributed to this trend and, alongside with the Soviet ideology-informed negative account, the first homophile voices were slowly emerging in the public domain (ibid.)

Unfortunately, this public shift had almost no effect on the medical discourse (Kon, 2003). In the 1990 edition of the *Soviet Manual of Sexual Pathology*, homosexuality was still defined as a “pathological desire” that comes about as a result of neurological-endocrine pathologies, as well as the “infusion by parents and educators of an animosity towards the opposite sex.” Parents and educator are advised to ensure “correct sex-role education, which should be aimed at introducing children to sexual differences, and avoidance of preaching "asexuality,” etc." (Kon, 2003, p. 89).

5.3 De/medicalization of Homosexuality

> Confined on the ship, from which there is no escape, the madman is delivered to the river with its thousand arms, the sea with its thousand roads, to that great uncertainty external to everything. He is a prisoner in the midst of what is the freest, the openest of routes: bound fast at the infinite crossroads. He is the Passenger par excellence: that is, the prisoner of the passage. And the land he will come to is unknown—as is, once he disembarks, the land from which he comes. He has his truth and his homeland only in that fruitless expanse between two countries that cannot belong to him.
>
> Michel Foucault (2001, p. 9)

Despite the sweeping socio-political change, the tendency to pathologize homosexuality continued into the first decade of the existence of the Russian Federation. However, comprehensive non-medical research on this biopolitical dynamic is still scarce (a notable exception is the late Igor Kon). It was not until January 1, 1999, i.e. as many as six years after the decriminalization of homosexuality, that the Russian psychiatry officially gave up on its legacy of "medical sovereignty" and switched to the classification of diseases adopted by the World Health Organization, ICD-10. But the move was inconsistent: on August 6, 1999, the Ministry of Health approved a new clinical guide, *Models for the Diagnosis and Treatment of Mental and Behavioural Disorders*, prepared by the Moscow Research Institute of Psychiatry. In parts, the document strongly contradicted ICD-10 (Kon, 2003, p. 90; Prikaz, 1999).

Although the new guideline did not contain the diagnosis "homosexuality," its section P65, on *Disorders of Sexual Preference*, opens with a list of criteria for the sexual norm: couple intercourse, heterosexuality, maturity of partners, voluntary initiation, willingness for mutual consent (sic), lack of physical and moral harm to the health of the partners and other persons. The document considers a disorder of sexual preference to be any deviation from the norm in sexual behaviour, regardless of its manifestations, nature, severity and etiological factors. This document conceives a disorder both in the sense of a deviation from social norms, and from

medical norms (Prikaz, 1999). As Kon notes, this definition not only pathologizes any manifestation of homosexuality, but the solitary act of masturbation as well (Kon, 2003, p. 90). Section P65.8, *Other Sexual Disorders, Preferences,* lists activities such as making obscene phone calls, frotteurism, sexual activities involving animals, using strangulation to enhance arousal, preference for partners with some kind of physical "abnormality" or certain skin colour, thus re/inscribing compulsory able-bodiedness and whiteness in the national biopolitical canon. Although all these "deviations" have no default relation to same-sex intercourse, the stages of their "comprehensive therapy" are almost identical to the old Soviet methodology for the "treatment" of homosexuality I discussed in the previous section (Prikaz, 1999).

An overview of doctoral dissertations devoted to homosexuality and defended in the field of medicine in the Russian Federation over the decade of 1990s also reveals the spread and acceptance of the deep pathologizing trend. The thesis of Georgii Vvedensky (1994), based on a survey of 117 homosexual men who sought psychiatric assistance in 1989-1992 clearly deems homosexuality abnormal and homosexuals — psychologically impaired. Thus, Georgii Vvedensky identifies a hysteroid disorder in 49% of the sample where "psychophysical or disharmonious infantilism manifested in the form of personal immaturity, primarily of the emotional-volitional sphere" (Kon, 2003, p. 90). Noting "evidence of organic damage to the central nervous system," the author identifies in the cohort "a disproportional fixation on sexual life (ibid.). Surprising in this regard, notes Kon, is the complete absence of reflection on the sample limitation: dealing with persons with an apparent ego-dystonic disorder, Vvedensky uncritically extrapolates his findings onto the whole social group of homosexual persons (ibid.). Irina Panyukova, in her thesis on *Psychopathological Aspects of the Formation of Homosexual Preferences in Men* (Panyukova, 2000), follows Igor Derevyanko (1991) in distinguishing between "genuine" and "erroneous" homosexuality and borrows a lot from Gannushkin's understanding of homosexuality as resulting from an arrest in psychosexual development. For

proceeding with a "correction" effort, she offers comprehensive therapy for various groups of sexual minorities, as well as a list of measures to prevent homosexuality in adolescents which, in general, follow the pattern discussed above.

At the same time, a new, normalising trend emerges in the late 1990 and strengthens in the 2000s and 2010s. Thus, several psychiatric manuals appear that list homosexuality as a variation of the sexual norm referencing up-to-date international knowledge (Kon, 2003, p. 92); at the same time, a lot of relatively up-to-date research on the criteria of the sexual norm still insists on the "couple character" of a sexual intercourse, for instance Yagubov and Kibrik (2014). The Russian psychiatry no longer regards homosexuality as a disease (Nechiayev, 2019). Yet, different kinds of so-called reparative therapies are still widespread. I shall discuss these in the following section, before turning to the ways these remnants of the Soviet "sovereign" medical knowledge translate into the public discourse around homosexuality.

5.3.1 Reparative Therapies

In the 2004 *Manual of Forensic Psychiatry,* Professor Tatiana Dmitriyeva, then Director of The Serbskii State Scientific Centre for Social and Forensic Psychiatry, Russia's leading clinical and research institution in the field, decisively argues for the infeasibility of "treating" homosexuality:

> The potential danger of the so-called "reparative therapy" is tremendous — possible complications include depression, anxiety, and self-destructive behaviours [...] Contemporary official Russian psychiatry opposes any psychiatric treatment of homosexuality, both in the form of a "conversion" and "reparative" therapy that is based on the premise that homosexuality is, in itself, a mental illness, or on the premise that the patient must be willing to change their sexual orientation. Concerning the practice itself, there exists no known case when psychiatric or pharmacological treatment in this area would have had a positive result. A person's sexual, sensual, emotional experiences cannot be artificially changed" (Dmitriyeva, 2004, ch. 45.5).

However, Dmitriyeva's unambiguity is not shared by all of the professional psychiatric community. Specialists who practice or endorse reparative therapeutic interventions tend to defend those by referring to the presence in ICD-10 of the diagnosis of the ego-dystonic sexual orientation under the Code F66.1. Thus, prominent experts in the psychiatry of sexuality Yagubov & Kibrik (2014) and Vvedensky & Matevosyan (2017),[26] in their respective articles, argue that official international medical regulations contain no clear guideline or clinical protocol for addressing this disorder. In their view, some of the individuals who seek reparative interventions do so not as a result of social stigmatization and discrimination, but due to a genuine "rejection of their orientation with the desire to have a heterosexual family, children, etc" (Yagubov and Kibrik, 2014). Vvendensky and Matevosyan go even further, directly attacking the "bias" inherent in the project of ICD-11:

> Due to the fact that the distress associated with an unfavourable social environment cannot be considered a sign of a mental disorder to a greater extent than that associated with other stigmatizing social factors such as poverty or physical illness, the working group considered that the existence of such a distress does not possess evidentiary power. However, here the authors take a one-sided position, a priori assuming mental healthiness of the persons concerned and the lack of a connection between the feeling of social exclusion and stigmatization not with the influence of society, but with their own mental pathology, which is impossible to reveal through [standard] screening questionnaires. Sexological practice shows that in a number of cases, an ego-dystonic attitude to homosexual orientation is associated with an intrapsychic conflict that cannot be reduced to "stigmatization"; such people need psychiatric help (Vvendensky and Matevosyan, 2017, p. 104).

Pointing to the "ambiguous situation" regarding the choice of a therapeutic tactic with this category of patients, Kibrik and Yagubov argue that the choice of tactics needs to be "individual and aimed, first of all, at eliminating affective disorders, with the subsequent correction within the framework of the orientation that is socially significant for the patient" (ibid., p. 47).

[26] All the four psychiatrists are affiliated with institutions subjected to and funded by the Russian Ministry of Health.

This attitude is echoed in an interview with Dr. Irina Panyukova in the Russian Service of the BBC on the clinical approaches to "treating" homosexuality (Golubeva, 2017). Panyukova, who is personally known to me to have practiced reparative therapy on the basis of the Russian Medical Academy of Continuing Professional Education of the Russian Ministry of Health where she teaches psychiatry and sexology, argues that when "one's spiritual or personal life causes them discomfort or they want something different in their life, one can try and reconcile their life with the way they feel." If the orientation of sexual attraction that a person has is causing them discomfort, then, "regardless of the initial sexual orientation, the person may begin to try to search for themselves in a wider context." Regarding the possible therapeutic tactics for such an intervention, Panyukova suggests that it should start with determining what the person associates their condition with. The therapist then proceeds to the study of the specificities of their past relationships. After that, a direction of work is selected. However, she warns that "in inept hands or when practiced inappropriately, any method of treatment may prove unsuitable."

Unfortunately, it is exactly "inept hands" that many homosexual and transgender Russians happen to find themselves in. In December 2019, the Russian LGBT group *Vykhod* forwarded data on "conversion therapy" practices in Russia to the UN Independent Expert on Protection from Violence and Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (Report, 2020). The report is based both on the work experience of these organizations and on a study conducted in December 2019 by the LGBT group *Vykhod* and the LGBT ministry *Nuntiare et Recreare*.

The authors emphasize that their study is not scientific in scope and quality. To date, there are no such studies in Russia, and it seems increasingly unlikely that they will emerge any time soon. Although tentative and limited in scope, the *Vikhod* study allows one to draw the most

general impression of the field of conversion therapy practices in the country. This study was first undertaken by the LGBT+ organizations in response to a request from the Independent Expert on Protection from Violence and Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity. 184 people from Russia responded to the survey through a form posted on the research project website. The respondents named the regions of Russia where the practices of "conversion therapy" were experienced. In total, 28 out of 85 regions in Russia figure in the study, embracing all geographical parts of the country.

For the purposes of the study, "conversion therapy" means any practice aimed at changing sexual orientation and/or gender identity of a person (ibid.). According to the study, the main conversion therapy agents in Russia were identified as: psychologists and psychotherapists (more than 60% of LGBT people surveyed in 2019 gave this answer); psychiatrists (28%), representatives of religious organizations (20%), sexologists (10%); esoteric practitioners (fortune-telling, witchcraft, and others; 10%); representatives of 'alternative medicine' (6%), endocrinologists (4% of the surveyed LGBT people).[27]

Practices of conversion therapy in Russia were found to be varied and include:

- individual consultations with a psychologist or individual psychotherapy (68% of the number of LGBT people who took part in the survey);
- forced reading of religious or pseudo-psychological literature (29% of respondents);

[27] The report contains no absolute numbers for the answers submitted, only percentage.

- attending churches, religious organizations, and participating in religious practices, receiving instructions from clergy in order to change sexual orientation and (or) gender identity (23.5% of the survey participants);

- coercion to heterosexual sex (by specialists, community representatives, third parties; 18% of the survey participants);

- placement in a medical institution for the purpose of changing sexual orientation and (or) gender identity (13% of respondents);

- ritual practices (casting out demons, collective prayer for deliverance from sin, etc.) in order to change sexual orientation and (or) gender identity (13% of the survey participants);

- coercion to take medications to change sexual orientation and (or) gender identity (12% of the survey participants);

- group consultations or group psychotherapy (9% of the survey participants);

- visits to specialists who promise to "change" sexual orientation or gender identity through esoteric practices or alternative medicine (9% of the survey participants).

Least of all respondents (approximately 1% of answers) noted the use of such practices as:

- placement in a monastery;

- persistent recommendations to contract a heterosexual marriage;

- attempts to place in a medical institution, including a psychiatric hospital.

According to the survey, 26% of the LGBT persons voluntarily sought conversion therapy and 74% of the persons who took the survey were coerced into it. The reasons for involuntary conversion therapy were:

- psychological pressure from relatives and friends (29% of all those who took part in the survey);
- other violent causes (26%);
- threats from relatives and friends (19%);
- psychological pressure of church representatives (10%);
- threats from clergy (6%).

According to the survey, LGBT persons sought to quit the conversion therapy practices over different periods of time: some immediately, and some only after 15 years. On average, it took 2-3 years.

Although not comprehensive in nature, the study points to several noteworthy features of conversion therapy practices in Russia. First, it reveals a vast involvement of official medicine (state licenced psychiatrists, psychotherapists, and psychiatric hospitals). In an interview with the independent media *Nastoyascheye Vremia* (Srapian, 2020), several homosexual and trans persons, on condition of anonymity, described these insidious practices in detail. These included forced hospitalisation into (state) psychiatric institutions and forced medication with obsolete, potent antipsychotics with harmful side-effects, such as haloperidol. Two of those interviewed were diagnosed with schizophrenia (in one case the diagnosis was lifted by, presumably, a more qualified specialist). Second, the research reveals the vast involvement of

religious organizations, highlighting the role of organised religion in the anatomopolitics of sexuality in Russia.

In February 2016, the Russian Ministry of Health published a draft order proposing amendments to the *Procedures for the Provision of Medical Care for Mental and Behavioural Disorders for Public Discussion* (mskagency.ru, 2016; Prikaz, 2016). The project, marking an increase in state involvement in anatomopolitics of sexuality, proposes establishing sexology rooms at neuropsychiatric dispensaries where trained medical personnel would provide "appropriate assistance" to persons "suffering from sexual dysfunctions not caused by organic disorders or diseases, as well as sexual dysfunctions of mixed origin; gender identity disorders; disorders of sexual preference; family-sexual disharmonies, psychological and behavioural disorders associated with sexual development and orientation; family-sexual disharmonies."

The proposed establishments will carry out dispensary observation of such persons. In addition, a sexologist and a nurse at work there will participate, "in cooperation with a psychiatrist, in carrying out compulsory medical measures prescribed by court for persons suffering from a sexual preference disorder (paedophilia)" and "in conducting forensic psychiatric examinations on behalf of the head of an expert institutions or judicial investigative bodies" (Prikaz, 2016). Specialists working in such offices will also determine the indications for sex reassignment in identification documents, send for in-patient examinations of persons suffering from gender identity disorders, and carry out "sanitary-educational, advisory and preventive work on the development of sexuality in childhood and adolescence, sex education and enlightenment," as well as examinations relating to temporary disabilities resulting from such conditions.

Such offices would be equipped with "devices for vibration stimulation," for physiotherapy of sexual dysfunctions and dildos of different sizes. The order project stipulated that such an office staffed with one sexologist and a nurse should be in place in state and municipal medical

organizations per each 250 thousand of the population. As of May 2020, on the website of the Ministry of Health, the document status was indicated as "finalization of the draft regulatory legal act. Preparation of the final version of the text of the draft regulatory legal act."

5.3.2 "Epistemological Scandal"

In 1999, following the adoption of ICD-10 and the resulting official demedicalization of homosexuality, Head of the Laboratory for Forensic Sexology of the Serbsky Centre Professor Andrei Tkachenko was among the most vocal critics of the move. Addressing the 1973 ruling of the American Psychiatric Association that, according to Tkachenko, laid the basis for the removal of homosexuality from the project of the new ICD, he argued that the decision "was inspired by the pressure of the militant homophile movement" and was made under "essentially extremal" conditions, which "contradicts the principles of medical diagnostics in general" (Kon, 2003, pp. 91-92).

The framing of the demedicalization of homosexuality by the APA and WHO as a result of an "extreme pressure" is a common discursive strategy in the homophobic discourse in Russia. A search for "homosexualism/ality + decease" or "homosexualism/ality + truth" on the Russia's most popular search engine Yandex produces dozens of links to materials where this attribution constitutes the argumentative core. Articles under titles such as *Twelve Myths of Homosexual Propaganda*, *Homosexualism: The Truth They Hide from Us*, *The Rhetoric of the LGBT Movement in Light of Scientific Facts: Myths and Reality*, etc. that I looked at (some of them framed as popular science stories, some — as "expert reports") all stress the fact that the APA ruled by the margin of a single vote. Some of the authors utilise rhetorical devices of the scientific discourse referring to the APA ruling as an "epistemological scandal," arguing that a

"scientific truth" necessarily must be determined by a "blind randomised study" only rather than a tight margin vote conducted under an "enormous external pressure." Mostly produced by individuals whose expertise, institutional affiliation, or journalistic credentials are difficult, if not impossible, to establish, these accounts criss-cross the public discursive field about "scientific facts" on homosexuality in the Russian internet space.

Standing out among this plethora is a widely circulated "scientific report" prepared for the Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation, a consultative state institution whose mission is to analyze draft legislation and monitor activities of the parliament and government. The author of the report (Kocharian, 2019), published by the pro-Kremlin online-media *Regnum*, is Garik Kocharian, Doctor of Medical Sciences, Professor, Member of the Russian Academy of Natural Sciences (RAE), Professor of the Department of Sexology, Medical Psychology, Medical and Psychological Rehabilitation at the Kharkiv Medical Academy of Postgraduate Education, Honorary President of the Association of Sexologists and Sexotherapists of Ukraine, member of the Russian Scientific Sexological Society. It is this essay that appears to integrate a number of discursive moves encountered in the rest of the online sample (17 pieces altogether): it shares the overall architecture of discursive relations and discursive identities with the rest of the sample thus it may be argued to be a representative instance of the discursive regime that founds the whole sample.

It appears fruitful to analyse this text via the social and political logics approach. To reiterate, the concept of social logic refers to any conditional and historically specific systems of sedimented practice; political logic is a middle-range analytical concept denoting the arrangements of discursive elements responsible for the articulation of how any social logic may have emerged and how it may have been contested or transformed. The form of the address to a deliberative institution that embodies the link between civic society and the state, and the

framing of the piece as an expert intervention into a political debate positions the address as a discursive sample of the biopolitical knowledge production apparatus.

In terms of the sociopolitical logic, several points can be made about the texts. Firstly, making use of the topos of the "acute demographic situation" in both Russia and Ukraine and warning against the expansion of LGBT propaganda into the post-Soviet Slavic states, the author conjures up a geopolitical imaginary community in which Russia and Ukraine, invisibilizing their war ongoing for several years, are united in a chain of equivalence in opposition to the common constitutive other, the "homosexual lobby." This shared membership of "victim" thus appeals to the phantasmatic Eurasianist logic that I discussed in section 4.3.2:

> The intensive efforts […] at violent homosexualization of the younger generation, currently exercised in a number of countries, raise understandable concerns, in particular in terms of their possible expansion into the post-Soviet Slavic states (ibid.).

The antagonism is drawn around the relation to the social logic the author describes by alluding to the following conservative metanarrative:

> In the world of today, changes are happening aimed at the destruction of traditional norms and values, which, in particular, becomes reflected in medical classifications (ibid.).

The social logic of traditions is distinguished from and set up in an antagonistic relation with the logic of science informing "medical classifications" of sexuality, which is then implicated to undermine the autonomy of science through the alleged political intervention against human procreation:

> […] there was no scientific basis for [the exclusion of homosexuality from the classification of deceases], since it is clear that homosexual relations exclude the possibility of reproduction of the human race, and the adverse demographic consequences of such relations are absolutely obvious (ibid.).

"Reproduction" thus figures as a naturalised topos which should be deemed immune from topical interventions of the social and political logics, despite the contrary dynamic of interconnectedness described above.

The antagonistic other, the "homosexual lobby" is said to employ a set of tactics to meet its vicious political ends sutured together by the strategy of "compulsory homosexualization": "[…] the zombification (sic) of the public consciousness of modern society, to which it is absolutely groundlessly suggested that homosexuality is a norm" (ibid.).

> This decision was preceded by an intensified struggle of homosexuals for civil rights, attempts and threats of disruption of meetings of the American Psychiatric Association, insults to psychiatrists involved in research of homosexuality issues, and the declaration by homosexuals of psychiatry as their enemy (ibid.).

As a corollary, the "true science" taking sides with "us" is argued to be excluded from the logics of the geopolitical antagonism: but it is this very "alienness" of US science that underscores the implied claim that true science is "unbiased" — across the world — and so their claim is incontestable: homosexuality is "unnatural." Apart from the socio-political speculations, the speaker's appeal to his expertise in the primary field, i.e. the psychiatry of sexuality, is also mobilised towards the denaturalisation of homosexuality, to further legitimize the call for maintaining its previous categorization as "mental illness." This paves the way for the uncovering of the antagonist's political tactic of "involvement" of the youth that is being "lured" into homosexuality.

> It is a mistake to assume that homosexuality is in all cases congenital and therefore no external influences can affect the direction of sexual desire. Moreover, it can be argued that it is never congenital, since there is no sexual orientation in a new-born child, and it is only formed much later in life.
>
> […] However, numerous studies suggest the opposite [to the claim that homosexuals are normal]. Homosexuals are often diagnosed with depression and associated suicidality, anxiety disorders, high rates of alcohol and drug addiction, nicotine addiction, other substance abuse and/or addictions, disorders associated with the use of psychoactive substances (ibid.).

Overall, the text, then, enacts a hegemonic move which consists in the autonomization of an allegedly "impartial" medical knowledge on homosexuality that should be immune to the interventions of the antagonistic sociopolitical ideologically invested knowledge. As almost any hegemonic move, this one relies on a chain of naturalisations, thus concealing its own political premises. Yet, at the same time, the articulation of the topoi of demography and the protection of youth testifies to the biopolitical foundation of the enunciation. The conjuring of a chain of equivalence in which both Russia and Ukraine are opposed to the external threat of "compulsory homosexualization" attest both to the political logics of sexual sovereignty and Slavic cultural integrity. The latter nods towards the Eurasianist phantasmic logic of the constitutive geopolitical antagonism between *russkiy mir* (invisibilizing its colonial foundations exposed by the ongoing Russian aggression against Ukraine) and the "West" that has given in to the intervention of the "homosexual lobby."

5.4 "Traditional Values" as a Cure: Biopolitics of HIV/AIDS

Ever since the first case of HIV was documented in the Soviet Union in 1986, the epidemic has been expanding and the authorities' response to it has been largely delayed and inefficient (Pape, 2013). In the 1990s, the disease mainly affected the traditional high risks groups: intravenous drug users, MSM, and sex workers. At the 5th International Conference on HIV/AIDS in Eastern Europe and Central Asia held in 2016, Natalya Ladnaya, Senior Researcher at the Federal Scientific and Methodological Centre for the Control and Prevention of AIDS (hereinafter referred to as FSMCCPAIDS), stated that, based on the WHO classification, Russia has entered the generalized stage of the HIV epidemic (Mishina, 2016). She explained that in twenty Russian regions, more than 1% of pregnant women are HIV-infected, which, according to the criteria of WHO and UNAIDS, attests to the highest stage of

the epidemic when it is no longer confined to high-risk groups. In December 2016, at a meeting of the Presidium of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the head of the FSMCCPAIDS Professor Vadim Pokrovsky reported that, out of the 147 million population, approximately 1.5 million Russians were carriers of the HIV virus, and 240 thousand people had hitherto died from AIDS related complications (Rossiyskaya Gazeta, 2016).

According to the WHO data, since 2017, Russia has led the global statistics by the number of newly diagnosed cases: in 2017, 104 thousand cases in total, 71 cases per 100 thousand people. The second and third positions in the ranking were occupied by Ukraine (37 cases per 100 thousand) and Belarus (26.1 cases per 100 thousand), respectively (WHO, 2018). The sanitary and medical watchdog of Russia, Rospotrebnadzor called the WHO data unreliable (RBC, 2018a,b). The Minister of Health Veronika Skvortsova also criticised the WHO statistics for inaccuracy, arguing that the Ministry of Health provided more accurate data (ibid.). Rospotrebnadzor, together with the Ministry of Health, communicated a joint comment in which the information in the WHO report was called "extremely incorrect," arguing that Russia had a wide testing coverage and, when recalculating the values according to coverage, the incidence rate in Russia would be lower than in some European countries (ibid.). Further, Skvortsova noted Russia had not shared its HIV statistics for 2017 to WHO. However, the WHO report (2018) clearly indicates that the data for Russia were taken from official statistics published by the FSMCCPAIDS.

This "war of statistics" results from the virtual "dyarchy" between the FSMCCPAIDS on one side, and the Ministry of Health and Rospotrebnadzor on the other. Until 2011, the official Russian statistics on HIV/AIDS were published by the FSMCPCAIDS. Since 2012, Rospotrebnadzor has overtaken the power to control the official statistics, while the FSMCPCAIDS continues its own tracking that is available on its websites. Additionally, in

2016, the FSMCPCAIDS was stripped of the responsibility to organise national auctions for the centralised procurement of antiretroviral medications. The disagreeable institution's funding, thus, was significantly cut.

The head of the FSMCCPAIDS is known for his stances on the epidemiology of HIV/AIDS and preferred responses to it that contradict the official stances of the Ministry of Health, resulting in a years-long feud between the two governmental bodies. A proponent of globally proven harm reduction approaches, Pokrovsky has stated on numerous occasions that the negative factors contributing to the spread of HIV infection in the former USSR are the social stigmatization of HIV-infected people and the widespread homophobia, as well as insufficient public awareness and silence about the problem at the state level (Pokrovsky, 2013). In his view, the epidemic could be better contained if the population had more access to the knowledge of safe sex and intravenous drug users to substitution therapy with methadone. This view, largely relying on the successful experience of Western European countries in localising the epidemic (ibid.) stands in stark contradiction to the official approach adopted by the Russian government in the face of Rospotrebnadzor and the Ministry of Health that lays the emphasis on the propagation of "spiritual-moral education" in the field of sexual morality.

Despite the generalised character of the epidemic, intravenous drug users remain one of the key HIV/AIDS risk groups in Russia. Contrary to the harm management approaches promoted by the FSMCPCAIDS, the new anti-drug strategy prepared by the Ministry of Internal Affairs in 2020 completely disregards the expertise of the international scientific community on HIV containment in this group. Thus, among the goals the document declares is to prevent the use of substitution therapy for treating addiction. To reduce mortality among drug users, Home Office calls to rely on "Russian traditional spiritual-moral values" and strengthen control over financial transactions and drug propaganda on the Internet (Prikaz, 2020).

In Moscow, the Andrey Rylkov Foundation for the Promotion of Health and Social Justice (known as FAR) is the best known NGO in the field. Its main mission is the promotion of harm reduction practices among risk groups. The foundation volunteers work in the field: their outreach activities includes distribution of free condoms, sterile syringes, and antiseptic wipes to drug users, sex workers and MSM, distributing information brochures and instant HIV testing kits, and offering assistance in matters related to legal and psychological support.

In 2016, FAR and seven other HIV-service NGOs from different regions of Russia were officially recognized by the Ministry of Justice as "foreign agents" (i.e. political entities acting on behalf of foreign states), which had an immediate effect on the work of the organisations' volunteers and employees (Kondratyev, 2020). The "foreign agent" status obliged them to submit regular reports to the Ministry of Justice, and their collaborations with institutions of public education were virtually banned. Prosecutor's offices of the respective oblasts decided that the activities of FAR and similar organisations not only disagree with the Russian law, but also come into contradiction with state policy in the area of the prevention of drug use and HIV transmission (BBC Russia, 2016).

Since the mainstreaming of the HIV/AIDS issue in the Russian society by independent activists and free media, this clash of approaches between independent NGO's informed by international expertise and the authorities most clearly manifested in the healthcare policy of the city of Moscow. Not only social and educational but even medical activities of state-run AIDS centres of the city are being increasingly politicised (Kondratyev, 2020). Thus, the leadership of the Moscow City Centre for the Treatment and Prevention of AIDS is convinced that there are "biased opponents" operating in Russia in the sector whose primary "mission" is to deliberately distort the scale of the epidemic and engage in "alarmism." On the centre's website, among medical and legal information, one can find the section titled *By the Laws of Information*

Warfare[28] which is abundant in corresponding rhetoric. The section offers a selection of articles in which the centre's specialists debunk "manipulations with the data on the HIV epidemic in the country" and attribute the originators of these "manipulations" to foreign interference.

In 2018, the Moscow Department of Health launched an auction for "Providing services for the production of promotional and informational materials on affordable measures to prevent the spread of the HIV infection and promote a healthy lifestyle and traditional values"; the technical assignment was signed by the head of the Moscow AIDS Centre Alexei Mazus (Kondratyev, 2020). The auction closed on an order in the amount of 2.1 million roubles on which social advertising posters and booklets with the following content were produced and widely circulated:

> "There is a mere 80% chance that a condom can protect you";
>
> "Effectiveness of condoms is a myth";
>
> "Marriage fidelity is a guarantee of your HIV security";
>
> "No one but yourself will take responsibility for your life";
>
> "Risk groups are not only drug addicts and homosexualists (sic), but also men and women who lead a normal sex life."

Arguably, the most vocal and active political proponent of this "sovereign," "traditional values' "based approach to harm reduction has been the Head of the Committee for Healthcare of the Moscow City Duma, member of the ruling party United Russia, Lyudmila Stebenkova. On multiple occasions, she has argued that the AIDS problem in Russia can only be addressed through the propagation of family values, and criticised the harm reduction approaches that involve distribution of free condoms and syringes or sex education in schools (BBC Russia, 2020). In her statements, Stebenkova distinguishes between two approaches to prevention, the

[28] http://www.spid.ru/spid/ru/index_infowar (Accessed on Auguest 14, 2018)

liberal (distribution of syringes and condoms) and the conservative (promotion of family and moral values and complete abstinence from drugs):

> As an Orthodox Christian, I believe that family is the prerequisite of society's health. A healthy family is the main defence against AIDS. Where there is no betrayal and people are faithful and loving, there is a chance to give birth to a healthy child, to get healthy offspring. […] Today, HIV is the result of lax behaviour, debauchery. By and large, why on Earth are you and I talking about sexual debut at the age of 14? Is it normal, would you tell me? It's not normal! At 14, the child does not understand anything. At 18, they still don't really understand anything, but at least they are already adults. I want our girls to be given wedding rings, not condoms. This is the difference between the liberal way of prevention and the conservative one" (Taiga.info, 2016).

Stebenkova's distinction between liberal and conservative approaches to the prevention of HIV/AIDS seems borrowed from the analytical report prepared by the Russian Institute of Strategic Studies (RISI), Russia's main governmental policy think tank established by and subjected to the Russian President's Administration. The report, entitled *Social Aspects of the HIV Response in Megacities (Case Study of Moscow)* (RISI, 2016) was delivered to the deputies of the City Duma of Moscow the same year before Stebenkova made the above comment.

This 60-pages long comprehensive document is authored by four specialists, all employed by state institutions in the sphere of public health and hygiene: a Doctor of Biological Sciences, Professor; the Deputy Head of Control in the Sphere of Ensuring Sanitary and Epidemiological Well-Being; the Chief Physician of the Federal State Budget Health Care Institution State Centre for Hygiene and Epidemiology; and an epidemiologist, Head of the Implementation and Monitoring Group of National Health Programs at the Federal State Budget Health Institution State Centre for Health and Safety. The document follows the logic of linear progression from delineating problems through identifying their causes to suggesting remedies while at the same time discarding "harmful" alternatives. The authors claim to integrate the accumulated empirical and theoretical material (for Russia, relying mostly on the statistical data from

Rospotrebnadzor and the Moscow City AIDS Centre rather that of the FSMCPCAIDS) to reach the following three objectives:

(1) establish factors and measures of susceptibility, vulnerability and resistance of the metropolitan area to the HIV infection;

(2) demonstrate regional and subregional models for the development of the HIV epidemic, including the Western and Russian variants;

(3) analyse social aspects of the epidemiological situation in the context of migration processes (this latter objective is declared and proceeded with despite the fact that, among the authors of the report, there are no experts on social, political or demographic issues).

The biopolitical aspect of the document manifests itself in the articulation of a connection between state policy and the citizens' "healthy" conduct: "It is not by accident that the HIV infection and AIDS are classified as socially significant diseases. Their spread and eradication directly depend on the conduct of the population, which in turn is shaped by the socio-economic conditions of life, traditions and state policy" (ibid., p. 5).

In a dedicated chapter (pp. 20-24), the report stresses the role of foreign citizens in the spread of the epidemic:

> Global experience shows that, in the development of the epidemiological situation in megacities, migrants play a paramount role. […] In Spain, Latino homosexual migrants are a high-risk group, in the UK, it is heterosexual African women, while Germany has a high proportion of those among HIV-infected drug addicts[29] and prostitutes (p.20).

[29] The Russian word *narkoman* carries a distinctive stigmatising connotation. The NGOs working with issues of drug addiction and HIV prevention use more appropriate terminology, yet the state discourse as traced through the documents analysed in this chapter sticks to the stigmatising lexeme.

Once it needs to acknowledge the presence of HIV inside the country, the document lays a special emphasis on the role of "illegal migrants" in spreading HIV both in Russia and abroad. It notes that 42% of those who arrived in Moscow in 2014 were immigrants from the "drug-hazardous" Central Asian region. Although it is claimed that the share of foreigners among carriers of HIV in Moscow has been sharply increasing, the review arrives at the conclusion that the prevalence of the HIV infection among migrants does not yet exceed that among Muscovites. Nevertheless:

> Migrants are vulnerable to the HIV infection due to risky behavioural practices outside the family and their low awareness of transmission routes and methods of prevention. […] In addition, it should be noted that staying in a new country gives one a feeling of liberation from previous social norms and restrictions.
>
> It is important to bear in mind that chronic social and economic problems of labour migrants often lead to substance abuse. At the same time, individuals who are aware of their positive HIV status conceal it and, as a rule, find various illegal ways to stay in Russia (ibid., p.22).

The migrant from the Central Asian region thus emerges as an alien biopolitical threat, adding a biopolitical dimension to the (post)colonial dynamic of inferiorating cultural alienation of the post-communist subaltern countries like Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The report goes on to collocate it with the topos of costliness ("we" have to pay for "them"), noting that the expenses of the city of Moscow on screening and the treatment of ("legal") migrants are disproportionally high and continuously increasing (ibid.).

Although the report acknowledges the prevalence of the heterosexual way of the transmission of HIV in Russia, yet, it is not heterosexuality itself, but "risky liberal behaviour," that is said to cause the virus transmission among this group. Conversely, when addressing the homosexual way of contagion, no explicit mention of risky practices is made: homosexuality is rather collocated with the HIV threat as such. Neither does the document address any practices the City of Moscow implements in the direction of harm reduction among this group, while there

is a considerably long section on the measures towards the prevention of HIV among the heterosexual population that are deemed overall successful.

> The Moscow vector of growth in the proportion of infections through homosexual contacts is […] moving in the direction of European capitals. The growth of this route of HIV transmission is characteristic of many cities, but the gay community of London is currently at the greatest risk. […] [T]he London gay community is most affected: every eighth of them lives with HIV infection (every 26th outside the capital). […] The very size of the Moscow gay community and the spread of HIV infection in its environment is significantly lower than in London, but there is a steady tendency in the capital of the Russian Federation towards the intensification of the homosexual transmission of HIV, the growth dynamics of which comes second after heterosexual, ahead of intravenous (ibid., p. 30).

While arguing (without backing) that the gay community in Moscow is considerably smaller than in other European capitals, the authors nevertheless note that in Russia, homosexual practices are largely hidden, discreet. However, no reflection, similar to that concerning the risky behaviour of migrants, follows on the possible reasons of this state of affairs. Instead of a discussion of the possible causes and types of risky behaviour among MSM, the above text is supplemented by screenshots from a Russian gay dating website with (rather unconventional, for an expert report) selection of advertisements from users (ibid., p. 30). This supplementation and the selection of quotes highlight the logic of unconditional responsibilization of this community by collocating it with offbeat, repulsive sexual practices:

> "Two handsome tops would come and visit";
>
> "Perv to jerk off via skype";
>
> "Are there married dudes here?;
>
> "Looking for a big, meaty Caucasian cock";
>
> "Will suck like a docile slut."

The closing chapter, entitled *The Potential of the City Environment in the Containment of HIV / AIDS* (pp. 47-58), introduces the distinction of the two approaches referred to by Stebenkova.

The first section establishes a discursive boundary with the antagonistic other and uncovers the perceived social logic of their actions. The key antagonistic value is:

> The liberal approach, actively promoted by Western countries, declares [to offer] comprehensive information about the problem, the content of which is sometimes too bold and does not take into account the age characteristics of the target group. The latter, in turn, is considered extremely broadly, which leads to the same way of informing applied both to prostitutes and middle school girls who did not have any sexual experience (p. 47).

The social field is thus structured around relations of incommensurability between the "good" population and the "bad" risk groups characterised by different sets of ethical values and patterns of conduct. Thus, criticising an information booklet developed by an independent NGO (whose "foreign" financing is specifically stressed) for Moscow, the authors perpetuate the logic of the "expansion" of the "bad" social groups through contagion with "harmful" information:

> A booklet, originally developed for individuals involved in prostitution, does not indicate its target audience, which means that there are no guarantees that these and similar materials were not distributed, for example, for 'educational' work with adolescents (p. 49).

The political logic behind this approach is articulated as "the corruption of the younger generation, the destruction of the institution of the family and the worsening of the demographic situation" (p. 47). On the "good" side of the hegemonic frontier we find "experts" and "representatives of the parent community" who "reasonably" contest the political logic described. The popular subject Muscovites is said to have given this approach the contemptuous name "sex-enlightenment" (the Russian word *seksprosvet* does not, in fact, carry a non-contextual negative connotation).

The position of the originators ("lobbyists") in this social logic is assumed by: NGO representatives "from far abroad [who] began to actively promote destructive AIDS concepts," "representatives of the porn industry" and companies producing condoms (p. 47). The authors

uncover, innumerate, and extensively criticise the “huge array of organizations responsible for introducing false ideas and risky practices into the minds of growing Russian citizens within the framework of the ideology of “safe sex” (ibid.).

This political logic is said to be played out via the following strategies:

(1) the absolutization of the role of contraceptives (often accompanied by their distribution);

(2) the formation of the illusion of the safety of sex under the condition of using contraceptives;

(3) propaganda among children and adolescents of autonomous behavioural ethics, when the rights of children are opposed to the rights of parents;

(4) positivization of HIV:

> For some reason, the HIV-positive status is positioned [in a sample of the “liberal” approach the authors discuss] in a positive way, which, according to sexologists, dulls the sense of danger in adolescents. Moreover, one can allegedly live an active, vibrant life with HIV. The authors propose a social model of the "HIV activist" (p. 51).

(5) popularization of risky behaviour, including homosexuality and promiscuous sexual intercourse, etc.

Homosexuality, thus, once again is treated “as such,” i.e. gets collocated with risky behaviour and social pathology. The listed organizations, the report claims, not only conduct “openly subversive “educational activities,” but also engage in political lobbying for their ideas, “form a resource base for destructive actions” allegedly aimed at hampering pro-reproductive, demographic objectives of the state, attempting to counter them with “the introduction of antinatal social technologies, dissemination of social pathologies, etc” (p.47).

As a result of the "durable social experiments," Moscow, "despite the enormous pressure from the Western and domestic lobbyists of the liberal approach, nevertheless came to its own model of regional policy aimed at genuine prevention and of HIV/AIDS" (p. 51). The core of the model, and the floating signifier that stands in for it, is 'traditional values' made meaningful through articulating together the ethical ideals of the Christian family and the "indigenous" conservative ideology:

> As Moscow experts were studying the possible consequences of implementing the "harm reduction" programs, fundamentally different programs began to emerge in the capital. Over the past ten years, the Russian concept of the AIDS response has been clearly framed in Moscow on the platform of Russian pedagogy, sociology, psychology and public health, all of which determines the content of the conservative ideology (p. 50).

Thus, through the appeal to the "Russian" pedagogy, sociology, and psychology, the topos of sovereignty receives an emphasised enunciation.

On the "good" side of the hegemonic frontier we find the Moscow City Duma (with a special acknowledgement of Lyudmila Stebenkova), the Russian State Security Council (headed by President Putin) and the "good" NGOs and GONGOs that share the value package of the conservative approach, such as the Charity Foundation for the Protection of Family, Maternity and Childhood. The position of the representative expert is filled with Timur Bessarab, head of the HIV Prevention Department of the Moscow City AIDS Prevention and Control Centre, who, answering a journalist's question about how to avoid contracting AIDS, allegedly said: "Love and fidelity are a guarantee against the disease" (Bessarab, n.d.).

Thus, the document introduces the proposed strategy for the implementation of the value signifier: "the current Moscow HIV vector is aimed at promoting fidelity as the most acceptable and effective stance in building reliable sexual relations, instead of sexualizing fragile children's

consciousness" (pp. 51-52). This enunciation is then amplified by the naturalisation of the institute of the traditional family with its inherent integrity and mutual trust:

> Such a traditional approach, in which the closest people for a teenager - his parents - become the main channel for transmitting sensitive information, is much more effective due to the incomparably higher level of trust between children and parents. Otherwise, society will inevitably encounter an a priori distrust, an aggravated sense of natural shame and a psychological unwillingness of schoolchildren to discuss such frank topics with strangers from the education system who are far from always enjoying proper authority. In addition, […] parents are thus encouraged to a dialogue with their children, which can increase their authority in the eyes of the younger generation during the difficult teenage period and convey the necessary information and knowledge in a form acceptable to children, taking into account their personal characteristics. By the way, recent sociological polls convincingly confirm the society's demand for the intensification of the parent-child communication on such delicate issues. So, it has been shown that most Russians, including residents of Moscow, do not need "enlightening" services of dubious public organizations (p. 51).

In terms of discursive relations, besides the antagonism enunciated above, standing out are those of incommensurability, echoing the social divisions enunciated in the previous section of the document. Potentially, society as a whole is a risk group, so the objective of state policy is to prevent the risk from proliferating onto the "normal" population and to contain it within its "traditionally" established borders:

> According to Bessarab who was mentioned above, HIV infection is a disease of risk groups. The only question is how wide the boundaries of such groups are. The state's objective is to ensure that the population is properly informed and has a safe model of behaviour, which would ensure it would not be put at risk (p. 52).

The document's hegemonic move, enacted through the referencing of public opinion polls revealing that "most Russians, including residents of Moscow, do not need the 'enlightening' services of dubious public organizations" (p. 51), relies on the sociopolitical logic of sovereignty:

> We believe that the conservative shift in public consciousness has been the corollary of the rejection of the liberal paradigm in sexual education, often enacted under the pretext of combating HIV / AIDS (ibid.).

To sum up, the document enshrines the discourse of sexual sovereignty as the national strategy for combatting HIV/AIDS epidemic. Once again, the discourse is implicated in the Russia/West antagonism, where Western actors are said to exercise a corrupting influence on Russians through disseminating "false" ideas. This bears on the dynamic of de/naturalisation where the political logic of the discursive Other is exposed and highlighted, while the one weaponised by the discourse proponents is naturalised and thus concealed.

Chapter 6 In Quest of a National Idea: The Impasse of Russian Identity Politics

This chapter consolidates the arguments of the previous ones in the discussion aimed at identifying the structural conditions of possibility of the research object. Here, I argue that the ways the anxieties over sovereignty and biopolitics articulated in relation to sexuality and its normalization vis-a-vis "pathologies" are produced by the inherent liminality of the national subject of Russia. Caught in the game of "agility" that reveals a persisting ideational deficit at the core of #SistemaRF, the latter conjures up "ironic ideologies" to cover the empty space of the national subject. Enacting the postcolonial game of mimicry, the Kremlin's subaltern empire, as well as certain oppositional domestic actors, are seeking to work out a political voice and grammar of their own, while speaking on behalf of and at the same time silencing the subaltern subject of the people. This discursive construction fails time and again, as the only available political grammar the Kremlin has at its disposal is that of the "third space" — the Western language of democracy infused with poorly developed ideas of particularism, leaving the enunciative subject of Russia with the only option of responding and subverting the discursive Master, rather than challenging them outside their discursive ground. I argue that the Russian biopolitics of sexual sovereignty is part and parcel of this postcolonial identity game and a product of transnational discursive circuits set in motion by the recent societal developments in Western societies to which the hybrid political subject of Russia feels compelled to react, including the mainstreaming of emancipatory sexual politics and the rise of homonationalism.

6.1 Ironic Empire: "On-Call Spectres" and the Empty Place of Ideology

In his analysis of Russia's "ironic statehood," Pavlovsky (2019) could not avoid addressing his own role in constructing the political language in which the state speaks to its subjects today:

> Faced with the people's trauma incurred by the dominant concepts like "reform" or "democrats," we retreated, replacing them with others. Today, it is evident that political speech was corrupted from the very start, a speech that evades engaging in an argument with those who hate it. Thus, an evasive, discommunicative, sly speech, unsuitable for debate, was born. Today, it is in the backbone of the discourse of the Kremlin's TV shows (2019, pp. 231-232).

In Section 3.2.2, I briefly addressed the issue of the meaning Pavlovsky invests the term "irony" with. The ironic, he claims, "does not mean comic, joyful, and least of all, alas, funny. The ironic is a way of being alienated from everything that it is operating with, including facts, ideas, and principles" (Pavlovsky, 2019a, p. 30). "Alienation" stands here for the instrumentalization and commodification of claimed values in the game of agility (the latter concept is developed in Section 3.1). This is all Pavlovsky has to say about the concept of irony, so, in order to specify it further, I shall refer to Søren Kierkegaard's understanding of irony as a disruptive force whose key effect is to undo texts and readers alike (Kierkegaard, 1966, p. 278). In Kierkegaard's words, from *On the Concept of Irony with Continual Reference to Socrates,* irony is defined as:

> […] the infinite absolute negativity. It is negativity, because it only negates; it is infinite, because it does not negate this or that phenomenon; it is absolute, because that by virtue of which it negates is a higher something that still is not. The irony established nothing, because that which is to be established lies behind it… (ibid., p. 273).

In Kierkegaard's view, irony entails endless reflection and violent reversals, ensuring incomprehensibility of ironic speech (ibid.). Another helpful reflection on irony that situates it in the discussion I offer in this chapter, comes from American writer David Foster Wallace who saw the pervasiveness of ironic tropes as the symptom of "great despair and stasis in U.S. culture" (Wallace, 1993).

Now, In Section 4.2, I discussed the representational strategy of the main format of Putin's communication with the "people of Russia," the show *Direct Line with Vladimir Putin*. One of the key characteristics of the show's format is its increasingly atomising, deconsolidating representation of the Russian society: the growing proportion of personal grievances communicate the local, individual character of the society's problems whose articulation is insulated, divorced from the structural conditions in which they emerge. The whimsical nature of many questions asked, grievances voiced, and successful measures reported is symptomatic of an evasion of representation of potentially mobilising concerns on the national agenda.

If larger societal issues are addressed, the modus of their articulation is mostly optimistically "unifying," which effectively demobilises and alienates the spectator: Russians are invited to behold the bravura march of "volunteers" who are always already addressing an issue before the larger crowd is duly informed of its existence. An increasingly important political subject in the Kremlin's domestic political discourse, "volunteers" are mostly carefully handpicked and controlled by the Administration of the President. The presented group of "volunteer" figures fabricates a representation of the "good" people's collective efforts at maintaining the upward march of Russia's national goals (aka "national projects"), functioning as a discursive jammer of depoliticisation by divorcing societal issues from the general context of their emergence.

6.1.1 Ironic Facts, Ironic Agenda-setting

The Soviet system was a dull, overideologized discursive space characterised by a constant lack of information due to the almost unlimited state powers of gatekeeping (Benn, 1985; Pomerantsev, 2019). Its serious, dry approach to the omniscient propaganda and the strict censorship left no space for infotainment. Soviet citizens were exposed to continuous and pervasive interpellations into their predetermined roles within the only available regime of

truth. Conversely, #SistemaRF "spews out a ton of dazzling fictions, from scripted and staged to unintentional but hilarious" (Pavlovsky, 2019a, p. 240). These fictions are then multiplied by the diverse palette of internet media and social networks, dispersing regimes of truths and dissolving facts into a playful cascade of interpretations that confuse but entertain (Pomerantsev, 2019). The Kremlin's media executives have long tried their best to never let any other actor set the national agenda. Should that occasionally happen, a swift interception operation is carried out — either by juxtaposing a new, louder topic that feeds on the public's arousal produced by an unauthorised issue, or by an unexpected, ground-breaking entry into the ongoing debate. In these conditions, relevant information about "facts" (understood here as first-hand data about occurring evens free from ideological interpretations) is a rarity. Fictional, facilitated conflicts receive much more resonance on social media than the "factual ones," be it the murders and persecution of oppositioners, the crimes of the Chechen authorities, or the social reality of deepening social divisions along the lines of class, race, and ethnicity, let alone the burning divisive issues voiced by sexual minorities.

A telling example is the recent national conversation on the so-called "new ethics" and "cancel culture." Fabricated in a political space defined by an almost complete lack of allowed meaningful political debate, the issue entered the public discourse at a time when barely anyone in Russia was being "cancelled" or "shut down" in a way similar (in the opinion of the discourse facilitators) to the public uproar responding to the remarks of author Joanne Kathleen Rowling, or to powerful perpetrators exposed by the *MeToo* movement in the West. The "cancel culture" debate was staged to "cancel" the public interest in the scandal generated by Alexey Navalny's team that exposed President Putin's luxurious "palace" near the resort town of Gilendzhik in Krasnodarski Krai. Exactly when the Kremlin's media executives were trying desperately to win time and tune down the public uproar while the state propaganda machine was already hardworking on putting together a counter-narrative, which took a couple of weeks to be

launched in state-controlled media, the well-known scandalous theatre director Konstantin Bogomolov[30] came up with a manifesto (Bogomolov, 2021) condemning 'cancel culture'. The piece was published by the stronghold of liberal journalism *Novaya Gazeta* and immediately diverted the attention of the very stratum that at the moment had been busy fuelling the public condemnation of "Putin's luxury" (BBC Russia, 2021).

Russian liberals are well known to be decisively split on the issue of the so-called "new ethics" (see, e.g., Surman and Rossman, 2021). The concept is usually used by those overall critical of (or willing to neutrally distance themselves from) a heterogenous set of cultural shifts in Western democracies that, reminiscent of a conspiracy theory logic, are seen to be methodically imposed by the "woke minorities" like people of colour, feminists, LGBT+ persons, etc. upon the "innocent" majority. The main "victim" of this overall shift figures as the white, straight, "mentally unchallenged" middle-class Western man, whereas the main beneficiaries are "week," "decapacitated" members of minority groups with endless, poorly targeted grievances and "in therapy" (sic.). An important target of critique, travesty and ridicule in this discourse is the new languages, regimes of truth, and techniques of care of the self promoted by psychotherapy, demand for which is undergoing an explosive growth among a young educated middle-class stratum in Russia (see Aronson, 2021). Seen as privileging weakness, laziness and an overall lax attitude to self, combined with a poorly justified whimsical refusal to participate in the meritocratic, achievement-based neoliberal regime of the social, this "therapeutic" discourse is seen as a threat to the pillars of Western civilisation dismantling (aka "cancelling") the type of individual who is credited with building the foundations that have allowed "us Westerners" to enjoy an unprecedented level of welfare and freedom (which are now being abused). Bogomolov's manifesto titled *The Hijacking of Europe 2.0* contains no original

[30] Bogomolov's proximity to the Kremlin was confirmed in 2019 when he was appointed Creative Director at one of Moscow's prime state theatres.

additions to a rhetorically rich summary of this discourse. It is symptomatic not only of the agenda hijacking operation, but the reliance on a common-sense set of arguments and rhetorical strategies originating in one Western political discourse to fight another.

6.1.2 The Ironic Figure of "Putin"

The foundational discursive figure of "Putin" in #SistemaRF is ironic inasmuch as it, as per Kierkegaard's definition of irony, establishes nothing, concealing what lies behind it. Pavlovsky describes the President as the main Russian media whose key content is the show "strengthening of the state power"[31] (Pavlovsky, 2019a, p. 230). This implication precludes seeing Putin as merely a replaceable human actor, a politician who owns his objectively measurable levels of popularity and possesses a personal subjectivity and charisma that fill the position he occupies.

> […] Putin's rating figures are merely an index of the perceived lack of alternatives to the System by the respondents. [These figures] say nothing either about the absence of alternatives and alternative politicians, or about the real level of trust in a candidate personally (ibid., p. 242).

During Putin's first term in office, his image team held a series of discussions addressing what appeared to them to be the key question of the President's positioning (ibid., 230). One option was working out a clear, comprehensive image; the other possibility was remaining intentionally dubious in answering the famous question asked by a western journalist: "Who is Mr. Putin?"[32] The team eventually settled on the latter option that was named "white tiger in

[31] This almost idiomatic phrase in the Russian political discourse is almost exclusively infused with a positive connotation as the opposite of the impotency of the state in the face of the "anarchy" and "anomie" of the 1990s.
[32] The President's famous response was as short as: "President of the Russian Federation" (Gornostayev, 2001).

the fog"; the formats for presenting the "President" to the world were developed on its basis (ibid.).

The two key formats of the presentation of "Putin" have been the Valdai Forum targeted at Russian and foreign elites, and the show *Direct Line* whose target audience is "the people" of Russia. The former's format, Pavlovsky contends (ibid., p. 231), hinged on the dissonance between the personal presence of Putin himself, and the uncertainty regarding his his future actions. At the forum, Putin has always extensively dwelled on his past activities, choices, and policies, explained their objectives and inner logics. Such comprehensiveness led the forum's guests to mistakenly believe that they had the basic data to predict his future actions. The media function of "Putin" thus developed as an increasingly scaled up floating signifier that referenced no solid, long term political stance.

In the format of the *Direct Line*, this practice of signification reached the apogee of sacralisation: a straightforward performance of the charisma of omnipotent power (at the same time concealing the President's personality). Conceived as a "conversation with the people" — this indeed was the working title for the show (ibid.) — it hinged on the dramaturgy of "waiting for a miracle" (ibid.) whereby each social group constructed as belonging to the body of the "good people" anticipated being directly addressed and helped out. The discursive construction of the "good people," however, has inevitably depended upon exclusion through scapegoating of those social groups to whom the responsibility for the major social problems has been relegated — "on-call spectres."

6.1.3 Ironic Pragmatism and Stalinist Formulas of Exclusion

For its thirty-year history in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian state has been declaratively searching for a "national idea" that would solidify the sense of belonging in

society and put an end to what figures in the official discourse as the "anomie" of the 1990s (Willerton, 2017; Karlova, 2019). The process has been hindered, among other things, by the almost non-existent institute of reputation, which effectively rendered ideological coherence of public articulations unnecessary. A good example of this is Vladimir Zhirinovsky, the leader of one of Russia's largest political parties, the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR). LDPR has never adhered to a coherent liberal-democratic ideology, nor any other for that matter. Its political doctrine has been a postmodernist mishmash of ideas and statements ranging from moderate to explicitly fascist (Umland, 2010; Beichelt, 2009). As a political showman ever finding new ways to entertain the crowd, Zhirinovsky has excelled at putting together each time a fresh populist pastiche ad hoc that would consistently win his party a solid number of seats in the Duma.

It does not hold, however, to claim that life in Russia is completely devoid of any covert ideational ground, contends Pavlovsky (2019, p. 267-268). Already back in the 1990s, the public attitude towards ideologies morphed into what he calls "counter-idealism" driven by the only desire, namely, not to be deceived again:

> [The post-Soviet citizen] fled from republic as a burden, driven by a firm decision not to fall into the trap of ideology where he [sic] had found himself during Perestroika. In misinterpreting his experience, […] he made two mistakes. First, he gave away the matter of principles to the authorities. Second, he turned power itself into his new ideology (ibid., p. 249-250).

This attitude paved the way for what Pavlovsky calls "constructivist" governance (ibid., p. 251) in the sense of articulating social strata, manipulating religions and churches, at each moment taking up whatever ideological construction appears handy. Moreover, there may be discerned a clear correlation, if not causality, between the ideational crisis and the advent of highly efficient forms of authoritarian governance: the latter's exercise is not delimited by the necessity to negotiate an ideological consensus. When a viable model is required, it can be built

on the basis of a *reference sample* rather than a set of guiding principles and ideas (ibid., p. 251-252). Reference samples, models of governance that have already been implemented elsewhere, substitute for an ideology: "doing things like" in the US, China, Georgia, or Israel becomes a goal in itself, divorced from a value system that would lend meaning to and explain the purposes of a particular imitation. Pavlovsky understands reference samples as an important factor in the strategy of improvisation, lending the latter stability and coherence. In his view, the place of values, for as long as since the rule of Peter the Great, has been appropriated by the argument "they have made it" (see e.g. Burakova, 2011). Ideas are recognised only when and as allegedly successfully implemented elsewhere.

As Putinism advanced and the topos of sovereignty strengthened, the imaginary value of the transfer of Western institutions was gradually replaced by a rhetoric of an overarching goal – "struggle for the unity of Russia," "building a vertical of power," "fighting against colour revolutions," etc. Extremist and radical variants of archaic ideologies, such as Zhirinovsky's improvisations, are summoned to service these objectives, they are hence merely functional ad hoc. Their task is to justify ensuing costs and scattered repressions aimed at maintaining the required level of consent through exclusion and fear. As a result, fundamentalist-postmodern mixtures emerge (ibid.).

The leader as the shepherd of reality has taken the place of ideology (Pavlovsky, 2019a, p. 254). #SistemaRF (and its "leader") comes up with ideological grounds for what is in essence just a dispersed, convulsive activity. The principle of pragmatic selection is what is deemed effective for conjuring up some distain in relation to the "West." When the enmity with the West needs to be grounded in an ideational domain, random ideas are borrowed from what comes to be known as "Russian philosophy". Russia is declared a "civilization," with the underlying concept of *russki mir* reactivated. All of these terms are quotations out of context in which they

might have made sense: “ideological "dismemberment" of dead ideological bodies of a history that is over” (ibid., p. 257).

Behind the search for an enemy rendered necessary by the inherent void at the heart of the “we,” and the perpetual lack of the enemy figure, lies the pattern of the Russian “society of power” (discussed in Section 3.2). The use or creation of extremity is mandatory: the RF is fully capable only in emergency situations. Generation of states of emergency, argues Pavlovsky (p. 255), began in 1991–1996. The transition to a new regime in 1999-2003 brought about a deliberate increase in extremity: the war in Caucasus. Today, a characteristic feature of the System is the expectation of a further repressive shrinking of the allowed space for political activities. An important circumstance, however, is that repressions are conceived and implemented hastily, without effort, only to forget about their new iteration soon in the future. This is how and why fictitious conflicts and splits in society are created, with “hooligans disguised as "social activists" let loose on undesirable minorities” (p. 241) — on-call spectres.

An important factor in the System’s self-defence (and the preservation of the Kremlin regime) against its both internal and external “enemies” is the oversaturation of the Russian language with stigmatizing terminology (ibid.). The continuity with the Stalinist vocabulary defined the discourse of the intelligentsia during perestroika: this social stratum unwillingly served as a transport for Stalin's formulas of linguistic exclusion (Oushakine, 2001). The anti-Stalinism of Perestroika practiced Stalinist forms of expression with the uncontested discourse “no other choice” at its centre. An axiom for both the Russian state and the opposition to it is that social evil is derived from the evil that is personally inherent in an evil person. “Evil can only be

removed along with [the agent] by personal purge. This is a common philosophy for Stalin, Kasparov,[33] Putin, and Bastrykin"[34] (Pavlovsky, 2019a, p. 232-233).

6.1.4 The Doctrine of Global Civilizational Threat

Starting from Putin's Munich speech of 2008 (see Section 4.2), the Kremlin has promoted an ideology of standoff with the West. This ideology, paradoxically, does not have a single non-Western element: it is made of Western rhetorical and ideological tools (ibid., p. 263). Yet, in line with its pragmatic hybridity, this hostility towards the "Western world" with its modernisational trends (associated with secularity, gender equality, and "open door" migration policies) does not constitute a foundational ideology of the Kremlin or #SistemaRF. Rather, they are random, opportunistic narratives, designed for the purposes of bargaining with the West. (Ibid., p. 267). And yet, it is not true that there is no doctrinal attitude to the world in #SistemaRF at all. The doctrine of the global threat to Russia as a civilisation is widely accepted (ibid.) and believed in. This doctrine has absorbed the ideas of Eurasianists, as well as Surkov's writings on sovereignty. The systemic, vague, feeling of threat is perpetually seen as materialized in whatever comes across as "Western influence." As per the thesis of the enemy's existential ambiguity (see Section 3.3), the global threat to Russia is always conceived as an internal threat: the Enemy is always both global and internal.

The enemy is located, defined and targeted on the basis of the current objectified avatar of the nebulous, opaque feeling of a global civilizational threat: the enemy could be the "West," liberalism, or the United States. Similar to Schmittean ontology of political difference (see Section 3.3), the threat is premised, pre-attributed to the adversary. Enmity figures as an

[33] Garry Kasparov, world chess champion and a notable face of the 'White Ribbon Movement".
[34] Aleksandr Bastrykin, head of the Russian Investigative Committee responsible for the persecution of many dissidents, human rights defenders, and political activists.

ontological given, not the relationship one builds with an adversary when there is one to enter such a relationship with. The myth of a threat required a perpetual search of enemies in the outside world: the enemy is a derivative of the nexus of threats and the corruption of reality that are always already there approaching Russia and, hence, must be stopped at any cost. Here lies the key difference of this construction from the Soviet doxa: the latter saw the world as dialectically conflicting, which, however, in the long run, was important and positive. In the RF, the world is merely a world of threat that is alarming, even when it is not directly visible: "[t]he world outside of Russia is evil" (ibid).

6.2 The Third Space: Cutting Across the "Divide"

6.2.1 Situating Homophobia

The ways Western and Russian liberal media and moral entrepreneurs addressed the issue of the LGBT+ rights violations in Russia over the period of 2012-2014 are in many cases haunted by a problematic political framework of decontextualization (Healey, 2017). The treatment of the Russian state homophobia as a corollary of a linear process of "turning away" from the "West" entails losing sight of how these processes in fact result from an intense and even obsessive engagement with the "big Other." This lack of the work of contextualisation results in perpetuating Manichean imaginary geographies, marking the spaces of "progress" in sharp opposition to those of retrogression. It is this imaginary that bears Western homonationalism fuelled by orientalising tropes. Within this worldview, it is habitual to problematize Russian sexual politics as a case-in-itself, disregarding what Jasbir Puar calls transnational discursive circuits of call and response (2007) that inaugurate a space of negativity where both pro- and anti-LGBT agents hail and incite each other into the same discourse, prescribing to each other the limits of intelligibility.

Finger-pointing at other countries' "homophobia," premised on a firm belief in having eradicated it at home are characteristic of a discourse that is less concerned with extending LGBT+ rights than with stoking international rivalries. As pointed out by Dan Healey, postcolonial entanglements conceal the ways accusations of "homophobia" are negotiated between former metropole and colony – or, between countries that belong to the core and the periphery within the world-system of uneven and combined development:

> In the 21 century, rapid and transnational diffusion of "homophobia" as a political concept has obscured some of the historical and intellectual baggage that it acquired as it evolved in the West. That historical baggage "haunts" the use of the word beyond Western contexts and contributes to misunderstanding in transnational dialogues about anti-LGBT policies. […] We are obliged to criticise homophobia where we discern it, but we must do so reflectively, remembering that homophobic violence at home took decades to recognize. We must also consider the entanglements of homonationalist rivalries and post-colonial relationships. Such care was seldom taken when Western journalism and social media attacked Russian policies in 2013-14. Accusations of homophobia cast at Russia proceeded from a cluster of contradictory and "memoryless" assumptions about Russia's place in Europe and in the world. We cannot decide if Russia is a part of Europe, or a distinctive "civilization" of its own, and the battles over that ambiguity cloud our reactions (Healey, 2017, p. 4).

What is crucial to me in the above quote is that it is not only the Western media and general public that systematically fail to decide on the "place of Russia," but that Russia itself and the anti-gay actors within it, while claiming indigeneity, are nevertheless at the same time struggling with this question.

To proceed and sidestep that gap, we need to challenge another narrow framework, the presumption that homophobia is always and only about homosexuality — "a logic that pre-empts thinking more contextually, historically, and conceptually about what might be at stake in claims to homosexual rights [or against them] in different geopolitical spaces" (Walcott, 2010, p. 317). We have to look into how moral entrepreneurs shape their messages and how "folk devils" come to be constructed in these discourses.

Dan Healey argues that most contemporary moral panics around non-heterosexuality result from an economic or security crisis that is perceived to jeopardize stability. The ensuing campaigns tend to index an intense contest over national identity, where the igniting side constructs the nation as being threatened by an external (often "colonial") ideology of sexual difference. "They raise the spectre of a dangerous LGBT minority said to be in the grips of Western or colonial influence. Ironically, of course, the nationalism they celebrate is a European invention, so is the panoply of anti-homosexual measures they propose" (Healey, 2017, p. 5).

To highlight and explain how such encounters of subjects with their constitutive outside define the identities of all the parties implicated in an antagonism, the postcolonial theorist Homi. K. Bhabha offered the theory of the "third space" (Bhabha, 2004). Cutting across the constitutive hegemonic frontier that tends to be essentialized in discourses of national (or personal) identity, Bhabha views all identities as necessarily hybrid: in his view, identity is always relational and carries the birthmark of the constitutive encounter with the "big Other." Identity is, thus, necessarily located in a space that Puar refers to: by interpellating and inciting each other into the negotiation of their respective identities, the parties prescribe to each other their limits of intelligibility. This theory is crucial for the discussion in the rest of the chapter.

6.2.1 Un/becoming "Europeans"

> Moscow has always been an ersatz state, one that assimilated the aspects of its rivals it most feared. From hijacking Kyiv's history to adopting the mannerisms of French absolutism, hardly any of the things Russia is most famous for—Orthodoxy, communism, hell, even vodka—originated in Russia.
>
> Zachery Tyson Brown (2020)

Russia's relationship to "Europe" and modern discourses of nationalism have shaped the ways in which both traditionalist and progressive groups within the country view and have viewed

queer sexuality and non-normative genders. It was in the context of a Europeanizing empire under Peter the Great in the 18th century and on that the first legal orders for the mixing of the sexes, and the first prohibitions against male same sex relations came into existence. "In common with the Europeans they would seek to become, Russians drew upon languages of sinfulness, crime and pathology to construct homophobic views" (Healey, 2017, p. xii). This pattern of persistent references to the West is more than evident in the Russian discourse of sexual sovereignty, e.g. in the constant rhetorical appeals to the 1988 anti-gay legislation in the Thatcherite UK, or the rudiment restrictions in a number of the USA states. Sometimes such references can be traced to actually existing (if obsolete) laws and practices, sometimes, however, these are purely fictional — and bordering on absurdity.[35]

In 2015, the ruling party United Russia unfurled a "heterosexual pride flag" in celebration of the annual Day of Family, Love and Fidelity. Jennifer Suchland (2018) notes a striking similarity between this flag and the one used by the Pro-Family Resource Centre, a U.S. Christian fundamentalist group. Suchland's analysis shows that the Russian regime, while sticking to the rhetoric of anti-Western traditionalism, resorts to common and even coalitional political practices. The very same flag was used by the French group *La Manif Pour Tous*, who promoted heterosexual pride as part of a campaign against the adoption of marriage equality legislation in France. Indeed, there exists a bulk of literature and investigative journalism devoted to tracing the web of transnational connections among conservative groups across the West/Russia divide, in which Russian actors function as recipients of ideas, symbolics, and practices developed by their Western counterparts (Levintova, 2014; Montgomery, 2016; Suchland, 2018).

[35] For example, an article published in a newspaper issued by the Russian Ministry for Domestic Affairs in 2020 justified the need to expand the rights of the police by appealing to non-existent American laws (Meduza, 2020).

The same compulsively referential logic can be traced back to the deeper ideational foundations of Russian "ironic ideologies" that are hailed to justify authoritarian tendencies in #SistemaRF. In Section, 4.3, I discussed the intellectual roots of Putin's cultural turn by looking into the legacy of the Neo-Eurasianist movement. However, the "cultural turn" is riddled in contradictions. It upholds a traditionalist particularism, the primacy of culture over other spheres of life, argues for the protection of national cultural heritage against commercialization induced by the West, and advances the cause for a unique place for Russia in a pan-Eurasianist empire conjured as the family of particulars. However, the neo-Eurasianists stance does not really offer an even remotely original set of ideas. Their ideology is almost a verbatim copy of the ideas of a French intellectual movement known as the New Right (*Nouvelle Droite*, hereinafter referred to as ND). Similarly to Marxism, which was imported by Russian intellectuals and later laid the foundation for the project of the Soviet utopia, the imported ideas of the New Right inspired Panarin's, Dugin's, and others homegrown fantasies about the Russian nation (Peunova, 2008, p. 415). Neo-Eurasianist intellectuals widely read and adapted the works of their French counterparts. Indeed, their whole intellectual contribution may be argued to be modelled on ND combined with the appeal to Russian traditions and religiosity. European traditionalist discourses became available to some dissident circles in the USSR around the 1960s, with translations of Julius Evola, Rene Guenon, Titus Burckhardt, and others. However, it was not until the late 1980s and 1990s that their works became widely read and popular in Russia, laying the foundation for the newly resurrected Eurasianism.

A few recurrent core ideas align ND and Neo-Eurasianist intellectuals. Both movements are marked by a strong anti-globalist stance, perceiving globalization as a destructive process that dismantles sovereign states and erases cultural diversity. Both lament modern Europe's decline and both hope for an eventual revival made possible by a return to authentic European traditions and spirituality. Both put a particularist emphasis on local cultures and regions who are entitled

to difference, and both call for preserving particularist, local ways of life that organically formed in communities across the continent, against the uniforming trends of globalization. The regionalism and particularism they advocate is, however, combined with the postulation of the need for pan-European identity in the form of a "European empire of the regions" — a "Europe of a hundred flags" (Bar-On, 2008). Both discourses, argues Peunova (2008), stem from a feeling of resentment: the decolonization of Algeria in the case of ND, and the dissolution of the USSR in the case of the neo-Eurasianists. Similar to the colonialist implications of the ND discourse, Panarin's fantasia, "Eurasia" "repeats an age—old narrative on the civilizing mission by the benevolent "significant" nation over "less significant" communities" (ibid.). These communities, in Panarin's view, constitute Russia's "internal Orient" (*vnutrennii Vostok*).

Finally, both discourses are similar in their phantasmatic logic: their respective political subjects, in their strive for cultural hegemony and through the colonialist and racialised interplay of inclusion/exclusion, claim to represent and speak on behalf of the true "Europe" and its political aspirations. Like in Bogomolov's manifesto *The Hijacking of Europe 2.0,* "Europe" appears to be stolen from "us," the "true Europeans," "hijacked" by destructive, devastating trends that pose a threat to the "true" identity of the Continent articulated through a reference to an anti—Modernist tradition.

Unfortunately, the same logic in reverse to a large extent lies at the heart of the pro—LBGTIQ discourses that inform the bulk of visible local activist strategies. Masha Neufeld shows (2018) that "the construction of 'Westernness' as post- homophobic progressiveness and unquestioned role model for the global development of LGBT rights is not only passively accepted, but also actively cultivated" in mainstream LGBT+ activism in Russia (p. 83). She contends that it was not gay subjectivity as such that was imported to Russia from the West (as claimed by the anti-gay discourse of moral panic) — what was indeed imported is a specific gay discourse that

focuses on "gay civil rights, public visibility and radical street protest" (ibid.). Indeed, at least in the decade of the 2000s, the most visible political strategy resorted to was the so-called "high-profile politics" (Holzhacker, 2012) which, in our case, was mainly reduced to organising Western-style "gay prides," litigation on the level of the European Court of Human Rights when those got banned or violently dispersed, and transnational action consisting in the appeal to Western politicians and civil society. The reliance on "high-profile politics" correlates with the adoption of "Western-oriented" strategies of radical visibility with the objective to draw the maximum of international attention "notwithstanding the potential harm and the criticism coming from their local communities" (Neufeld, 2018, p. 83).

The problem with this set of strategies, Neufeld goes on to argue, is that activists cannot escape the comparison to the West. Such comparisons inevitably perpetuate the Manichean imaginary geographies I referred to above, marking the geotemporal space of "progress," the post-homophobic and enlightened West, in sharp opposition to the space of "backwardness," the image of a homophobic and backward Russia. The latter figures as the Oriental Other of the enlightened Occident, ever unable to catch up with democratic development. At core of the issue is not merely discursive dependence of Russian LGBT+ activists upon the Western mainstream of Human Rights: cornered, and oftentimes stranded, LGBT+ rights groups in Russia significantly depend on their Western peers in terms of economic and legal support, whereas their Western peers rarely reflect on their hegemonic position within this relationship of dependence (ibid.). This dynamic is further implicated by the power dynamics and inequalities within the Russian activist scene itself, expressed in the privileged position of well-organised activist groups from big cities that are economically, morally, and strategically imbedded into mainstream Western Human Rights networks, at the expense of discursive and economic disenfranchisement of provincial and independent voices, groups and practices. These factors "lead to a constant repetition and reinforcement of Western hegemony, while

simultaneously creating the discourse of underdevelopment of, and within, the Russian LGBT community" (ibid.).

6.3 Hybridity and the Constitutive Outside

This section undertakes to theorise these constant references to the "West" as implicated by the discursive circuits Puar refers to. Here, I draw from the recent approach in postcolonial studies that builds on Homi K. Bhabha's theory of hybridity to argue that the geopolitical subject of Russia must be viewed both as a colonizer but also as a "subaltern actor" (e.g. Morozov; 2015a,b; Tlostanova, 2008).

6.3.1 The Subaltern Empire and the State of Elites

As a coloniser, Russia poses one of the most vivid examples of the so-called internal colonialism (Bassin, 1999). Alexander Etkind, who is arguably most knows for applying the concept to Russia (2011), explores the Russian Empire's conquest of territories and domestication of its own heartlands. Thereby, many peoples were (often violently) colonized, Russians included. Beginning with the fur trade, which is credited with shaping its vast territory, and ending with the collapse of the Russian Empire in 1917, Etkind explores serfdom, the peasant commune, and other institutions and dispositifs of internal colonization. Examining Russia's internal colonial processes and practices directed not at the frontiers, but at the heartlands of the empire, Etkind emphasises the formative role of the self-colonizing discourses of Russian classical historiography. Furthermore, he interprets the reforms of Peter the Great (including those introducing, for the first time in Russian history, criminal punishment for

same-sex intercourse) as a powerful act of self-colonisation driven by Europeanised Russian elites.

On the other hand, Russia's subaltern positioning is usually seen through two principal lenses. Economically, Russia is integrated into the world-system of uneven and combined development as a junior neoliberal economy and, hence, a semi-peripheral nation (Worth, 2005; Morozov, 2015a). The Russian state has institutionally and economically colonized its own periphery on behalf of the Western core. What it failed at, however, is to overcome economic and ideational dependency on the West, which became more that ever apparent in the wake of the imposition of Western sanctions from 2014 that have significantly damaged the economy and arrested economic, social, and political development (Christie, 2016). From the cultural perspective, on the other hand, Russia's subalternity is conceived as normative dependence on the West identified as its inability to come up with its own language for political subjectification and its own vision for social, political and economic transformation (Morozov, 2015a).

In the domestic political discourse, we find the constant interplay of these figures of an empire and a subaltern state that reveals a tangled dialectics of a grandiose self-image vis-à-vis subdued articulations of national humiliation, marginalization and dependence in the wake of the collapse the Soviet Union. In this context, Viacheslav Morozov refers to what he sees as the liminal global positionality of Russia whose geopolitical subject comes to be represented by processes of iteration and translation through which its meanings are vicariously addressed to/through an Other. The colonial subject of Russia is located in a place of hybridity, the empty signifier of its identity is constructed in a space of iteration and translation by the (internal) colonizer – the Russian elite.

Pavlovsky calls #SistemaFR a state of elites (2019, pp. 144-149). The anomalous nature of the Russian model is related to the specific position of elites in the post-Soviet Russia. The post-

Soviet elites, he contends, sacrificed the construction of a civil nation for the sake of equipping the System as a service to protect their position under any new governance (ibid., p. 149). From the first years of the emergence of the Russian Federation, Russian elites exist under the alleged eternal threat of extermination by the "deep people" whose representation has shifted from "red-brown masses"[36] to a "populist and paternalistic population."[37]

In Pavlovsky view, the cornerstone of the current elites dominating #SistemaRF is made up of a pro-Western and anti-regime strata of the Soviet intelligentsia: journalists, literary critics, writers, actors and directors. They further co-opted the so-called "economic people," that is, those who were ready to subsidize the projects of intellectuals. These groups saw the business beneficiaries of the market transition as their exclusive philanthropist and saw to it that no restrictions on the power of this philanthropist were imposed by the reforms. Pavlovsky refers to the *bon mot* of the head of the Human Rights Council under the President of the Russian Federation, and the grandee of perestroika Mikhail Fedotov: "The highest form of democracy is the absolute dictatorship of a true democrat" (October 2010). The phrase symptomatically clearly reflected the collective consciousness of the intellectual elites of those years, in their interaction with society, government and politicians in Russia (ibid., p. 144).

To make sense of the relationship of domination between Russian elites and the "deep people," Pavlovsky offers yet another metaphor for #SistemaRF: a symbiont state. The team of the Kremlin's "commissars" continuously re/invades the artificial society that has been destroyed through reshuffling at least twice: by Perestroika, and by Yeltsin's reforms, leading to a catastrophic loss of identity. This society is loose and multiform. Without setting the goal of

[36] Widely used by supporters of the first Russian President Boris Yeltsin to finger-point at the "nationalist-socialist" proponents of the tactical alliance between communists and far-right "patriots".
[37] A judgemental expression used by Russian liberal politicians and economists to finger-point at the social classes that suffered the biggest blow from the transition to the neoliberal economic order.

state building, the Kremlin's "commissariat" developed a policy of taking over Russia. The new state of the RF is conceived by the elites as the personal property of a small group of "brilliant minds" who act as trusted advisers to the President, while retaining the position of "rulers of thoughts" over Russian citizens. Statehood in this scheme is a technostructure serving the objectives of the elite (ibid., pp. 148-149).

Elections in Russia have long been unfair and simply fictitious, but now the Russian voter herself is fictitious: she is merely passively *involved* in the act of voting without seeing herself as a voter. Nor does she correlate changes in power with her voting (ibid.). The system generates a bureaucratic description of reality that is utterly inadequate. The official statistics are falsified; the population has set up its existence inside an everyday routine that is indescribable for the government — this idea is vividly substantiated by sociologist Simon Kordonsky (2016). The government, Konstantin Gaaze writes, "parachutes administrative special forces into the depths of the Russian jungle, as if beyond the front line" (Gaaze, 2017). People here resist rendering the motives of their behaviour intelligible for the elites (see my discussion of Russia sociometric and polling in Section 4.5), and do not trust their own knowledge.

Now, speaking in the name of the subaltern, the elites (including the state apparatus, major segments of upper and upper-middle classes and intellectuals) is fully incorporated in the global structure of domination as its repressive agent. Claims in the name of the subaltern that the Russian state increasingly makes in global politics reinforce the oppressive authoritarian regime within Russia and, thereby, solidify its imperial order.

> Whereas a subaltern empire demands equality for itself in great-power games, the true subaltern remains silent. […] The only political subject that remains on the horizon of Russian politics is the West, while the Russian people, as any other subaltern, are being spoken for, and thus silenced, by the country's Eurocentric elites and the Western intellectuals (Morozov, 2015a, p. 9).

As a result of this subaltern positioning, while opposing the West, the Russian state still frames its own global demands and domestic policy in the Western language of democracy. These acts of mimicry objectified in the desire to "catch up" with the West testify to a normative dependency on the latter and a failure at coming up with an alternative ideological platform. Russia's subaltern imperial positioning, thus, "translates into a nearly impossible, self-contradictory political framework": political agency is only seen as legitimate if it is either directed against the West, or renders Russia independence from it "while fitting the 'universal' norm (defined and upheld by Western hegemony) at the same time" (ibid., p. 129).

Morozov refers to Bhabha's famous metaphor of the encounter between the Master and the Slave where the Slave engages in "colonial mimicry as the effect of hybridity — at once a mode of appropriation and resistance, from the disciplined to the desired" (ibid). In their resentment, the Slave resorts to mimicking, subversion or even inversion of the norm imposed by the Master; "what they cannot do is establish any moral authority of their own that would not need the Master's sanction to be credible." Therefore, while at the same time claiming moral sovereignty, the Russian state at the level of rhetoric can never and has never used the self-referential indigeneity argument "we do it because that is what we have always done." Rather, they selectively and rather often inaccurately appeal to international and national regulations resorting to external attribution: we put Pussy Riot to jail because that is what they also do in Germany, or we protect our children from gay propaganda because that was done in the UK and is still being done in a number of the US states.

To sum up, "traditional values," constructed as a reference to the would-be historically distinct Russian customs, morality and way of life, have tended to only be negatively semanticized in opposition to the allegedly "Western" liberationist political developments, rather than in relation to specific domestic referents. To capture this specificity, Alexandra Novozhenova

(2014) coined the term "paleoconservatism" to highlight the similarity of this discursive formation to the openly agonistic political stance of the American so-called "paleoconservatives" that "emphasize tradition and organic spirituality, and tend to politicize culture as an instrument of "civilizational struggle" (Morozov, 2015a, p. 114). In a word, unlike a more conventional kind of conservatism that tends to safeguard the already existing social formation from excessive politicization by radical forces both on the left and right, this discursive regime actively promotes this politicization from the far-right stance, constructing and naturalizing what it at the same time refers to as the "tradition" or "status quo."

Paradoxically, we are dealing with an attempt to construct a tradition where there is no solid, historically continuous and coherent pre-existing social formation that could support it with an indigenous material for national identity politics. Both paleoconservative and liberal discourses on sexuality and gender in Russia rely on an imported inventory of rhetoric which they play with and subvert to make a claim to cultural specificity. A short comparative detour may help me make this point clearer.

6.3.2 Hybridity vs. Indigeneity

Now, if the Russian sexual politics is determined by the postcolonial condition in a way that might be similar to other postcolonial spaces, then what is the difference between similar struggles in other, one might say, properly postcolonial spaces, and Russia?

This comparative section is to position the claims I make in this chapter about the sexual politics in Russia's postcolonial discursive space in the wider context of research dealing with a

structurally similar case[38] that has already been subject to profound analytical scholarship. This section will bring a perspective on the homophobic media discourse in Uganda in dialogue with my analysis in the preceding sections to productively contextualize those against a considerably different context. Similar to my own analysis of the Russian context, I read the Ugandan case along the lines of authoritarian biopolitics of sexuality as a form of postcolonial politics for the making of a nation.

The shared understanding of much recent scholarship on sexual biopolitics of postcolonial Africa (Boyd, 2013; Cheney, 2012; Murray, 2009; Wahab, 2016, Weiss, 2013) is to establish its implication in transnational neoliberal governmentality whose rapid expansion produces anxieties in its peripheral liminal zones caught in unresolved tensions between conflicting colonial legacies and contemporary discursive imperialism of the West. In this framework, Weiss (2013, p. 149) addresses the recent homophobic mobilization in Uganda and other countries in sub-Saharan Africa as fitting in "a growing pattern of homophobic "anticipatory countermobilization" by non-Western nation-states."

This countermobilization is widely seen as reactive to what Ahmed (2011) and Massad (2002) view as the gay human rights discourse inaugurating the next stage in the biopolitical project of Western neoliberalism that is, to a large extent, structured by race. At its core is what Puar (2013) terms the "pinkwashing of international human rights discourse as a feature of an increasingly globalized homonationalism" and its imperialist underpinnings. As summarized by Wahab, Puar's concept of homonationalism points to:

> [The] pattern of gay and lesbian assimilation into (U.S.) national-normative and neoliberal projects through the rhetoric of inclusion, recognition, and rights-based equality. [Within this pattern,] the production of gay and lesbian sexual citizenship

[38] A homophobic populist discourse was initiated in Uganda in the context of expanding missionary work of the US evangelists and the passing of the "anti-homosexual bill" in 2014 with an ongoing debate thereon since 2009 when the bill was first introduced in the Parliament (Wahab, 2016).

> depends on the movement's support for "curtailing of welfare provisions, immigrant rights and the expansion of state power to engage in surveillance, detention and deportation" (Wahab, 2016, p. 689).

Joseph Massad (2002) refers to the same formation as "the gay international": a predominantly white, gay, male Western missionary dispositif resting upon a Western understanding of sexual freedom and its historical teleology, aiming to save non-normative sexual others in the global South in the name of this notion of freedom.

In the opinion of Cheney (2012), Wahab (2016), and Weiss (2013), the burgeoning antigay platform in Uganda emerges, in part, in reaction to "the gay international" as a strategy of resistance that has been framed as an anti-colonial project aimed at securing the sovereignty of the Ugandan nation-state. For Weiss (2013, p. 149), "transnational discursive flows [yield] a form of anticipatory countermobilization" against "gay rights" and, thus, interpellating the Ugandan nation-state into the homo-transnationalist disciplinary regime. This transnational discursive circuit of "call and response" (Puar) inaugurates a space of negativity where both pro- and anti-LGBT agents "hail and incite each other into discourse—that is, they prescribe the limits of intelligibility for each other" (Wahab, p. 691).

Caught in this referentiality, the parties, however, are not positioned as equally standing subjects of discursive agency. Rather, Uganda represents a "proxy space" of largely external discursive struggle where, according to Kaoma (2013, p. 79), African politicians and religious activists advocating for the anti-gay law, and African LGBT+ persons are implicated in American culture wars by receiving support from, respectively, the marginalized evangelical homophobes, and homonationalists. In Baptiste's explanation (2014), the struggle eventually externalized when the LGBT+ movement rose to salience in the United States (producing an intensive internal conflict and, eventually, split in the conservative circles around the issue). As

a result, the most radical far-right homophobes started shifting further out of the American mainstream politics into a proxy territory, i.e., into the peripheralized global South.

The respective dominant media discourses guiding the public debate around the anti-gay legislation in Uganda both domestically and abroad are “Kill the Gays” vs “Kill the Bill.” Both largely rely on a biopolitical imaginary and inherently Western normative language of “tradition” that is differently re-invented by both parties. Addressing the former discourse in the Ugandan media through biopolitical lens, Cheney (2012, p. 79) claims that the campaign against non-traditional sexualities in Uganda is “a textbook example” of a moral and biopolitical panic, whereby the media is heavily implicated in fuelling the image of a nation “under moral siege,” securitizing the issues of gender and sexuality by implicating them in debated around pornography, sex work, HIV, and homosexuality.

The nodal point of this discourse, consolidating these concerns against a unitary moral reference, is “the family” as the primary agent of welfare. Sadgrove et al. (2012, p. 103) calls for a “situated understanding” of the “deep imbrications of sexuality, family life, procreation and material exchange in Uganda,” which they view as critically connected to discourses of “public morality and national sovereignty.” It therefore seems logical that the “rationale” of the anti-gay legislation is to protect “the traditional heterosexual family” against homosexuality, which the Bill links to “the strengthening [of] the nation’s capacity to deal with emerging internal and external threats” (Wahab, 2016). Sadgrove et al. (2012, p. 117) contend that the Ugandan homophobic discourse articulates non-traditional sexualities as a threat to “long-term social reproduction” (thus “linking ‘homosexuality as death-drive’ to national dissolution”). Specifically, as Robert Lorway points out (quoted in Chiney, p. 82): "As the state crafted ‘homosexuality’ as a threat to national survival, homosexuality became linked to a multitude of

emergent social problems and tensions of the postcolonial era, such as criminality, national identity/ authenticity, globalization, and neocolonialism."

Cheney attributes the floating signifier of "the traditional family" to a discourse of postcolonial amnesia: "it is striking how 'the traditional family' is invoked in the bill, when in fact Ugandans have always had very pliable family arrangements" (ibid., p. 86). This discourse thus is deeply invested in a largely fictional imaginary of a "pure" innocent continent against the perceived "moral decay" of contemporary West. Similarly, the HIV epidemic framed in moralized overtones has been implicated in a climate of "sexual sanitization". This discourse articulates gay Ugandans as an internal subversive agent of biopolitical threat to an "indigenously" pure (bio)political community that is defined exclusively in the imported normative language of American evangelism.

This analysis of the Ugandan case mirrors my discussion of the ways in which biopolitical state racism and moral panic are implicated in a construction of a populist regime around empty signifiers that negatively denote an alleged indigeneity. Similarly, Sadgrove et. al. (2012, p. 109) contend that the homophobic campaign instigated by the state is aimed at consolidating the public discourse by the toughening of moralizing rhetoric and the naturalization of the securitizing discourse "homosexuality is un-African" which relies on a reified "carnal knowledge against the order of nature." Along the same lines, Oliver (2013) suggests that homophobia is used by postcolonial nation-states such as Uganda as a political resource, bringing the community together in the face of the socio-economic stagnation by targeting and scapegoating non-conforming citizens. As argued by Oliver and Wahab, the "homosexuality is unAfrican" meme "serves to manage the vulnerabilities brought on by neoliberal globalization while providing legitimacy for "authoritarian and hetero-patriarchal forms of power" that secure the hegemony of "political and religious leaders" (Oliver, 2013, p. 100).

Discussing the implication of this populist logic within transnational power relations, Wahab argues that the "homosexuality is unAfrican" discourse has been invoked to equip the Ugandan state (and its associated elites) with a rhetorical toolkit to renegotiate the conditions of its postcolonial sovereignty. This project is structured by race, gender and sexuality. Crucially, however, "while both "state/cultural/religious homophobia and international/local Ugandan gay rights activists are pitted in opposition to each other, they are both implicated in a struggle to produce and authenticate their claims through transnational circuits of influence" (Wahab, 2016, p. 695). Therefore, it is not unusual that both pro- and antigay actors endlessly accuse each other in the media of being agents of Western imperialism. In other words, "both discursive formations have coproduced the case of Uganda within a project of global flashpointing—one that depends on stabilizing the question "Is homosexuality/ homophobia un-African?" as the only question that makes the case intelligible on the global radar" (ibid.).

As the bottom line, the African case can thus be seen as implicated within the ongoing process of (post)colonial co-construction: while Africa is increasingly being reinvented as a straight continent, Europe is being simultaneously – and against the Orientalizing representation of its Other – reconstructed according to the (post)modern ideal of sexual democracy. A similar discursive dynamic has been described in the previous chapters of this dissertation devoted to biopolitical and postcolonial analysis of sexual politics in Russia. Both rooted in the discursive logic of biopolitical racism, homophobic reactions in Russia and Uganda are articulated as a security measure necessary in light of the "increasingly expansionist" modalities of Western imperialism, targeting its newly raised banner – the global "gay rights as human rights" discourse. Driven by the socio-economic and identitarian anxieties of the neoliberal world system that positions the two countries on the periphery, their hybrid self-images are negotiated in the third space of the (post)colonial encounter. Both countries' policies can be viewed as exemplary of the biopolitical drive that hails individual bodies as sites of the mobilized populist

frontier to protect the national body from the contamination by external others. Aggravated by the urgent HIV epidemic and equally obsessive concerns about fertility figuring in the media (which, in Cheney's thorough and profound account seems almost identical to the respective rhetoric in Russia), the moral panic in both countries entails a therapeutic resort to what Morozov (2015, p. 148), following Rancier, theorizes as archipolitics founded upon the reificatory biologization of culture. The latter in this logic is equated to "a biological organism, whole and non-contradictory," whose innate balance can be easily troubled by ideas, images, value systems which come from elsewhere. This mode involves reducing "difference to an incontestable 'fact of life' and thus banishes all undecidability from the internal space of the nation" (ibid.).

What seems to be a basic difference between the two cases is a potentially firmer foundation of the oppositional stance in Uganda's debate over sexual politics that has got to do with the availability of some inherently African counter-discourse. A well-developed scholarly and mainstream narratives of African "indigenous" cultural memories suppressed by the colonial intrusion of Western modernity with its imported homophobia, provide a viable discursive material for constructing a counter-discourse of inherently African sexual pluralism to counter-balance the hegemonic claim of homophobic necropolitics. On the other hand, on the basis of my discussion in Section 6.3.1, Russia can be argued to pose a case of more profound postcolonial hybridity of internal postcoloniality where reactivational decolonial discourses have barely entered the national conversation even on a scholarly level, to say nothing of a more mainstream discursive field. Alternative indigenous discourses (as opposed to those the Kremlin manufactures for its own ends) are barely developed, largely disregarded in activist language and progressivist narratives, and thus do not stand as a viable point of reference in either domestic or international debates around the country's identity politics. The increasingly autocratic governance and its expansive discursive hegemony effectively preclude any attempt

of the civil society at constructing such narratives as they are invariably seen as "unmanageable" and thus threatening the regime's homeostasis. To see to the impossibility of the negotiation of such narratives, #SistemaRF generates atomisation and alienation, banning any attempt at the formation of grassroots popular movements that may negotiate and uphold their own cultural and historical memories. By telling different stories about themselves and Russia, its past, present, and future, subaltern communities can subjectify themselves and thus challenge the hegemony of ironic pragmatism and come up with their own, counter-hegemonic politics that will shed light on the inner contradictions of Russia's imperialist subjectivity and statehood and make a different future possible.

Conclusion

The Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the following hybrid war against Ukraine brought about a new iteration of "sovereignty." "Geopolitics," the Kremlin's rhetorical framework for the objectification and explanation of the "Western threat" suddenly superseded the cultural framework that rose to prominence in 2011 and defined the hegemonic front until the annexation.

It is of note that the aggression against Ukraine unfolded days after the closing of the Sochi Olympics, a project aimed at the promotion of Russia's "soft power" by showcasing the country's unique history and culture. The opening ceremony of the games was the most expensive show in the history of the Olympics (Raspopow, 2014) and received acclaim both domestically and internationally. The show's narrative conjured up an imaginary of a complicated but glorious and continuous national journey across epochs and political systems. The show constructed Russia as a grand, centuries-long empire. But no less significant is the fact that the empire was depicted as European in essence: the scope of cultural referents selected by the ceremony's creators was easily recognisable and culturally close to the perceived Western viewer. At the same time, the darker parts of the country's history such as the Tsarist serfdom and oppression, Soviet Red Terror, and Stalin's atrocities were left out of the narrative, their empty place filled with impressive depictions of Russian imperial achievements and the Soviet avant-garde. A persistent nodal point of the show was the depiction of "unity," the Russian (and Soviet, without much distinction) society was articulated as a unified popular subject en route to the ever more glorious future.

Such a colonisation of history, or, rather, multiple histories is not outstanding in narratives of this sort. However, two of its main features must be stressed: the claimed inherent (and non-peripheral) Europeanness of Russia, and its military glory in combatting Western aggressors in

the two Patriotic Wars that occupy a special place in the country's historic memory: the war against France under Napoleon in 1812, and the Great Patriotic War in 1941-1945. Increasingly scaled up, costly and aggressively promoted celebrations of victory in the latter, infused with military aesthetics, have defined Putinite memory politics. As one of the few occasions where the regime invites and welcomes popular mobilisation (as long as it adheres to the aesthetic, political, and narrative framework advanced by the Kremlin), the victory serves as the memorial nodal point of the discourse of global civilizational threat. In the Olympics ceremony, the figure of the victory was translated into a visual narrative language that, unlike the victory parades held yearly in the Red Square, would not be idiosyncratic to a perceived Western audience. A telling circumstance in this avoidance of alienation was the inclusion of Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky and the absence of homophobic overtones or other exclusionary tropes in the narrative: on this occasion, the Russian elite sought to reveal a European, moderate face of the country.

Nevertheless, the success of the show was overridden by the aggression against Ukraine that was planned in the last days of the Games. Yet again, Russia emerged as a subject "in despair" — always alert and ready to "respond" to a perceived threat to its empire status such as the expansion of NATO imminent in the wake of the Ukrainian revolution against the Russia-backed president Viktor Yanukovych. Unwilling and indeed unable to conceive of Ukraine as an independent state rather than Russia's imperial periphery, the Kremlin was driven by the sense of betrayal committed by the West: the surrender of the great power status in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union was seen to be followed by the forced stripping of Russia of its colonial periphery. It is here that the figure of the "subaltern empire" presents itself at its most vivid: the interplay between an imperialist self-image that should invite respect and obedience, and the inflated feeling of resentment when a due regard of these claims is not shown.

In this dissertation, I have argued that the biopolitics of sexual sovereignty imposed by the ruling elites in 2011-2014 is part and parcel of this discursive dynamic. The Kremlin's subaltern empire seeks to uphold its own, autochthonous cultural foundations and forms of life that would be distinct from what the "Master" seeks to impose. At the same time, the discursive dominance of the Master is left essentially uncontested: the demands, recognition claims, and discursive "resistance" are invariably framed in the language of the Master, its meanings either instrumentalized in the game of pragmatic agility, or overturned and negated, inaugurating a space of negativity determined by the constitutive outside. Hence are the two faces of the Russian political subject: seeking recognition as being on a par with the West, and at the same time perpetually failing the discursive pursuit and resorting to naked, brute military force to advance its perceived interests.

For the period of 2000-2012, the discourse of #SistemaRF was articulated around the floating signifiers of "stability" and "steady development." The presidency of Dmitrii Medvedev (2008-2012) liberalised the regime, and Putin's decision to return for a third term created a schism between the expectations of the educated urban middle-class and the perceived authoritarianism of Putin's figure. A relegitimation was effected through a restructuring of the populist front whereby the opposition was effectively excluded from the body of the "people," and the body of the "people" itself was defined against the frontier separating the "pure," pro-natalist nation against the foreign contagion of "permissiveness" and "perversion" leading to national degeneration. Biopolitics thus became a proxy for ideology: persistent infusion of the words like "liberal" or "democrat" with negative connotations did not prove enough, the struggle had to be taken outside of the ideational domain and deployed in the space of affect. Ideational disagreement is too vague and frigid to define an "enemy." Inducing repulsion through the implication of the Other in a natalist biopolitical regime of regulating sexuality proved more successful.

Yet, this dissertation set out to look beyond the political logic of decision-making on the part of particular individual or institutional actors and inquire into the conditions of possibility that define the actors' field of discursive-material agency and frame problems and solutions in ways that are implicated in a complex nexus of larger - or more localised - structures. For this purpose, I made use of the Foucauldian methods of genealogy and analytics of government. Both set out to map the field of agencies within the realm of multiple possibilities oscillating between determination and contingency. The operationalization of these frameworks allowed for me to deconstruct a set of mental shortcuts that are frequently summoned to reduce explanations of the reasons certain hegemonic projects fail, while others gain traction and come to define the field of discursivity. Thus, I showed that the myth of Russia as an "inherently homophobic society," or the non-nuanced projection of Soviet state homophobia (and the soviet ideology at large) onto the present fail at accounting for both the immediate reasons and the totality of larger structures that make certain decisions possible.

To come up with an alternative account of how the discourse of sexual sovereignty was made possible and came about, I set out to map the discursive-material field of Putinism as an agile, loose assemblage defined by the lack of a solid ideational core, which is replaced by "ironic" projections of various ideologies onto the field of essentially pragmatic action. The inherent logic of Putinite govermentality was defined as self-preservation through escalation: the obsessive preoccupation with re/defining and defending "sovereignty" structures the field of perpetual expansion to secure the borders of the governed space and population from the ever expanding Other (indeed, according to Etkind, this has constituted the pattern of Russia's internal colonisation for centuries). "Sovereignty" thus becomes implicated in various discourses and spheres of life: it can and has been articulated with respect to the matters of technology, IT, finance, education, science, medicine, culture — virtually everything. Behind each iteration of sovereignty colonising a new domain of life lies the pattern of securitization

whereas a certain entity or activity becomes problematised as a matter of state security. This is what, I argue, happened with sexuality in the period of 2011-2014.

A major contribution of the dissertation was identifying and tracing the multiple conditions of possibility for the discourse under analysis. These were found to include: the nature of Putinite statehood itself (objectified in Pavlovsky's heuristic neologism #SistemaRF and Gefter's concept of the society of power), the ideational terrain defined and gate-kept by various political and social actors who function as moral interpreters, the intellectual context conjured up by thinkers who prepared a conceptualisation of the foundations of Russian statehood (organic intellectuals). Medical and penitentiary dispositifs were argued to have created the context in which "non-normative" sexualities can be thought of "scientifically." Finally, I resorted to theoretical analytic to position the phenomenal properties of the discourse of sexual sovereignty in the context of a postcolonial discussion about the positionality of the Russian political subject. This allowed for me to conceptualise this subject as caught in mimicry of its discursive Other, subverting the dominant discourses to conjure up a sense of indigeneity in a discursive field defined by enmity and referentiality.

None of the entities or actors discerned within these formations of power/knowledge constitute an unchanging, essentialist subject that travels through history in its pure sameness. Some of these structures are relatively recent (such as neo-Eurasianism) or dissolving at the moment (the Soviet psychiatry discourse), while some have persisted for a long time and seem to be virtually immune to challenge. The subaltern empire pattern can be discerned in Tsarist Russia, its implications are evident in the Soviet project, and it defines the discourse on identity and the field of action for the Russian Federation. However, even such a durable formation cannot live up to being a transcendental truth of a subject. Many argue that imperialism is inherent in the Russian statehood and the only way to get rid of it is territorial and ideological decolonization

whereby a new subject of Russia would emerge, with a different spatiotemporal positioning, different historic memory, different identity. Whether the geopolitical space of Russia and the governmental dispositif serving this space fully determine the identity of the Russian subject and as such would fully foreclose any alternative forms of constructing a statehood, invites a scholarly and public conversation imminent in the light of the 2022 war Russia waged against Ukraine. However, even a conversation on this topic cannot commence without an intensification of the power dynamics inside the country, where the inner subaltern must find a way to enunciate their diversity, formulate their needs, and define a field of action for making a different future possible. This process is underway, although blocked by the repressive government that is aware of its estrangement from the "deep people" whom it fears. Its repressiveness, despite the common wisdom, is essentially Eurocentric: defining itself in opposition to the West, the "constructivist" government operates with a ready-made inventory of ideas, practices, and rationalisations borrowed from the discursive Master, distilling them out of the ideational and value contents at their core.

To be clear, there is nothing inherently wrong with borrowing from the "West": in the era of globalization, all identities are referential and hybrid, and any imaginary of an indigenous autarky is an absurd attempt to reverse Modernity. Hence, decolonisation cannot be viably conceived as a project of "unlearning" — it is always a project of learning, coming up with new ideas, interpretations, and practices in order to challenge the large-structural hegemonies of power/knowledge without pretending that they have never existed. A decolonial project for Russia is one that would recognise and lend voice to the diversity of lived experiences and forms of life, promote mutual understanding and free self-subjectification of its citizens and communities. Such a democratic formation is yet to come, but the work of imagining and preparing this future has long been underway.

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