NECROPOLITICS IN THE DIGITAL AGE: GRIEF, DEAD SOLDIERS, AND RUSSIAN SOCIAL MEDIA DURING THE INVASION OF UKRAINE

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Abstract

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine began, communities of grief where people collectively mourn the soldiers who died in the war have appeared on Russian digital social networks. "Molimsya vmeste o voinah" ("We Pray Together for Warriors") is an online community that appeared shortly after the start of military drafts. I analyze how digital grief and memory practices acquire necropolitical meaning in the context of the war. Building on Mbembe's concept of necropolitics, I ask how it refers to the place of death in the illiberal regimes in the digital age. Digital ethnography is a primary method of research. The data was collected through "nethnographic" observations, unstructured interviews, and critical visual analysis applied to the aesthetics of virtual mourning culture. Despite substantial theoretical contributions, I argue that the concept does not account for the effects of digital media and the fragmentation they generate. Revisiting the political meaning of the digital dead, I build a model of necropolitical management of grief based on my empirical analysis and rooted in Goffman's dramaturgical management of impressions.

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My study, in short, is about women's social labor, in which their voices are erased under the pressure of patriarchy. I want to dedicate this thesis to my mother, whose voice, full of absolute pride and belief in me, always sounded close, no matter what.

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Introduction

President of Russia Vladimir Putin, at the end of 2022, made an alarming statement: "99.9% of Russians are ready to make sacrifice for Motherland" (TASS 2022). Such a biopolitical claim by the president of a country waging an immoral war in Ukraine and possessing nuclear weapons makes studies of the dynamics and determinants of the Russian political regime especially topical. However, studies of the Russian context have been seriously hampered. The government has de facto established military censorship restricting freedom of speech (Troianovski & Safronova 2022). The respectability of opinion polls in Russia became especially problematic because people tend to hide their opinions and give desirable answers by their ideas of socially approved discourse (Alyukov 2022).

Since the beginning of the war, memorial communities have appeared on the leading Russian social network VKontakte ("In contact/touch"), where people collectively mourn the soldiers and officers who died in the war. My study is focused on one case of an online community of grief. "Molimsya vmeste o voinah" (Russian name means "We Pray Together for Warriors") is a digital community that appeared on "VKontakte" on October 3, 2022, shortly after the start of military drafts on September 21, 2022. The community has grown to around 40 thousand participants in just six months. Its founders and moderators are directly affiliated with the Russian Orthodox Church. They have outlined the community rules in the group description on the main page: subscribers can publish posts with "prayer requests," indicate the soldiers' names, and upload their photos. If the participant does not want to use a photo, one can illustrate the post with an icon, a temple picture, or another image related to Orthodoxy. "The group will also post news from the front line. Every week there will be a prayer service! With God's blessing!" administrators greeted the subscribers.

In this study, I focus on the expression and performance of grief online and virtual memory practices. Analysis of online communities of memory provides an innovative way to

approach Russian society that can become an effective method for studying public sentiment. Thus, my exploratory research question is how power is distributed in Russian digital communities of grief. Relying on empirical analysis and relevant theory, I study the construction of collective memory in digital interaction and commemoration rituals through the lens of necropolitics. I ask specifically in what sense the notion of "necropolitics," crafted by Achille Mbembe, refers to the place of death in the illiberal political regimes in the digital age, applying it to the Russian context of wartime digital grief. I reconstruct necropolitics more relationally to answer the research question: how death becomes not a manifestation of power but a space of politics?

I use digital ethnography as the method. Ethnographic observations were conducted from February 2023 to May 2023. Observations are supplemented by unstructured ethnographic interviews with the founders of the digital grief community. I analyzed the visual culture of mourning embodied in far-right Russian nationalist paintings, particularly popular in the mourning community. I also interviewed the author of these paintings.

Chapter 1 functions as a literature review. I outlined the conceptual foundations of the analysis of wartime digital mourning. Chapter 2 is an ethnographic description and analysis of the digital grief community. In Chapter 3, I conducted a critical visual analysis of the paintings of the artist popular among the community members. I show how necropolitical logic manifests itself in visual culture. Finally, Chapter 4 functions as a conclusion. I combine theory with case analysis and propose the model of necropolitical grief management.

1. Political Meaning of Digital Death

1.1 Digital Grief in Media Studies

At the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, it became clear that personal and collective memory studies cannot ignore the phenomenon of new media (Huyssen 2000: 431). While calling the influence of new media on memory "enormous," Huyssen stated that new technologies communication did not introduce a fundamental difference in the processes through which media produced collective memory (Huyssen 2000: 436). He argues that although digital technologies influence different aspects of human memory, the idea that cyberspace alone can provide a complete model for imagining the global future is erroneous. Thus, Huyssen proposes to abandon the radical separation of the virtual from the real but, on the contrary, to include the digital world in a general memory theory (collective, individual, or historical).

The processes through which collective memory (and forgetting) form have changed throughout history as technologies and methods of storing, transmitting, and information processing have evolved. The discursive distance between the world of the living and the world of the dead has also changed accordingly. In his study of the relationship between communication technologies and cultural representations of death in history from the emergence of writing to the spread of social networks (Walter 2015: 215-232), Tony Walter focused on the impact of the general infrastructure of communication, whether it is speech, inscription in stone, writing on other supports, typography and print, telecommunications (telegraph and telephone), photography and phonography, or modern media and the Internet, showing that the features and level of the presence of the dead in society and relationship between the dead and the living depend on the communication and mass media technologies common at one time or another (Walter 2015: 228).

Walter draws attention to several radical differences in virtual memorialization. The first distinctive aspect is the question of the presence of the dead in society (Walter et al. 2012: 285). Online presence of the dead (their personal data, photographs, and other digital traces on social networks, for example) means that death coexists in one communicative space with the living. Grief occurs beyond cemeteries, in online memorials and commemorative communities, bringing death closer to everyday life through digital media. Death is no longer confined behind the fences of hospices and cemeteries. The ubiquity of new communication technologies means that the dead are a physical part of life. They somehow *walk the streets* with the living on their smartphones. As Walter puts it: "The dead are no longer sequestrated" (Walter 2015: 227).

The presence of death in everyday life affects the rituals of collective grief and disrupts the healing process of social amnesia. The French anthropologist Marc Auge pointed to a dialectical relationship between collective memory and oblivion, given their exceptional role in forming meaningful time. As Auge puts it: "We must forget in order to stay in the present, forget in order not to die, forget in order to remain faithful" (Auge 2001: 474). From a purely technical point of view, one might say that forgetting on the Internet is impossible: digital infrastructure does not produce value diversification of data, representing "a perfect memory" (Delich 2004: 69). Information in virtual space is not deformed during transmission, use, and storage. Thus, digital archives' availability, reliability, and infinity suggest a world without forgetting, in which humans are in a position to lose the ability to forget, to free themselves from the past (Mayer-Schönberger 2009: 196).

Digital means of communication introduced another critical change to the social production of grieving and remembering: the interactive and participatory nature of digital memorial sites. If the transition from pre-modern to modern societies marked a transfer of bereavement from the community to individuals (Walter et al. 2012: 289), digital technologies, especially through social networks, have brought back the communal dimension of mourning

and memorialization (Walter et al. 2012: 290). Digital communities of memory have multiplied in cyberspace, bringing together diverse categories of grievers (such as communities of widows or relatives of people who committed suicide or, as in the case studied in this thesis, communities memorializing dead soldiers). "The internet, however, is vernacular, interactive, and participatory, like pre-modern memory," suggests Walter (Walter 2012: 295). Its distinctive features endow the Internet with the potential to democratize social memory (Walter et al. 2012: 294). The general tendencies inherent in the digital are crucial for the analysis of the virtual community of grief (especially democratization, continuity of bonds with the dead, and the alleged impossibility of social amnesia and memory distortion), which is my thesis's subject. However, to understand how the transformational processes described by researchers of digital grief are embodied in the Russian context, the optics of Internet analysts as a space for the formation of collective memory may not be enough. The peculiarity of the case suggests the need to analyze the symbolic political meaning of military grief and war commemoration.

1.2 War Memorialization and Military Corpses

The memorialization of wars and the construction of social memory of military conflicts became a crucial aspect of social life starting at the onset of the modern era. As Reinhart Koselleck (2002: 369) put it: "The history of European war memorials testifies to the common visual signature of modernity." Koselleck argued that the Christian model of memorialization transformed into the bourgeois one, radically changing the social perception and meaning of death. As the number of worldwide representations of death grows, memorials embrace democratization and functionalization (Koselleck 2002: 367). The bourgeois memorialization shifted focus away from royal representatives to the memorialization for people, more particularly ordinary soldiers, that epitomized the democratization of war memory. Besides, the democratization of war memorials and the secularization of death politicized commemorative war sites and granted them an integrative social function.

The political and social function of death and the societal meaning of dead bodies has been widely studied in political sociology and anthropology. Particularly noteworthy are studies of the modern cult of the dead in the national context. For example, the study of Georgia devoted to the selective memorialization of dead bodies showed that the creation of narratives about national heroes (or, on the contrary, villains) is used by various political forces in their own interests, and the functionalization of the dead is often accompanied by social conflicts (see Gugushvili et al. 2017). Also noteworthy is Nagy's analysis of the political role of obituaries in Hungary (see Nagy 2019). Nagy focuses on the discursive features of politically significant obituaries, emphasizing that their very structure and form are the tools for forming collective memory and creating imaginaries of the common past that are critical for the present. Focusing on the post-socialist Czech Republic, Naxera and Krčál sought to capture the importance of dead bodies in modern polity through the concept of "political necromancy" (see Naxera and Krčál 2022). Political necromancy is a metaphor for analyzing the instrumentalization of dead bodies in the context of post-soviet culture wars. Using the example of the annual celebration of the liberation of the city of Pilsen by the American army in 1945, the authors examine politicians' strategies in the use of war memory in the cultural struggle against communist values. Politicians act as necromancers, they argue, in the sense that they "summon the armies of the dead" through certain ritualistic gestures and incantations. They use dead bodies as political weapons (Naxera and Krčál 2022: 11).

Although the concept of political necromancy is fruitful in an analysis of public, solemn memorial rituals for political mobilization around specific ideologies, the perspective it offers is also somewhat limited in that it captures mostly intentional and top-down instrumentalization of memory, it does not account for the bottom-up dynamics through which the dead may acquire political meaning.

Rethinking politics as a process that is not limited to the activities of politicians, Katherine Verdery proposed to consider dead bodies as vehicles of meaning, with the help of which new cosmic orders, public spheres, political values, national identities, elites, etc., were formed in the post-Soviet countries (Verdery 1999: 51). The anthropologist describes how dead bodies (both real and their metaphorical representations, such as statues) were used as political symbols through forms of "post-socialist necrophilia" (the name Verdery gave to the intensification of socio-political activity around dead bodies). Particularly valuable is the anthropologist's analysis of the symbolic meaning of the dead through the category of kinship and her account of the functions of historical depth. The aspect of kinship will be used to describe discursive memorial practices in the digital grief community in Chapter 2. Verdery's approach to the political meaning of historical depth construction I use to analyze the visual culture of this community (Chapter 3). However, for Verdery's work's merits, my research has shown several significant differences, which I will elaborate on in Chapter 4.

1.3 Towards Digital Necropolitics

In order to address the political effect of the digital dead, I will rely on the post-Foucaultian theories that have revisited the notion of biopolitics through concepts of necropolitics and thanatopolitics, where the former pertains to Achille Mbembe and the latter to Giorgio Agamben.

Agamben describes the transition from the classical order of power to modern biopolitics. The former refers to the master and slave dialectic and the right to decide to take life or let live. In biopolitics, the formula for power becomes "power to make live and let die" (Murray 2008: 204). Agamben combines the approach of Carl Schmitt with the theoretical base of Foucault and describes the transition from public murder to the ideological and surveillance functions of media that determines the norms of social behavior (Murray 2008: 205). "What the State cannot tolerate in any way (…)," he writes, "is that the singularities form a community

without affirming an identity, that humans co-belong without any representable condition of belonging" (Agamben 1993: 86). In his opinion, the politics of identity and representation become the fundamental issue of a biopolitical order that lies on the border between life and death. One may think of the history of AIDS, when the US authorities used selective erasure and other repressive mechanisms against specific identities (exercising the right to make live and let die) to protect the neoliberal political scene (Gossett 2014: 31-50). Che Gossett's study showed that it led to the emergence of new death worlds united by race, sexuality, or gender identity.

Thus, death is a defining part of political life. Death is a necessary element of the ontology of power, and biopolitics manages it. It is built into the differentiated mechanism of the state bureaucracy, penetrates the complex and diverse chain of modern media (from traditional to social networks), and is mediated, acquiring symbolic meanings (Agamben 1993: 86). Mbembe also expresses this idea by emphasizing the symbolic meaning of death: *"What is striking is the tension between the petrification of the bones and their strange coolness on one hand, and on the other, their stubborn will to mean, to signify something"* (Mbembe 2003: 35)*.

Like Agamben's, Mbembe's account of necropolitics focuses on corporeality and bodies. For Mbembe, modern sovereignty finds its ultimate expression in the production of general norms regulating bodies, the physical bodies of free citizens (Mbembe 2003: 13). Necropolitics emerge precisely at the intersection between the people's subjectivity and their bodily existence, which subjects them to biopower. Authorities are capable of instrumentalization of corporality in the population. Focusing on the interaction between power and human bodies, Mbembe constructs his theory of political rule as ontological connections and breaks, collisions, and connections between mind and body (Mbembe 2003: 14).

In which sense can this theory be relevant when talking about death online, since digital existence is by definition not physical in the conventional sense? Is it even possible to talk about physicality in the virtual space? Luciano Floridi helps us answer this question by elaborating on the logic of the defense of informational privacy. To criticize the ethics of dealing with personal data, Floridi develops his informational ontology. Describing the historical shifts in human self-determination, starting with the emergence of the heliocentric model of Copernicus and ending with the spread of social networks, Floridi suggests calling the current social reality "the infosphere" and people informational organisms ("inforgs"), which are inextricably linked and embedded into the informational environment (Floridi 2014: 111-112). In a sense, writes Floridi, a person becomes the same informational agent as the smartphone he owns because they share the same environment (Floridi 2014: 113). Within Floridi's informational ontology, relations of belonging in the digital space become more understandable. Floridi writes: "Your' in 'your information' is not the same 'your' as in 'your car' but rather the same 'your' as in 'your body,' 'your feelings,' 'your memories,' 'your ideas,' 'your choices,' and so forth. It expresses a sense of constitutive belonging, not of external ownership, a sense in which your body, your feelings, and your information are part of you but are not your (legal) possessions" (Floridi 2014: 141).

Within this logic, persons do not own their information but exist through it: *"We are our own information, and our personal data are our informational bodies"* (Öhman, Floridi 2017: 644). Using Marx's concept of the inorganic body, Floridi and Öhman derive the concept of the informational body. If the production of information is part of the modern capitalist system, then the informational body, by analogy with the inorganic one, is an object of necropolitics.

For the ethnographic part of my work, the necropolitical logic of martyrdom is of particular importance. As Mbembe puts it: "… the martyr, having established a moment of

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supremacy in which the subject overcomes his mortality, can be seen as laboring under the sign of the future. In other words, in death, the future is collapsed into the present." (Mbembe 2003: 37). The future and the present merge into one in the practices of mourning and memorialization. And if, as Mbembe notes, "entire populations are the target of the sovereign" (Mbembe 2003: 30), then the production of general norms for operations with human bodies applies to informational bodies to the same extent as biological ones.

1.4 Russian Digital Memory of War

Digital war memorialization has been a topic of discussion in Russian official historiography. It is essential to consider in the context of the present study of the visual culture of grief in contemporary Russia. The social myth of the Second World War is the central integrative myth of the USSR and modern Russia (Glisic and Edele 2019: 105-106). Historians point to the emergence, in Putin's Russia, of a patriotic historiography that constructs the Russian Empire's and the USSR's main achievements as a single continuum, erasing unpleasant and traumatic historical episodes (Glisic and Edele 2019: 106). The so-called battle for history has established the dominance of historical narratives legitimizing government policy at home and internationally (Glisic and Edele 2019: 106).

Seth Bernstein analyzed two commemorative online projects dedicated to World War II (see Bernstein 2016). The first project is called Ia Pomniu ("I Remember"). Originally a grassroots initiative, it ended up receiving a government grant (and has been publicly funded ever since). It features interviews with Soviet veterans of World War II about how the everyday life of a Soviet soldier during the war. Bernstein analyzed the frequency of certain words and topics (for example, the words "victory," "Russian," "the people," etc.) in the transcripts and the responses those elicited (Bernstein 2016: 428). Patriotic themes feeding national pride were significantly more represented in the interviews and yielded more approval and agreement among commentators. Difficult episodes in Soviet history (such as anti-Semitism in the Red

Army) caused negative emotions and disputes among users. The second project that Bernstein analyzed is called Pomnite Nas! ("Remember Us!"). It is a digital database of monuments dedicated to World War II, placed on a map and recording details about their condition. Bernstein points out that in analyzing such a database, what is not in it says more than what is present (Bernstein 2016: 431). For example, among the 12,000 monuments in the database, only 15 mention the words "Jew" and "Holocaust." The marginalization of the Holocaust is also evident in the fact that on the map of the "Pomnite Nas!" there is no Auschwitz, although thousands of Soviet citizens died there (Bernstein 2016: 431). Thus, selective suppression, characteristic of pre-digital memorial practices, is also observed in Russian virtual sites of memory.

Analyzing similar digital projects, Iva Glisic and Mark Edele use the concept of "managed memory" (Glisic and Edele 2019: 113). Memory management is a two-way process involving the state apparatuses controlling social memory on the one hand and, on the other hand, bottom-up processes of production that may be fragmented and uncoordinated (Glisic and Edele 2019: 112). The interactivity of the Internet precludes totalitarian control or entirely engineered historical narrative (Glisic and Edele 2019: 113). Despite its fragmentation, virtual social memory intersects with the official historical narrative and is partially included in it. This intersection occurs especially on patriotic issues, forming a space of consensus between the state and society. The concept of memory management permits to describe this situation in its complexity and versatility. The state strategy for regulating digital social memory in Russia is not to establish total control over historical narratives. It consists, instead, in strengthening the space of consensus between society and government. One of the crucial aspects of this strategy is the personification of social memory, the inclusion of the younger generation in the official historical continuum at the individual level through the history of family and ancestors (Glisic

and Edele 2019: 114). In my analysis of the visual culture of the digital memorial community (Chapter 3), I will argue that memory management is a critical element of Russian necropolitics.

Mykola Makhortykh looked at representations of the Battle of Kyiv in Russian and Ukrainian YouTube productions (Makhortykh 2020). Concentrating on how war and memory are narrated, experienced, and performed in the virtual space, Makhortykh notes the potential of digital social media to bring about a fundamental shift in how military conflicts are remembered (Makhortykh 2020: 149). YouTube allows different representations of a historical event to intersect and collide (Makhortykh 2020: 157). However, despite the conditions of diverse historical accounts, virtual memory narratives do not challenge official national discourses but simply reproduce them (Makhortykh 2020: 157).

1.5 Militarized Orthodoxy

The present research focuses on a community of grief affiliated with the Russian Orthodox Church. The existence of strong ideological links between post-Soviet Russian nationalism and religion is well established (see Laruelle 2019). These connections will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3 in the case of Russian nationalistic art.

To analyze the digital prayer and commemorative community associated with the Moscow Patriarchate, I will use the concept of the militarization of Orthodoxy. The militarization of Russian Orthodoxy was arguably an outcome of Russia's religious "culture of war" and became one of its key trends (Knorre 2016: 33). The culture of war, a religious studies researcher Boris Knorre argues, is a stable tradition in Russian cosmology, embodied in religious discourses and a conservative spirituality focused on protecting the military. Knorre redefines post-Soviet political Orthodoxy as an ideological movement to create a homogeneous system through military-political actions and domestic political means, whereby the Orthodox Church legitimizes militaristic discourse, political dictatorship, and violent practices (Knorre 2016: 33). Knorre stressed the "cosmological" nature of this war (Knorre 2016: 33).

Representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church, he showed, articulated the discourse of "Holy Rus," in the center of which lied the "forces of light" and "the forces of evil" (where the first personifies the Orthodox sacred order, and the second profane chaos), promoting the idea of sacrifices. In this Orthodox model, Christian ethics are consolidated but also transformed into a new one that places war at the center of its value system (Knorre 2016: 33). I will show how the weaponization of Orthodoxy is another vital element of contemporary Russia's necropolitics.

1.6 Management of Grief

To convert grief into a political reality, I will use the concept of grief management as another aspect of Russian digital necropolitics (see Rashid 2022). Focusing on the grieving women in Pakistan and beyond during memorial ceremonies and the military's practice of dealing with their affect, Maria Rashid articulates a number of critical aspects of grief management that, as I will show in Chapter 2, are also emerging in digital.

First, Rashid argues that grief is the labor of women, exploited by the military (Rashid 2022: 53). Secondly, this work of mourning, despite its feminine nature, is inscribed in and conditioned by a patriarchal system that, according to Rashid's accurate remark, seeks to give mourning an acceptable, "masculine" form, exposing women grieving for dead soldiers to masculinization of affect (Rashid 2022: 63). This masculinization of affect allows the political leaders, choosing the path of war, to make corpses understandable and socially acceptable. Third, drawing on Judith Butler's notion of social grief, Rashid describes how the death of soldiers in public mourning rituals is constructed as a noble death constituting a meaningful, acceptable life when mourning creates "hierarchies of grief" that reinforce social privileges, inequalities, and boundaries between different social groups (Rashid 2022: 54). Thus, public mourning rituals for soldiers "are acts of war, where mourning is not about suffering, but

national projects that masculinize affect through female bodies and call for continued war and the meaningfulness of violence unleashed in them" (Rashid 2022: 63).

Rashid's categorization of social justifications is equally valuable, which explains the limitation of uncontrolled "feminine" grief (Rashid 2022: 57). She divides the justification strategies into three discursive categories. The first lies in the non-total nature of the death of the deceased soldier: according to religious imaginaries, he continues to exist in paradise, meaning it is pointless to mourn for him. The second is the festivalization of grief: if death is socially significant and righteous, mourning should be turned into a festival. Thus, relatives should be proud of the death of their loved ones. Finally, the third is the depersonalization of grief: in memorials and obituaries, the deceased soldier is defined not as the son of a particular woman but as the son of a nation; therefore, his body and life belong to the national community. In Chapter 2, I will show how these practices are replicated in the Russian digital grief community. In Chapter 4, I will try to fit digital grief management into the general necropolitical Russian context.

Rashid's account of mourning as a women's labor may make one think of Pierre Bourdieu's analysis of feminist studies ("Masculine Domination," 1998). The French classic analyzed the position of women through the concepts of symbolic domination and the struggle for symbolic capital, considering individual strategies for gender self-presentation akin to symbolic trading activities (Bourdieu 1998: 101). Bourdieu points out, in particular, that patriarchy turns women's labor into symbolic, entrusting them with the function of producing symbolic meanings (for example, signs of distinction). As he puts it: "[women] are the greatest victims of symbolic domination, but also the natural vectors for the relaying of its effects towards the dominated categories" (Bourdieu 1998: 101). Engaged in the production of social meanings within specific households, women are thus, according to Bourdieu, responsible for social labor, in other words, for bringing people together as a community. Thus, grief, while

traditionally a woman's labor, becomes a symbolic work, converting individual affect into political experience.

2. Digital Festival of Grief: Ethnography of Mourning on Social Media

On March 25, at 19:20 Moscow time, an online community called "Molimsya vmeste o voinah" (Russian name in English means "We Pray Together for Warriors") starts a live stream. A man appears in front of the camera and starts a prayer service. The live stream's title indicates this is "an evening prayer for the Russian army." Under the broadcast, viewers leave hundreds of comments one after another. Their texts resemble prayer texts, containing the names of soldiers and appeals to God for help, health, repose, etc. One of them reads: "God, save and protect our country, Russia and our people, DPR [Donetsk People's Republic – author's note] and LPR [Luhansk People's Republic], and the inhabitants of the DPR and LPR from terrorists and demonic ukrofascists, from various scammers and sectarians. Amen, Amen, Amen!" Twice a week, virtual parishioners gather for online prayers and memorial services. The group members send the names of their loved ones who are in Ukraine and make lists of the names under prayer announcements. Priest E., one of the community curators, reads them during the prayer service while the listeners of the livestream continue to pray in the comments. Some ask God to heal the soldiers "wounded by the Nazis," save them from the "demonic Ukrainian fascists," and also pray "for the health of our President Putin." Anyone can submit a "note" with the name of a relative or a friend.

2.1 The Wall of Lamentations and the Management of Grief

"God doesn't read social media. Everything that is written here is written for people."

A male member of the community in the comments
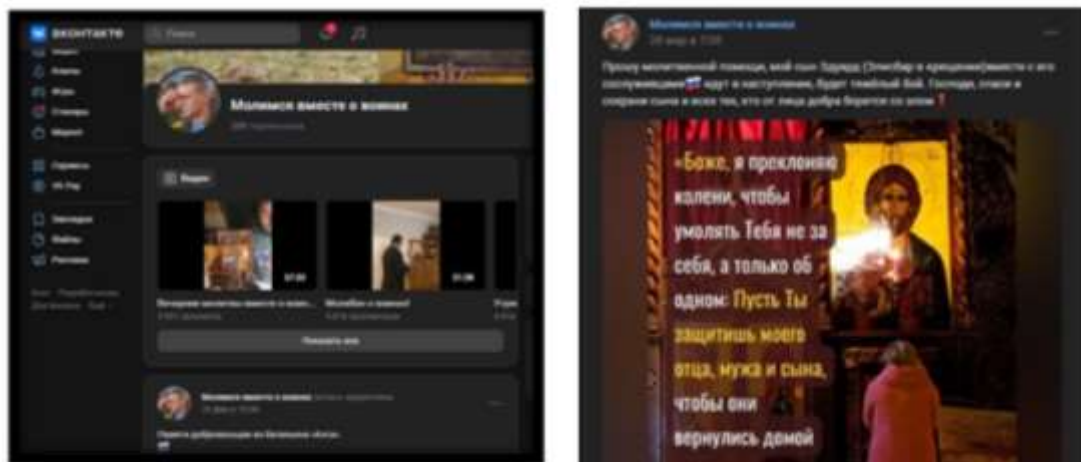
Figure 2.1

The community's newsfeed (the "wall" or *stena*) resembles an iconostasis (Figure 2.1). Above the images of Jesus Christ, the Mother of God, Nicholas the Wonderworker, and George the Victorious, the participants place short texts about their warring sons, husbands, brothers, and fathers. Most of the soldiers' photographs appear on the wall, accompanied by obituaries. In the grieving posts, parents and friends ask people to pray for the repose of the deceased soldier, and in the comments, people leave condolences, virtually sharing the grief of the main posts' authors. Participants also publish the date of death and information about its cause, as well as specific biographical details.

The information that mourners include in obituaries already contains a symbolic value. As Verdery put it: "Dead people come with a curriculum vitae or résumé—several possible résumés, depending on which aspect of their life is being considered" (Verdery 1999: 28). The dead cannot speak, and "words can be put in their mouths" (Verdery 1999: 29). Compiling "CVs" of dead soldiers is thus the first available means of digital grief management. Obituaries on the community wall, "Molimsya vmeste o voinah," ("We Pray Together for Warriors") tend

to emphasize two aspects of the lives of the dead. Their military prowess is one (usually indicating their military rank or belonging to the Wagner Group, for example). Courage in battle is an inevitable attribute of the dead military. Grief management, because it is political, especially in the case of military deaths, requires it to appropriately display the "masculine" attributes of the deceased — courage, strength, and endurance during combat (Rashid 2022: 63). The management of grief segregates appropriate manifestations of affect ("rational" grief which plays into the hands of the political regime that has chosen the path of war) from inappropriate ones (the "feminine," "irrational" manifestation of affect, which can potentially turn into or support a critique of war) (Rashid 2022: 53-54). The successful management of grief requires the military and political leadership to masculinize the affect in public mourning rituals. The virtual iconostases show that, in fact, this technique of "grief management" is not only the work of political and military figures from above but is also implemented in the ordinary habitus from below.

Another recurrent feature mentioned in obituaries is the network of kinship relations. This personalizes grief and clarifies the relationship between the deceased and his loved ones. As Verdery and other anthropologists have pointed out, kinship as a marker of lineage and as a basis for the gendering of community and social relations, is often linked to nationalist ideology. Per Verdery: "Nationalism is thus a kind of ancestor worship, a system of patrilineal kinship, in which national heroes occupy the place of clan elders in defining a nation as a noble lineage" (Verdery 1999: 41). Family ties can become a tool for creating and maintaining national identity, especially in the context of military conflicts. Kinship in grief connects the relatives of the dead with the general idea of war. Individualization through kinship makes grievers available for enrollment in pro-war discourse. Kinship and mourning rituals connect public and private, collective and individual lives. Direct effects of this micro-macro connection are, for example, calls for revenge or demands to continue the war until victory to make the death of

soldiers meaningful, that sometimes surface on the memorials. The connection might also work the other way around when it supports expressions of protest against war and violence. Several examples of different effects are analyzed below.

The anonymous post in Figure 2.2 is a request for prayers. The text reads: "I ask for prayers for the health of the soldiers of Fedor, Stepan, Sergey, Mikhail, Evgenii so that there will be no injuries, no captivity so that they will return home alive and healthy. I also ask for prayers for the healing of the soldiers Alexei and Maxim... And pray for the repose of the soldiers Andrei and Nikolai..." The comments seem monotonous: wishes of health to the living or the repose of the soldiers who died, supplemented with multiple "Amen." Most participants formulate their comments so that their texts semantically and lexically resemble prayers. For example, the comments often end with "In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." The picture accompanying the post is the work of the White Artist, a painter whose works became popular on the community wall and often accompany prayer requests and obituaries. Among all the various visual elements of the wall, the White Artist's works stand out: active participants recognize his paintings and leave hundreds of enthusiastic comments. A visual analysis of his works is presented in Chapter 4.

Figure 2.2

Participants often post poetry accompanied by photographs and drawings in the background. Figure 2.3 shows two examples of poetry common among online parishioners. The poem on the left is a prayer for God to return soldiers home alive: "I am on my knees, I pray. And my words flow from my heart. May all those who went to war return to their home alive." In the background, there is a portrait of a woman. Her eyes are closed, and her hands are folded in stereotypical prayer. On her left, a church candle burns. The poem on the right differs dramatically in its form, meaning, and visual parameters from the former exemplar. Firstly, it is not addressed to God but is a direct appeal to the soldiers: "Hold on, guys! Hold on, my folks! Victory is yours! God bless you!" In the background is a photograph of an armed Russian soldier looking through the scope of a machine gun.

Figure 2.3

This example illustrates a broader split among community members, manifested in poetry styles, visual elements, and the texts of prayers and obituaries. In one category of comments, participants call for victory in the war. An elderly woman writes, for example: "God, help them return home safe and sound with the victory over the Nazis!" Others joined her in prayer, asking God that Russian soldiers defeat "evil," "scum," and "fascists." Prayer requests of this type often mention the "enemy." One may ask God to "protect soldiers from enemy bullets and shells," "pacify the evil hearts of enemies," or "direct enemies to the true path." Appeals to God for the repose of the deceased are accompanied by direct appeals to the dead and the relatives, as in the appeal of one of the participants (a woman, 55 years old): "The kingdom of heaven to the servant of God who was killed by war. Eternal memory to the hero of Russia. Give strength to relatives so they survive the loss. And be the mother proud of her hero!" Appeals to the dead often contain such attempts to give meaning to death, as here: "Lord, rest the servant of God, the valiant warrior Oleg, who gave his precious life for his friends, for his Fatherland, and the truth of God!"

The discursive practices described above exemplify key mechanisms of grief management identified by Rashid in her study of ritual women grievers in Pakistan (see Rashid

2022). First, within the digital community, mourning becomes a communal activity (Walter et al. 2012: 290), a process in which grief becomes depersonalized (Rashid 2022: 57): the son of a particular mother, the husband of a particular widow, the father of a particular daughter, etc. turn into the son/husband/father of a nation, country, Fatherland. The informational body of a soldier no longer belongs to him or his family. In the course of virtual communication, it is endowed with the meanings of different members of the community. The communal nature of digital grief makes grief impersonal, belonging to everyone and no one at the same time. In the case of the "real" funerals and militaristic commemorative rituals described by Rashid, grief management was embodied in the discursive practices of politicians and military leaders. Unlike physical acts of collective mourning, digital ones are self-regulating: mourners not only experience the management of grief but also participate in it, reproducing official narratives and producing alternatives. However, as noted above, in the "CVs" of the dead, individualization through kinship also takes place simultaneously. Thus, the wall becomes the locus of a feedback loop between the personal and the national. The relationship between the depersonalization of mourning and the individualization of collective affect through kinship could be described as a psychogenetic process through which the collective and the personal are mutually constitutive.

Another mechanism of digital management of grief lies in the immortalization of the deceased. In the Pakistani case analyzed by Rashid, the military comforted grieving mothers with the idea that their sons have not disappeared forever: they continue to exist in heaven. This creates a rationalization effect whereby mourning is relativized (Rashid 2022: 57). In the case of the Russian online mourning community, Orthodox cosmology plays the role of soothing and rationalizing, often manifested in poetry. For example: "Our loved ones do not die; they return as warm rain. They return from paradise to see how we love and wait. Having run through the gardens and across the field, watered the flowers and the forests, and breathed in plenty of

native air, they rise into the heavens. They rise, turning into a cloud again. And again, they pour down to see our love. Our loved ones don't die." In this anonymous poem, a physical connection between the dead and the living (the clouds and the rain) is imagined, which performs the immortalization process. Russian Orthodoxy includes a Christian cosmology and a pagan cult of ancestors (Verdery 1999: 43) which provides mourners with a trove of symbolic resources in signifying immortality and continuity through burial and other funerary rituals. The cult of ancestors focuses attention on correctly "serving" the dead. Subjects of all rituals, the dead become the protectors of their living relatives unless they become evil, possibly even vengeful spirits. The dead observe the correctness of the rituals, invisibly watching the living. The poem above represents distance and closeness between mourners and their dead on precisely this general model: the dead are invisible, but they surround the living, embodied through the power of natural elements.

A third mechanism of grief management is the festivalization of mourning. Rashid writes: "Acts of public grieving for soldiers are acts of war, where mourning is not about suffering, but national projects that masculinize affect through female bodies and call for continued war and the meaningfulness of violence unleashed in them" (Rashid 2022: 63) The festivalization of mourning occurs through the glorification of the death of soldiers in many digital obituaries which, instead of describing the horrors of death in war, instead of doubts about how just such a death came to be, glorify the dead person's alleged choice of death in war and thereby of the war itself. If socially approved actions led to the death of a soldier (especially through sacrifice and martyrdom), then his relatives should not grieve but, on the contrary, rejoice and be proud. This third mechanism is closely related to the first (role of "holy" ancestors and kinship), as vividly illustrated in the following poem placed under an obituary: "And in heaven the holy fathers will meet them. And lead them to where the heroes rest. Dashing fighters gathered there, who at all times went into battle for Fatherland!"

Along the aspects that support and justify war more or less directly, many prayers on the digital shrine are for the war's end. Participants ask God to stop the war, pray for peace, and that people stop dying. A 37-year-old woman thus turns directly to God: "God, stop this as soon as possible, please!" In such prayer requests for the coming of peace, users use the phrases "cursed war" and even "useless death." The grief and affect in such obituaries and commentaries appear more individualized. Such obituaries are particularly feminized, making the perception of grief as "women's labor" noticeable. One of the users accompanied her son's obituary with the following poem: "Their names go into obelisks, but they should be in the patronymics of their unborn children. And the cranes above them froze low with the howl of their wives and mothers." The presence of posts, comments, poems, etc., of this type, indicates that grief management leaves a place for dissonance and potential critique and protest. While hegemonic management of grief is more conspicuous, the themes of unjust deaths of soldiers in a senseless, irrational war are also prominent. Community moderators officially working for the Moscow Patriarchate do not delete such posts and messages. The quantitative relationship between different discourses within a community needs further research.

2.2 Digital Rituals and Weaponization of Orthodoxy

On Saturday evening, at 19:20 Moscow time, the live stream starts at the "Molimsya vmeste o voinah" group. It is titled "Evening Prayers for Warriors." One of the community's founders, a layman A. appears in front of the camera. He is not a priest, but he is responsible for moderating the community on behalf of the Russian Orthodox Church. He is sitting at a table with two Orthodox icons in front of him. The sound does not appear immediately: "It seems to have started. I don't know how it is now. Write, how is it now, the connection?" A. asks the audience. "We're slowly warming up!" A. rejoices. I see the number of viewers of the broadcast growing. "But so far, there has been no notification in the group. Connection, they say, stumbles. And who doesn't have any problems? Good evening, Valentina!" A.

simultaneously reads the comments and evaluates the connection. His speech sounds chaotic. He begins to pray: "In the name of the Father… Yes, VKontakte freezes again. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen!"

Figure 2.4

While A. is praying, the audience is actively writing comments. They write the names of their relatives and friends and ask to pray for them. Comments appear very quickly, and dozens of posts turn into hundreds. Some viewers do not understand that the prayer service is dedicated to Russian soldiers in Ukraine. My attention was drawn to the comment of a man who asks for prayers for his relatives (mostly female names), and he also asks: "Help me, God, be together with my beloved girl, enlighten my mother to let us be together." While praying, A. sometimes appears in the frame with a pectoral cross (Figure 2.5). He makes the sign of the cross to the camera as if it were real parishioners (to cross all broadcast viewers). The online prayer service lasted 50 minutes. A. managed during this time to read several prayers. One of them was the prayer of Ephraim Sirin. The peculiarity of this ritual lies in the numerous earthly obeisances that the worshiper must produce. A. will bow during the prayers (that cannot be seen but will be heard) and instructs the audience of the prayer: "Whoever is able, also bow to the

ground. If you are not able, do a waist bow. If you are not at all able to do so… [he bows his head]. At least with your eyes, at least agree internally; everything is within your power."

The next day, at 12:05 Moscow time, Father E., community co-founder, hosted a broadcast entitled "Panikhida, memorial prayer service for soldiers." The stream's title indicates that this is a memorial service for the soldiers who died in Ukraine. Priest E. does not communicate with the audience and immediately proceeds to prayer (Figure 2.6). E. prays, reading the names of the dead soldiers. He walks around the room and swings the censor. Sometimes he approaches the camera and reads the names people leave in the comments. Sometimes commentary texts are accompanied by "orders" to God: for example, one participant asked for the opportunity to bury the deceased, whose body was still on the battlefield: "On the repose of the soldiers of Constantine, Edward, who died in Ukraine. Edward died in December; his body cannot be taken away from the battlefield to this day. Lord, hear prayers and have mercy on relatives; give us the opportunity to bury a warrior in a Christian way." Sometimes people send dozens of names. There are hundreds of comments, and the flow of names does not stop. E. does not have time to read all the names. In total, the prayer lasted 16 minutes. E. ends the memorial service with the words: "Unfortunately, I don't have a second phone or camera to

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read all the names. But tomorrow at the Divine Liturgy, we will commemorate again; we will read all the names. We'll pray for everyone, don't worry. Save all Christ! God be with you!" he says at the end. He signs the cross towards the phone, walks over to it, and turns off the broadcast.

Figure 2.6

To understand the features of the online community "Molimsya vmeste o voinah", I interviewed Father E. He is 25 years old. He is an ordinary priest. He says he has three children. There used to be four, but one of the children died. E. explains his decision to become a priest by the fact that he always wanted to serve people and God and also wanted to be an example of a good, "non-corrupted Orthodox priest." His answers seem open and sincere to me. However, E. carefully monitors the words he uses (for example, according to Russian law, the word "war" cannot be used to describe the situation in Ukraine, and its use can be followed by criminal prosecution). E. also connects the idea of the community with the concept of communities of memory. Here is what E. answers the question of what will happen to the community after the war in Ukraine ends: "Perhaps this will grow into a community of memory. We will commemorate the dead soldiers. Maybe we will make a memorial. Maybe there will be a community where we will gather monthly and pray for repose." E. claims that digital prayer

has a specific power. For example, he says: "The girl called me and told me her husband was missing. And he hasn't been in contact for three months. And we prayed together too. And the most amazing thing: yesterday she wrote that her husband had called her to say he was in the hospital and would come home soon… I think it's a miracle. He could get in touch earlier, or he could get in a week. And then: we prayed, and he immediately got in touch."

I wonder what meaning E. puts into "prayers for soldiers and the Fatherland," whether he sees political meaning in this. He answered: "There is nothing political in this. We are Russians. We pray for our Russian army. For our God-protected country Russia. We are praying for our guys. There are no political statements." E. takes for granted that he is doing his duty to people, helping them cope with the pain of loss without any political significance.

In her study of the political life of dead bodies in the post-Soviet space, Verdery pointed to the decisive role of religion in the ways people deal with death: "Religions monopolize the practices associated with death, including both formal notions of burial and the "folk superstitions" that all the major faiths so skillfully integrated into their rituals" (Verdery 1999: 32). This view implies that Orthodoxy not only developed and established formal aspects of a proper burial but also successfully incorporated and accumulated "folk superstitions" into its doctrines, making them an integral part of its general belief systems through ritualization. These practices may include special funeral ceremonies, periods of mourning, memorial services, and various superstitions associated with death, such as beliefs in the afterlife, spirits, or rituals to ensure the peaceful transition of the deceased. By incorporating folk beliefs into their rituals, religions create a comprehensive system that addresses death's practical and spiritual aspects. In the case of the virtual community of grief, this becomes especially evident during live broadcasts of prayers and requiems. Priest E. and Layman A., during digital prayers, offer viewers ("virtual coprayers," as they say) instructions on how to behave during the service and what words to say. In comments and prayer requests, community members reproduce Church

vocabulary and often use the phrases of online group moderators. The management of Orthodox rituals is an integral part of grief management. Verdery also writes: "Aside from their evident materiality and their surfeit of ambiguity, dead bodies have an additional advantage as symbols: they evoke the awe, uncertainty, and fear associated with "cosmic" concerns, such as the meaning of life and death" (Verdery 1999: 32). Orthodoxy, with its organized structures and spiritual framework, provides more than guidance and comfort to people facing the mystery of death. It also offers explanations for the cosmic order, creating a sense of community among participants in times of loss (Verdery 1999: 33).

Conducted observations and interviews with the co-founder of the Digital Orthodox community of grief point to the weaponization of Orthodoxy (Knorre 2016: 33-34). Its basis is the development of a "culture of war" within the institution of the church. Knorre describes the "culture of war" as a sustainable tradition with its theology, religious commitment, and conservative spirituality, supportive of the military, legitimizing militaristic discourse and violent practices of dictatorships (Knorre 2016: 33). The discourse around war is imbued with a metaphysical dimension, depicting it as a sacred battle between the "forces of light" and the "forces of evil." These narratives are reproduced in prayer requests, obituaries, and comments on the community wall.

Figure 2.7

Figure 2.7 shows another typical example of how the weaponization of Orthodoxy manifests itself in the discursive-visual practices of users. The picture posted on the community wall shows armed Russian soldiers. They stand on the porch, on the steps at the entrance to the church. On the church walls, you can see many traces of bullets. In front of everyone is an elder man dressed in a military uniform. In his hands, the elder man holds the icon of the Mother of God. The caption for the picture is a poem: "How foreign countries rejoice, and howl with happiness that we knelt. However, we knelt to pray before the fight." Thus, even in the digital grassroots community of grief, mourning is turning into a national project.

3. Historical Assemblage of Russia's Invasion: A Visual Analysis of Paintings Glorifying the War

Visual art is a form of expression that conveys meaning through multiple elements. Through visual analysis, one can explore the various ways in which culture intersects with the state and politics. The works of the White Artist, a Russian radical nationalist painter, along with photographs of the dead, accompany numerous posts of mourning in the "Molimsya vmeste o voinah" community as a visual accompaniment to obituaries and prayers for the repose. The works of the White Artist dedicated to the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine inscribe actual events in the national historical narrative and, to a certain extent, become an instrument of their ideological or political justification. Their visual and textual elements symbolize specific episodes of the Russian past, giving the ongoing war a historical depth and acquiring special significance in Russian necropolitics. Showing how the White Artist builds a historical continuum, what visual elements he uses, what they signify, and how they relate to the official historiographical tradition in Russia, I will demonstrate how the visual culture of the mourning community performs necropolitical functions. The conclusions of my visual analysis are complemented by an interview I took with the White Artist.

The White Artist is a 24-year-old military officer, a lieutenant of the strategic missile forces. His works have lots of references from his training as a soldier. His pseudonym is associated with the history of the Russian Civil War and is dedicated to the White Movement, which fought for the restoration of the monarchy. I contacted him through his social media account. He responded to the request for an interview with evident enthusiasm. Upon learning that the conversation transcript would not be published in Russian, the White Artist called it an opportunity to "say much more than is allowed in Russia." During the interview, I felt that the White Artist was trying to impress me and demonstrate his intelligence. He said that before the beginning of the full-scale war with Ukraine, his paintings were devoted only to Russian military history and the Russian Civil War and were unsuccessful. Since the invasion of Ukraine

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began, White Artist has published paintings dedicated only to the ongoing war, which have quickly spread on social media and beyond the Internet. The White Artist links the reason for the increased interest in his work with the need of Russians to "feel unity" and the growth of "request for official ideology." When the war began, he was still a cadet at a military school, and he painted during classes. According to him, teachers reacted positively to his hobby. So, one of them, noticing that the White Artist was painting at his seminar, offered to release him from all classes and credit work so that the student could "wage a full-fledged struggle on the ideological battlefield."

The White Artist's paintings have already gone beyond virtual communities in the social network. In Figure 3.1, you can see a photo of the Red Square in Moscow, which was published in the fan community of the White Artist. On it, you can see a stand with art dedicated to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, among which there are works by the White Artist. The text on the stand reads: "The enemy will be defeated; victory will be ours!" During the interview, he also talked about several exhibitions of his paintings held in state-funded art spaces in Moscow. He also clarified that he was paid for some paintings (and refused to disclose the funding sources).

Figure 3.1

3.1 Rooting the Present in the Past

The first aspect of the White Artist's works that catches the attention is the way in which diverse references to Russia's history, ancient symbols, and allusions to old traditions and institutions (all this I hereafter call historical symbols) are included in the contemporary context of the paintings. One of the most frequently used techniques by the author is the "layering" and mixing of historical symbols with modern ones. For example, in his first painting (Figure 3.2), dedicated to the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the White Artist depicted a modern Russian soldier with a machine gun and a Russian tricolor on his military uniform. At the same time, the Order of St. George, the highest military award of the Russian Empire, and the St. George ribbon accompanying the order are depicted in the background. According to the statute of the order of 1769, this award is closely related to personal courage and valor in battle (see Project "St. George's page"). Thus, this award symbolizes heroism and courage, and its inclusion in the picture of the beginning of the Russian invasion is an ethical assessment of current events.

Figure 3.2

The second figure exemplifies another form of historical "layering" (see Figure 3.3). In this work, the variety of symbols used is striking. There are both the modern Russian flag and the propaganda sign "V." "Z" and "V" are symbols that designate units of the modern Russian army in geographical areas; they have become the symbols of the war with Ukraine, used by the Kremlin (see Sauer 2022) and the St. George ribbon, and the banner of the Kornilov regiment (one of the parts of the Russian imperial army, which later participated in the Civil War of 1918-1922 on the side of the White Movement) with the text on the banner "By faith Russia will be saved." Such an intense mixing of historical symbols with modern ones equalizes

their meanings, creating the feeling that the symbols of the current war are a continuation of those episodes of Russian history that the author considers heroic.

Figure 3.3

Another technique the White Artist uses to connect past and present is the imaginary personified "meeting" of history and reality. As a result of ideological selection, the author depicts certain personalities of Russian history who "meet" modern soldiers in his paintings (Figure 3.4). For example, the artist depicts Prince Alexander Nevsky standing behind a soldier, they look in the same direction, and Alexander Nevsky symbolizes the confrontation with the West. In the interview with me, White Artist especially emphasizes the figure of Nevsky as a symbol of confrontation with the West: "This is our struggle to ensure that all this Western abomination does not breed there, all these LGBT communities, all these orders imposed by the West. So that our religion would be on our Russian land, they would not accept Catholicism there, so a pseudo-Orthodox church separate from the Russian Orthodox Church would not be born." In another painting, behind a contemporary Russian military pilot, Pyotr Nesterov, known as the first Russian pilot of the Russian Empire, symbolizes the emergence of aviation in Russia. Another example is the image of the leader of the White Movement during the Civil

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War, Admiral Alexander Kolchak: in the foreground is a soldier who is surrounded by a dark haze, and behind him, dispelling the darkness with streams of light, Kolchak is walking; they look into each other's eyes; metaphorically speaking, historical light illuminates the darkness of modernity. Also important is the work, which depicts a Russian soldier in profile, and behind him in an identical position stands a Russian knight from the time of princely Rus'.

Figure 3.4

All of the techniques described above for incorporating narratives from Russian history are examples of what Foucault called "the continuity of glory" (Foucault, 2003: 70). Continuity of glory is a tool for the mobilization and militarization of society. The historical continuity used by the author is almost identical to the official historiography described by Glisic and Edele (Glisic and Edele 2019: 106). Thus, for the author, modern Russia, which

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has undergone numerous political transformations, remains the only successor to Kievan Rus (a Slavic centralized state founded in the 10th century) (Składanowski, Smuniewski 2022: 873). Modern events are built into a single context with historical narratives about the history of Kievan Rus and the Russian Empire. This logic is common for a section of Russian nationalists, which Marlène Laruelle (2019) describes in detail. Thus, the "white" nationalists (supporters of the imperialist path) formulate the unity of Kievan Rus, Muscovite Rus, the Russian Empire, and modern Russia using the discourse of "Holy Russia," placing particular emphasis on the role of Russia in the baptism of the Eastern Slavs as on the formation of pan-Slavic culture (Laruelle 2019: 201). Among them, references to tsarism and hopes for the restoration of the Russian monarchy as a return to the "true" path after an erroneous, in their opinion, attempt to build a socialist state are also especially common (Laruelle 2019: 201). The White Artist emphasizes the history of the Russian Civil War in accordance with the logic of modern Russian nationalists described by Laruelle. He said: "The confrontation with Ukrainian Nazism and, in general, with supporters of the emergence of Ukrainian statehood and the nation began precisely then. Then, this moment began when it appeared on the maps. It was created then; it was then that the Ukrainization began." This quote echoes president Putin's statements about Ukrainian statehood. Within the scope of my research, it is difficult to determine whether it is Putin appropriating far-right imagery or nationalists articulating official discourse. However, it is clear that a space of consensus has formed between the far-right nationalists (represented by the White Artist) and the Kremlin.

Another characteristic of modern representatives of "white" nationalism in Russia is the active use of the images of the Cossacks as the keepers of the Russian national tradition and collective memory (Laruelle 2019: 202). Examples of the use of the Cossacks in the paintings of the White Artist are collected in Figure 3.5. The painting on the left depicts a modern Cossack whose alleged historical ancestors stand behind him. The painting on the right shows a modern

Cossack and a Russian soldier looking into each other's eyes (which may symbolize the unity of the Cossacks and other units of the Russian army). At the same time, each has chevrons of the Russian private military company Wagner (Wagner Group), which actively participates in hostilities in Ukraine.

Figure 3.5

In the interview, the White Artist claims that establishing a connection with the past is pragmatic. First, he repeatedly stated that "unlearned lessons of history" (meaning, in particular, that the experience of the Chechen wars did not teach the Russian authorities anything) are the cause of the failures of the modern Russian army. In addition to extensive criticism of the strategy of the Russian military leadership, the author emphasizes the need to personify history: "It is important to take into account historical events, to draw parallels. This is important for morale. This is important for every soldier. It's one situation when a soldier, a simple guy from the village, doesn't understand why he goes there [to the war]. And when in the course of

hostilities, the situation is not in favor of our forces, he is surrounded, wounded, or left without ammunition; of course, he does not understand why he should die. He will not fight to the end until his death. Another example is when he knows that he is a descendant of great warriors, part of a great nation with a great history. He knows about Suvorov, Alexander Nevsky, and the "Attack of the Dead Men" of the Osowiec Fortress... He feels all this greatness and power behind his back. He will never turn back." The described means of historical motivation for self-sacrifice is connected with the mechanism of personification social memory (Glisic and Edele 2019: 114). The ideas of sacrifice and martyrdom gain meaning by manipulating historical narratives. The personification of history acquires necropolitical traits, especially during military mobilization. The paintings of the White Artist, based on the meaning he gave them, embody the necropolitical strategies of the state.

3.2 Aestheticization of War

The theme of the Wagner Group is presented in most of the works of the White Artist. He resorts either to direct references to the Wagner Group or veiled ones. The most common type of explicit mention is the inclusion of Wagner Group symbols (for example, chevrons and patches on the soldiers' uniform) in the composition. Figure 3.6 shows the most significant example of a direct mention of the Wagner Group. The painting depicts the head of the PMC Evgenii Prigozhin. He has a machine gun in his hands, his gaze is directed at the viewer, and mercenaries are standing behind him.

Figure 3.6

The White Artist confirms the glorification of Prigozhin. Comparing his actions with the Russian army's high command and president Putin, the author claims that, unlike the previous ones, "Prigozhin clearly showed what kind of leader he is." He emphasizes that Prigozhin's popularity is due to his battlefield presence. The White Artist always accompanies comparisons of the Russian leadership with the head of the Wagner Group with sharp criticism of the former. In particular, he accuses military leaders of lack of professionalism, corruption, lack of combat experience, and so on. This echoes the discourse among the Russian far-right that the authorities lack the determination and professionalism to win this war.

However, the most interesting is the metaphorical system developed by the author to reference the Wagner Group indirectly. Figure 3.7 shows several works using this figure of speech. Metaphors are built around the equation of the work of the Wagner Group and music. The White Artist depicts the Wagner fighters on the battlefield playing musical instruments (usually a violin) against the background of a musical staff (often depicting notes of the march of the 2nd Officer Regiment named after General Drozdovski, one of the founders of the White

Movement during the Civil War), or as a conductor in front of the orchestra. The musical metaphor is a cliché in the White Artist's online fan community. For example, under many images of the Wagner Group, commentators call it an "orchestra." The musical metaphors used by the White Artist may also testify to the "aestheticization of politics" in Russia, especially if one considers war its highest manifestation (Benjamin 1968: 214-218). It symbolizes the authoritarian, militaristic dream of the White Artist. The author equates war and violence with art, shifting the discussion from the ethical field (are the actions of mercenaries acceptable?) to the aesthetic (can their actions and war, in general, be considered art?).

When asked how the comparison with music came about, the White Artist replies that he came up with it long before the Wagner Group appeared. He said that for the first time in his paintings, there was a connection between war and art when he was working on illustrations for a book about the history of the Russian Civil War. He depicted a military leader with a conductor's stick in his hands, commanding artillery fire. "I drew him with his eyes closed, enjoying the artillery salvos as if from music." To a clarifying question of whether he considers war beautiful, the White Artist replied: "War cannot be beautiful in the literal sense. It's blood, dirt, infection, corpses, decay... But music can be both beautiful and scary simultaneously — also, the war. Equipment, body armor, a combination of lines — it's beautiful. There is, for example, a military style in fashion; it's not without reason, so there is something beautiful in it."

The works presented in Figure 3.7, while being published in the community of grief, sometimes are accompanied by poems dedicated to the Russian prisoners and criminals who participated in the war with the Wagner Group. One of the poems reads: "My new choice is not payment for sins, not redemption, not forgiveness. I choose the sacred cross, the Soldier's fate, so that only how you will remember me." The cited poem highlights how the motivation for participation in the war of former prisoners is included in the necropolitics: the state offers them

the opportunity to exclude their criminal past from the posthumous memory by making self-sacrifice.

Figure 3.7

3.3 Soldiers of Christ and "Holy Rus"

Another essential element of the White Artist's work is the category of religious visual symbols. Thus, his paintings often present Archangel Michael and the Greek Saint George the Victorious (Figure 3.8). Holy Orthodox figures are depicted behind the soldiers and symbolize the truth of the path and the righteousness of their military mission. Among the representatives of "white" Russian nationalism, to whom the White Artist considers himself, Orthodox Christianity is perceived as an existential principle and distinguishing feature of Russian society (Laruelle 2019: 201). At the same time, they not only believe in the theocratic nature of the Russian political regime but also often have strong personal ties with the Moscow Patriarchate,

which provides them with direct ideological support (Laruelle 2019: 201). Depicting modern Russian soldiers and mercenaries against the background of religious saints, the author repeats the logic of the Moscow Patriarchate, presenting the Russian army as "soldiers of Christ" (Laruelle 2019: 201). In an interview, White Artist also repeatedly emphasizes the religious nature of the war with Ukraine.

Figure 3.8

Irina Papkova, in her book on the politicization of Orthodoxy, points out that the Moscow Patriarchate cannot be called an ideologically homogeneous system since different views are widespread among its representatives, including liberal ones (Papkova 2011: 200). However, in contemporary Russia, the church becomes "a source of national identity and as a link to the glories of the past" (Papkova 2011: 190). Russian radical nationalism, which the White Artist embodies, also uses narratives of spirituality (the Russian term "dukhovnost" has multiple meanings; basic is striving for the acquisition of the Holy Spirit). This spirituality, becoming part of nationalist politics, endows the church with an "idiosyncratic understanding

of the function of religion" (Papkova 2011: 164–165). The White Artist speaks about this directly in an interview, noting that despite the multi-confessional nature of Russia, Orthodoxy has an extraordinary potential for spreading patriotism.

Another motif of the White Artist's works is centered on the spiritual revival of "Holy Russia" and ethnonationalism as a political doctrine (Laruelle 2019: 203). For example, in Figure 3.9, one can see the author's preferred image of the future of Russia: soldiers stand on a tank with their weapons lowered (which can symbolize a military victory), the imperial flag flutters behind them, and the whole scene is depicted against the backdrop of the Orthodox Church as the spiritual foundation of Russian society (accompanying text will be discussed separately). The formation of not only historical but also metaphysical, sacred depth through Orthodox symbolism in the works of the White Artist echoes the sacralization of the rhetoric of President Vladimir Putin (Składanowski & Smuniewski 2022: 887). The abundance of religious symbols is intended to exclude pragmatics and replace it with discourses of Russia's "holy" historical mission. White Artist, when asked if Russia has a historical mission, says: "War is a forced mission of Russia. We are not to blame for being surrounded by enemies. I sincerely believe in the president's words that we don't want to fight and be enraged with anyone. But we are forced. We are not fighting for a better life; we are fighting for life. We are defending our territory, sovereignty, our existence."

Figure 3.9

One more critical aspect of the use of religious symbols is the emotional bonds with the dead. Figure 3.10, for example, depicts a scene with soldiers who died in the war (this motif is not often found in the work of the White Artist). Heaven is depicted above the battlefield, from which the souls of the dead soldiers look at what is happening, and behind them stands the Archangel Michael. The painting also contains a text: "For our fallen brothers, forward to Kyiv." The purpose of this image may be to create a specific emotional affect in the viewer. Applying the politics of mourning, the White Artist endows the death of soldiers with a necropolitical component, producing a discourse of the request for revenge for the dead soldiers.

Figure 3.10

The White Artist says that this painting was one of the first dedicated to the invasion of Ukraine: "It was the very beginning of the war, and these were our first failures. Our bitterest defeats. It was a suicide. We could not believe that our indestructible army could fail like this. With this picture, I decided to indicate that there is no need to give up. Our soldiers are doing their military duty. We must unite more and be worthy of their memory. Their death does not mean the victory of the enemy. Their death means that they have ascended to heaven, looking at us and hoping that we will finish the job. This is our divine support."

3.4 Distorted Continuity

In addition to what symbols are present in the paintings of the White Artist, it is equally important to describe what elements are missing. The author deliberately avoids the most significant element, the Soviet past and the USSR's experience of World War II, which is central to official historiography (Glisic and Edele 2019: 105-106). The process of monopolization of the historical narrative takes place with the aim of "creating and maintaining the unity and

continuity of a political body" (Medina, 2011: 14). The works of the White Artist exclude the Soviet period from this sequence, thus becoming a "counterhistory" (Foucault 2003: 72). However, unlike Foucault, I do not mean by counterhistory a radical opposition to dominant discourse, but rather one that competes with it in symbolic struggle. The White Artist confirmed that he does not accept Russia's communist past. He also pointed out that his image of the future of Russia is at odds with official discourse. For example, he said: "As soon as I start promoting my ideas, it is perceived as something radical, something extremist. It is very difficult to explain that this is patriotism." Thus, he has to be careful in the expressions among colleagues and superiors in rank, he explained. When asked what future he dreams of for the country, the White Artist replies: "I dream of the rebirth of the army, the rebirth of society, the rebirth of Russia." Thus, despite all the many similarities with the official discourse, his ideological attitudes and values can hardly be called conservative but rather fascist.

3.4 Texts and Imaginary Histories

The White Artist often mixes visual and textual elements in his works. The most common technique for applying textual accompaniment to paintings in works devoted to the invasion of Ukraine is drawing quotes from famous historical figures in the image's background. In the first picture, dedicated to the Russian invasion (Figure 3.1), there is an inscription: "The Russians are coming!" The Russian historian and translator Konstantin Dushenko described the history of this quote as a synthetic layering of meanings of different origins (Dushenko 2018: 572-576). On the one hand, Dushenko describes the mythologized episode of the suicide of US Secretary of Defense James Forrestal, who jumped out of the window of a psychiatric clinic, allegedly shouting, "The Russians are coming!" At the same time, the phrase itself could become part of the myth because of the satirical film "The Russians Are Coming the Russians Are Coming" 1966. With such a context, this quote can symbolize fear before the Russian army. On the other hand, this phrase appears in the 90s at nationalist

marches in Russia as a quote from the lyrics of Alexander Masolov's song: "The Russians are coming! Russians are coming! The Russians are coming, but not for the parade! Clean up your land! And the enemies of Rus' are coming to judgment! Russians are coming!" Thus, there is an intersection of the external meaning (fear of the actions of the Russian army) with the domestic political one (Russia takes the "true" nationalist path, returning to its historical mission).

Figure 3.11

The White Artist's use of quotations from historical figures is notable for the inauthentic origin of these quotations. Figure 3.11 shows two of the most typical examples. On the left, the image of Prince Alexander Nevsky is accompanied by a quote: "Get up, Russian people, for a glorious battle, for a mortal battle." It first appears in 1938 in the film directed by Sergei Eisenstein "Alexander Nevsky." These words are heard in the song of the choir to the music of the composer Sergei Prokofiev; the text was written by the poet Vladimir Lugovsky

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and, accordingly, has no direct relation to the "real" Alexander Nevsky. The image on the right contains the image of the Russian commander Alexander Suvorov. It is accompanied by a quote: "Warriors of the Russian land... Ancient glory in your banners rustles ... Victory burns on the tips of your bayonets! Victory loves you!" The origin of this phrase differs in detail from the text that ended up in the painting by the White Artist. These words also have nothing to do with the historical figure of Suvorov, but they appear in the film "Suvorov" in 1941. Figure 9 shows a similar example of using quotes from historical characters, but this time without the image of the quote's author. The text on the picture reads: "Russia is not a commercial or agricultural state, but a military state, and its calling is to be a threat to the whole world." The White Artist attributes authorship to Emperor Alexander II. However, my attempts to verify this quote were unsuccessful (for the search, I used the research service "National Corpus of the Russian Language" ruscorpora.ru, which allows one to search for phrases and expressions in texts with a total volume of more than 2 billion words). Indeed, this quote sometimes appears in Russian social networks. Still, it is always attributed to different people, including Russian emperors Alexander II, Nicholas I, and Alexander III, political figure in the Russian Empire of the late XIX — early XX century Sergei Witte, Russian writer Edward Radzinsky, etc. All these examples of the use of text in the paintings of the White Artist are an attempt to "strengthen" the historical depth, to root the "mission" of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, using the symbolic capital of famous historical figures. At the same time, this historical depth, when verified, turns out to be unreliable and is based not on an attempt to get closer to the authenticity of historical material but, on the contrary, on artistic interpretations of historical events. This thesis is confirmed by a number of other examples in which the author uses quotes from the poems of the poets Valery Bryusov and Nikolai Gumilyov, which he interprets as patriotic.

White Artist describes why he publishes his paintings: "The experience of the First World War shows how the defeatist mood of the people ends, backed up by foreign propaganda

and corrupted slogans about peace. Information counteraction to all pro-Ukrainian heralds and reckless pacifist-treacherous exclamations of inadequate people is necessary. You will look for the right and the guilty at the end, and now the war is happening. And we must unite and be with our army. Our guys are dying there now. Turning away from them now means only betrayal." Thus, the motivation of the White Artist lies in the ideological struggle "against defeatism" and participation in the political and military mobilization of Russian society at the level of visual culture. His art fits into the necropolitical logic of the authorities, avoiding significant contradictions.

4. Rethinking Necropolitics: Place of Death in Putin's Russia

In conclusion, let me go back to the concept of necropolitics of Achille Mbembe. Mbembe complemented Michel Foucault's biopolitics by making it sensitive to how sovereign decisions about who lives and dies are embedded in the ontology of power in colonial order and the war on terror as a state of exception. Mbembe argued that the right to determine who could kill and be killed is the basis of state power, and death is seen as its manifestation (Mbembe 2003:12). Mbembe proposed to consider necropolitics as "the specific structure of terror" (Mbembe 2019: 80). In other words, necropolitics, according to Mbembe, is a specific set of tools for managing mortality and distributing the right to kill in a state of exception. The result of necropolitics is the emergence of a specific social order consisting of a multitude death-worlds which are "... new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to living conditions that confer upon them the status of the living dead" (Mbembe 2019: 92).

Mbembe also pays attention to the symbolic function of the dead in the construction of this social order, marveling at "their stubborn will to mean, to signify something" (Mbembe 2019: 87). Thus, Mbembe mentions the discursive meaning of dead bodies and their significance for necropolitics. However, I believe that mentioning the symbolic meaning of human remains is not enough to integrate them into necropolitical logic. Necropolitical functions of dead bodies may lie in collective memory and oblivion, where the power is given to decide which bodies should be memorialized (and how) and which not.

American researcher Robert M. Bednar has studied the affects and roadside memorials dedicated to the victims of car accidents in the US using necropolitical lens (see Bednar 2013). Bednar concluded that roadside memorialization, like any other cultural practice, "involves an economy of power and control, where subjects compete with each other to assert the power" (Bednar 2013: 339). As a result, Bednar complements Mbembe's account of necropolitics with

the competition over cultural practices for the right to decide which bodies are to be remembered and which to be forgotten (Bednar 2013: 341). This statement brings us closer to determining the place of digital remains in necropolitical logic, linking the politics of memory with death as a manifestation of necropower. However, for the analysis of digital corpses, it is not enough to consider that cultural practices are representations of necropolitical order: on the contrary, they acquire a specific role in the construction of death-worlds.

Katherine Verdery's described the dead as "vehicles for reconfiguring worlds of meaning" (Verdery 1999: 50). Anthropologist argued that legitimization of the political order could be analyzed as a cosmological (and therefore closely related to the sacred) process of "meaning-creation" (Verdery 1999: 52). The digital practices of militaristic mourning have similar logical foundations: they also have a dynamic, complex, competitive nature that includes the dimensions of kinship, history, national identity, and ritualization. Significantly, the dead bodies were influential in rethinking history in post-Soviet countries (Verdery 1999: 52). As Verdery put it: "The widespread disorientation offered a tremendous opportunity to people seeking power, as well; the challenge for them was to form new political arenas, invent new rules of the game, and build new political identifications, all in fierce competition with other would-be elites" (Verdery 1999: 50). This led to the spread of post-socialist necrophilia, in short, a set of diverse processes that raise the dead from their graves (both metaphorically and literally in cases of exhumation and reburial). However, in the case of digital war mourning, it is not about instrumentalizing the dead to rethink historical events but evoking their ghosts: the necropolitical regime in Russia during the war and military mobilization implies the role of the dead in the current. The intensity of memorial processes in the digital age creates a situation when yet uncooled corpses acquire political significance. The informational bodies of the soldiers who died in Ukraine become part of the digital necropolitical process, not even reaching the physical cemetery (one may think of the prayer requests for the opportunity to bury

the deceased while the body lies on the battlefield). The death of soldiers and their memorialization act as tools for legitimizing the war and the reason for its continuation. Relations between the living and the dead become dialectical: the living endow the dead with meaning through the mechanisms of collective memory, and the dead, in turn, determine the actions of the living.

In order to analyze digital grief and the political life of the informational bodies of dead soldiers, I propose a necropolitical model of digital management of grief. It is schematically presented in Figure 4.1. It is based on theoretical and empirical parts of the work. Especially important for the model are Maria Rashid's observations of how the Pakistani military manages collective mourning (see Rashid 2022) and Katherine Verdery's account of the role of history and kinship in the political life of dead bodies.
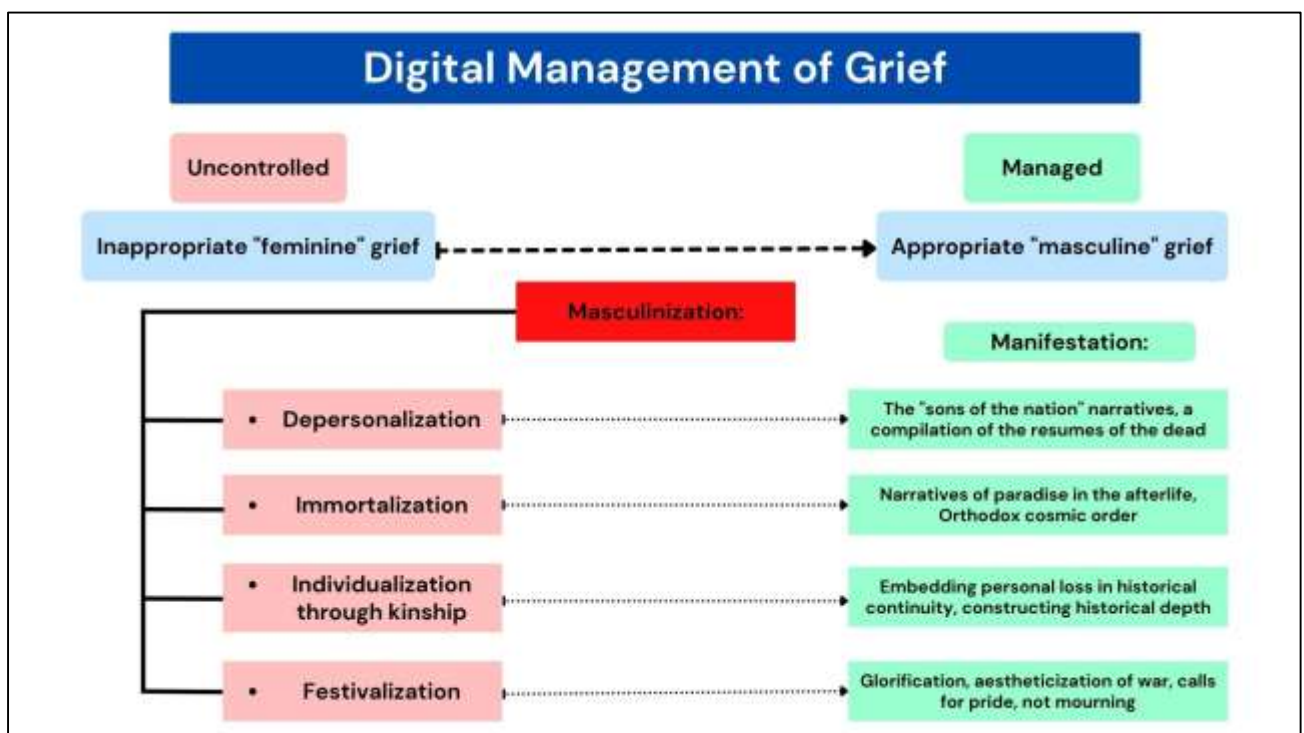

Figure 4.1

The essence of the necropolitical management of grief is to eliminate inappropriate social affect, giving it an acceptable, managed form. On the one hand, there is a manifestation

of grief as an inappropriate "feminine" affect. The digital management of grief aims to masculinize it to a desirable managed form of expression. The masculinization of grief consists of intertwined processes of depersonalization, immortalization, individualization through kinship, and festivalization. These processes can be both intentional, occurring at the initiative of various actors (such as the Russian Orthodox Church), and unintentional, as a result of the self-organization of the communal mourning experience. Depersonalization manifests itself, for example, in the compilation of the "CVs" of the dead and the construction of a narrative about the "sons of the nation." This process is based on depriving grieving relatives of the exclusive right to affect, reconstructing it as a shared practice appropriating the dead and inscribing them into the nation. Immortalization is associated with Orthodox cosmology and the religious meanings of the afterlife. It manifests itself in removing affect from the mourners by convincing them that there is no need to grieve because their deceased relatives are "in a better place" and continue to exist somehow. Individualization through kinship is a reverse, but not mutually exclusive, process of depersonalization. It is connected with incorporating national historical context into individual affect. This is especially evident in the visual representations of dead soldiers depicted next to their ancestors or historical figures. Finally, festivalization is a process designed to replace the affect of mourning with a feeling of joy. Mainly, it is manifested in the glorification of the dead soldiers, as well as calls for the mourners to be "proud" of their dead.

The digital grief management model has its roots in the symbolic interactionism of Erving Goffman. In his work "Presentation of Self in Everyday Life" (1959), Goffman formulated two critical concepts of dramaturgical analysis: management of impressions and performance (Goffman 1959: 208-209). Goffman argued that actors, in everyday communication, make constant efforts to control the impressions they make on others. This is the key feature of Goffman's dramaturgy.

In the digital community, grieving was presented by participants in accordance with societal expectations and norms established within it. This explains the lack of a significant variety of performances among the community members. Thus, the majority of online "parishioners" demonstrated the same clichés in text obituaries on the wall of lamentations, the monotonous syntactic and lexical form of prayer requests, a constant set of emoji (i.e., emoji imitating the prayer gesture). As Goffman put it: "Actual affective response must be concealed, and an appropriate affective response must be displayed" (Goffman 1959: 217). Management of impressions is also indicated by detailed instructions for prayer rituals that the organizers presented during livestreams.

Community members are influenced by prevailing cultural scripts and expectations associated with mourning, which Goffman describes in terms: "The disciplined performer is also someone with self-control." (Goffman 1959: 216). Goffman's dramaturgical discipline offers an opportunity to once again raise the question of the relationship between structure and agencies, but this time in a digital space. The structures in the digital community of grief are represented, for example, by Orthodoxy and its cosmology, by the features of digital memorialization and grief, or by the dominant historiographical narratives. These basic conditions provided a framework within which mourners navigate and configure their individual grieving performances. However, participants also visibly exercise free will in interpreting and adapting these structures to their expression of grief (one may think of the "dichotomy" between the dominant discourse of glorification of the dead and the counter-discourse of trauma and the demands for peace).

Digital ritualization also has social significance, as it serves as an integrative tool for the community, providing them with a reason to come together. Managing experiences in these rituals helps strengthen social bonds and provides a framework for navigating each other's grief. At the same time, weak social ties that distinguish the digital community from the "real" one

can make the management of grief even more effective. Thus, Goffman wrote: "The more information the audience has about the performer, the less likely it is that anything they learn during the interaction will radically influence them. On the other hand, where no prior information is possessed, it may be expected that the information gleaned during the interaction will be relatively crucial" (Goffman 1959: 222).

The necropolitical management of digital grief makes death an object of political competition and contention. Therefore, it does not imply a total monopoly of power and simultaneously includes various actors. Figure 4.2 depicts an anti-war action in Novosibirsk during Easter 2023 (image taken from the Twitter account of the Russian student protest media Doxa). The author modeled Easter cards addressed to the mothers of conscript soldiers who died in the war. Postcards were distributed randomly through the mailboxes of Novosibirsk residents and were also sent via messenger app. The text written in blue marker on the postcard on the left reads: "This Easter, no matter how you howl, no matter how you cry, there is only one misfortune. God's son has risen, but yours will never rise again." On the second postcard, next to the phrase "Christ is Risen!", which Orthodox Christians greet each other during Easter, there is the continuation of the phrase "But the conscript is not."

Figure 4.2

This example is not only intended to illustrate the inclusion of different participants in managing collective grief. It also demonstrates how actors with opposing political interests, by

instrumentalizing the symbolic meaning of death, reconfigure the management of grief in the opposite direction. Thus, the logic of the Novosibirsk political action is aimed at demasculinizing social grief, producing an inappropriate affect to delegitimize military actions.

Anthropologist Aleida Assmann in her article (see Assmann 2015), built the idea of afterlife into the concepts of cultural memory and the process of nation-building after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Assmann wrote:

"Karl Marx ([1852] 1972: 10) once commented that in history all great events and persons occur, as it were, twice, the first time as tragedy, the second as farce. With respect to the two phases of nation-building, this statement has to be adapted as follows: the first time it occurred in a heroic and self-celebrating mode; the second time it occurred in the tragic mode of victimhood and suffering" (Assmann 2015: 86).

Assmann argued that the contemporary structure of national memory could be constructed around trauma instead of continuity of glory. The same logic can be applied to the strategies of various participants in the digital grief management process. The supporters of the war are trying to construct a stable heroic narrative through the masculinization of affect. The Russian anti-war opposition, in its information strategy, reverses the logic of this process, seeking to spread the traumatic narrative. At the same time, both sides instrumentalize the grief and symbolic meaning of the dead to achieve their political interests. Even if the political goals are noble and dictated by good intentions, the instrumentalization of grief leaves many doubts, both of a purely ethical nature and from the point of view of the reproduction of social hierarchies.

Conclusion

My analysis has shown that necropolitics can be considered as a system of dispositions that turns death into a space for politics, symbolic struggle, and political contention. This approach can be useful for analyzing the digital context in illiberal political regimes such as Russia. After analyzing practices in the digital grief community and its visual culture, I have constructed a necropolitical model of the management of grief. Rooting it to Erving Goffman's symbolic interactionism, I refined the relationship between the individual and the collective in digital mourning, and fleshed out the tensions between social structure and agencies in social media.

To conclude, I make a point on the multidimensional nature of Russian necropolitics. In addition to the realm of social memory, it consists of legal, financial, aesthetic, religious dimensions, etc. My research was only focused necropolitical function of digital commemoration that showed how the informational bodies of soldiers become a place of political competition. Beyond the virtual space, an analysis of other dimensions of Russian necropolitics is of interest for further research.

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