A follow-up to *Critical Biopolitics of the Post-Soviet: from Populations to Nations* (2019) with Alexandra Yatsyk, Andrey Makarychev’s *Popular Biopolitics and Populism at Europe’s Eastern Margins* is a new major contribution in the field of post-Soviet studies. Interdisciplinary in its theoretical setup, the book draws from political philosophy, political science, and cultural studies, among other disciplines, to provide readers with a panoramic view of how political and bodily/corporeal discourses interact with each other in Estonia, Ukraine, and Russia. The contribution of *Popular Biopolitics* is twofold: on the one hand, it invites scholars of mainstream biopolitics to go beyond the familiar Western contexts and critically reflect on the robustness and scope of their theorization as the concept of biopolitics travels to different political, cultural, and institutional settings; on the other hand, it provides a fresh look on the issues of nation building, sovereignty, and neo-imperialism, which are routinely in the focus of post-Soviet studies yet are rarely approached from the biopolitical perspective.

Another running theme of the book is populism. *Popular Biopolitics* attempts to “unpack populism from a biopolitical perspective” by paying close attention to how the state as a “national body” is being discursively constructed in diverse political narratives and which groups of people are excluded from this collective body (pp. 10, 14). When approaching populism, the author focuses on its performative dimension. This allows him to incorporate populist narratives found beyond institutional politics (e.g., in popular culture) into his analysis and to trace how those narratives get appropriated and instrumentalized by political actors. The exploration of the nexus between biopolitics and populism is the core of Makarychev’s new book.

*Popular Biopolitics* consists of a preamble, four chapters, and concluding remarks. The first chapter starts with a concise and beginner-friendly introduction to biopolitics followed by the presentation of the novel concept of “popular biopolitics,” which Makarychev defines as “an epistemic instrument that allows us to peer into ...
cultural practices ... related to the political existence/functioning of human bodies and their inclusion into the discourses on power" (p. 23). Perhaps the strongest part of this chapter is where the author critically discusses the two poles of the biopolitical scholarship: Michel Foucault's understanding of biopower as a regime of care and Giorgio Agamben's view of biopolitics as a mechanism by which the sovereign subjugates and oppresses people, reducing them to the so-called bare lives. While pointing out the excessive idealism of Foucault's theorization and Agamben's ideologically biased anti-liberal reasoning, Makarychev neither takes a side in this debate nor dismisses both standpoints in entirety. Instead, he chooses to continue critically engaging with the two authors throughout the book, thereby opening the range of meanings in between and arriving at sophisticated and nuanced accounts of biopolitics. This decision is particularly important considering that the three countries analyzed in the volume find themselves at very different points on the Foucault-Agamben continuum, illustrating the complexity and diversity of real-life biopolitical discourses.

The second chapter, "Estonia: Bare Life between Geo- and Biopolitics," scrutinizes the two grand narratives defining the Estonian biopolitical discourse since 1991—the Estonian national narrative aimed at overcoming the country's traumatic past under Soviet rule and the Estonian Russophone post/neo-imperial narrative "largely built on the reverberations of the Russian World doctrine in Estonia" (p. 61). Importantly, the analysis does not stop there and extends beyond these two dominant themes to less visible and often misrepresented narratives that Makarychev refers to as "biopolitical dislocations" (p. 75). These narratives do not fit into the binary image of the Estonian public discourse and, therefore, highlight the hybridity of the country's diverse biopolitical identities. The chapter on Estonia is informed by the analysis of an impressive amount of empirical material, which includes art exhibitions and performances, fiction and nonfiction, social media, and press materials, as well as selected high-profile political events, such as the Bronze Soldier conflict and the 1993 Narva and Sillamäe autonomy referendum. The reliance on such an extensive selection of material allows the author to avoid a situation when the "right" examples are strategically pulled from the broader discourse for the sake of making a point, no matter how representative these examples are. At the same time, the empirical richness of the chapter may pose a challenge for an unprepared reader. To truly appreciate Makarychev's argumentation, one needs to be familiar with the Estonian historical and political contexts, as well as with the regional popular culture well beyond noted Finnish-Estonian author Sofi Oksanen.

The third chapter, "The Screen and the Street: Two Face(t)s of Ukrainian Popular Biopolitics," turns to the case of the Servant of the People (2015–19), a television comedy series that featured Volodymyr Zelensky in the role of the fictional Ukrainian President Holoborodko and offered a vision of what should constitute "the people" and "the Ukrainians" ahead of the 2019 presidential elections in Ukraine. Drawing from Guy Debord's Society of Spectacle (1967), Makarychev views Servant of the People not just as a mirror or a source of the then Ukrainian (bio)politics but also as one of the dimensions where it was taking place. Having analyzed all three seasons of the series, the author comes to interesting conclusions regarding which images it had projected to the public. These include the image of a populist trans-ideological hero without any concrete political agenda, non-securitized and only limited representations of Russia, and the inclusive yet vague category of "the people" as a core biopolitical object. While Makarychev rightfully points out the emptiness of "the people" category in the series, he chooses not to frame this construct as inherently pan-Soviet/postcolonial. Considering that the Ukrainians in the Servant of the People are devoid of any national traits and are hardly distinguishable in their mentality and behavior from citizens of other
post-Soviet countries, not to mention the overall aesthetics of the series clearly mimicking Russian comedy movies of recent decades, this could have been an interesting addition to the discussion.

Chapter 4, "Pastorate and 'Somatic Sovereignty' in Russian Popular Biopolitics," proposes an unusual biopolitical perspective on the Russian propaganda machine. The first part of the chapter focuses on the nationalist and neo-imperial narratives in the shows of the Night Wolves biker club, a Kremlin-backed far-right organization imitating a grassroots initiative. The chapter's second part is dedicated to the analysis of the Russian "biopolitical governmentality" as it manifested itself during the COVID-19 pandemic (p. 168). Interestingly, while the selected cases are different per se, they revealed similar patterns underlying Russian biopolitical agenda. For example, in both cases the theme about the necessity/admissibility of sacrificing individual lives, either for the sake of restoration of Russia's grandeur or in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, was particularly salient. Besides, both cases do a good job illustrating the paradoxical post-truth nature of Russian biopolitics, which combines nostalgia for the Soviet Union with sentiments for the Orthodox Church or blurs the lines between science communication and strategic dissemination of conspiracy theories.

The last chapter summarizes the analyzed empirical cases and reflects, among other things, on how their reading through the prism of biopolitics enriches our understanding of power relations and populism. Makarychev concludes that "biopolitization of public policy agendas ... has created strong preconditions for the spread and multiplication of various forms of populism" yet without addressing a possibility that it might be populism that strategically securitizes the biopolitical dimension of politics in order to sustain a "we" versus "they" dichotomy so central to the populist discourse (p. 199).

*Popular Biopolitics* is an original, well-researched, theoretically laden, and very engaging work shedding light on Estonian, Ukrainian, and Russian versions of popular biopolitics as they existed before the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Obviously, this catastrophic event has profoundly changed biopolitical dynamics in all three countries, perhaps to the extent that the ontological interpretation of biopolitics with its attention to biological necessity to survive, extralegal forms of legitimacy, and violence—a perspective that was rejected in the book as overly "reductionist and essentialist"—might now be the most suitable for the analysis of this new dystopian reality (p. 19). Nevertheless, the escalation of Russian aggression in Ukraine and associated changes in regional biopolitics in no way diminish the relevance of the book but, on the contrary, add extra depth and historical value to it.
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