

INTRODUCTION

Biopolitics and national identities: between liberalism and totalization

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The common denominator for this cluster of three articles is an exploration of the nexus between biopolitics and national identities. Of course, biopolitics is just one possible conceptual approach to the study of nationalism and nation-building; yet, as this collection of papers demonstrates, it might be instrumental for uncovering certain aspects of national identities that are not visible from other research perspectives. What biopolitics can tell us is that national identity making necessarily implies disciplinary practices of controlling and regulating human lives as a precondition for aggregating a population into a single collective body. The concept of biopolitics might help us to grasp the political as “something that occurs when bodies come together and relate to one another” (Puumala 2013, 952).

Biopolitical theorizing is particularly illuminating for studying identities in flux and national narratives in a state of transformation that need some anchoring and fixing in nodal points beyond traditional ideological divides. The application of biopolitical instruments usually serves to stabilize the dispersed identities through grounding them in bodily discourses concerned with managing lives through nutrition, medicine, reproductive behavior, demographic policies, food security, and so forth. Despite their seeming ideological neutrality, these issues might easily turn into manipulative tools by the state and, contrary to initial expectations, produce strong ideological impulses.

The three articles collected in this cluster claim, from very different research perspectives, that biopolitical instruments of power are indispensable components of discourses and practices of making and shaping national identities, whether they be exemplified by cultural production in the fashion industry, by practices of inclusion or exclusion of outsiders such as refugees, or by newly contrived ideologies of biopolitical conservatism with evident imperial tones in places such as Russia. In these and other cases, biopolitics is used as an analytical tool to detect and discern a strong totalizing platform for national identity-building projects, including practices of exclusion (Oliwniak 2011, 51) that do not necessarily fit in the liberal understanding of politics.

Originally, biopolitics was understood as a concept denoting a peculiar mode of making collective identities (communities) through “normalization,” that is to say, hegemonic struggles over producing an understanding of what body-related practices of population management ought to be considered as consensually accepted and welcomed, and what can be contested and bracketed off as detrimental for body politic. In this sense, biopolitics

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always embraces an interplay between the outside and the inside, and thus implies (re) drawing boundaries of the body of the nation. In the meantime, the field of biopolitics can generate endeavors of contesting extant power hierarchies through challenging the biopolitical norm (such as, for example, the institution of marriage as a union between men and women) and providing alternatives to them (same-sex marriage). Therefore, the analytical stakes of a biopolitical approach are substantial: the concept can help us better grasp reasons for actions aimed at consolidating power and contesting it, and therefore can be seen as a research approach to study policy strategies with practical implications. In the meantime, biopolitical scholarship offers ample opportunities for studying the sphere of human corporeality as a semiotic space that produces its signs, symbols, performances, narratives, and other cultural forms. Michel Foucault conceptualized the crux of biopower as a transition from the right to take life (the sovereign power's prerogative) to the state's investments in administering life, which is the crux of biopower. This shift implies a transfer from disciplining the individual body to disciplining the population as a whole through managing health, hygiene, nutrition, birth, and sexuality. In this sense, biopolitics develops the so-called apparatuses of control aimed at improving, promoting, and managing life, which becomes a matter of government, thus making life no longer a private affair, but a matter of policy. Therefore, biopolitics points to the ambition of modern power to administer, regulate, and optimize the human body and body politic as a whole, "to rationalize the problems presented to governmental practice by the phenomena characteristic of a group of living human beings constituted as a population: health, sanitation, birth rate, longevity, race" (Foucault 1994, 73). Thus, the mechanisms of biopower function at the micro level, being entangled in a complex web of corporeal relations. As a result, the hegemonic conceptions of identity are mostly based on corporeal practices of Self-Other distinctions, with the otherwise deeply private issues of lifestyles and reproductive behavior being elevated to the very top of political concerns.

Giorgio Agamben's conceptual division between physical life (otherwise known as "zoe" in ancient Greece) and politically qualified life ("bios") propelled the biopolitical discourse to the next level of conceptualization. Traditionally, these two forms of life required different types of scholarly analysis, and usually social scientists did not pay much attention to the corporeality of human bodies. Yet, due to Michel Foucault and his multiple followers, the very distinction between physical and political lives became questionable due to the social, political, and cultural underpinnings of the seemingly physical and material functioning of human bodies, and their inevitable inclusion in multiple societal contexts.

Biopolitics puts at the center of analysis the blurring of the distinction between our physical corporeality and the social and cultural conditions of its functioning. This allows us to identify elements of totalization (that is, the submission of the individual to the common or collective on behalf of a shared set of norms) in each type of regime, including the liberal ones. The biopolitical approach also offers a toolkit for understanding why practices of totalization are so recurrent and self-reproducing, despite their embeddedness in a plethora of institutions that are supposed to produce liberal effects through encouraging practices of de-bordering, supranationalism, and multiculturalism. This is illustrated by the recent resurgence of traditionalist practices all across Europe based on a deeply biopolitical understanding of conservatism, with anti-LGBT, anti-same-sex-marriage, and anti-immigrant practices at its core. This is what constitutes a still unaddressed biopolitical paradox: it is in the twenty-first century of globalization and trans-nationalization that the most parochial and primordial characteristics of human corporeal existence (sex, race, ethnicity, etc.) came to the fore of public interest

and thus framed the current political debates (Bernstein 2013; Gosciolo 2013; Rutland 2014; Rutten 2012; Sperling 2015).

By the same token, as the historical practices of totalitarian regimes such as Hitler's Germany and Stalin's USSR demonstrate, in the absence of political pluralism and viable civil society, biopolitics is likely to turn into a series of top-down repressive regulations that incorporate the ideas of racial or class hygiene, as well as repression of "deviant" sexual practices. Foucault himself was fully aware of this, acknowledging that "Nazism was doubtless the most cunning ... combination of the fantasies of blood and the paroxysms of a disciplinary power" (Foucault 1984, 271). Foucault therefore did not turn a blind eye to illiberal and non-democratic models of biopolitics, including those implying physical force and military coercion. He was fully aware of mortal danger of biopolitics: "the power to expose a whole population to death is the underside of the power to guarantee an individual's continued existence ... (O)ne has to be capable of killing in order to go on living" (Foucault 1984, 260). Yet, he failed to fully problematize this reverse side of biopolitics – not as an inducement for a better productivity of human capital, but as a potential killing machine in the hands of undemocratic and illiberal rulers. On the one hand, Foucault seemed willing to recognize the "formidable power of death" that he attributed to sovereignty. On the other hand, he was fascinated by studying "a power that exerts a positive influence on life, that endeavours to administer, optimize, and multiply it, subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations" (Foucault 1984, 260).

Foucault's underconceptualization of the totalizing and militant effects of biopower created a niche for claims that biopolitical totalization is not an exception but rather a rule. In particular, what Giorgio Agamben added to the Foucauldian vision of biopolitics is that sovereign power strengthens itself through control over the biological life of its citizens. He coined a concept of "bare life" that designates a life without any mediating role of public institutions or legal mechanisms, which leads to a physical struggle for survival beyond the sphere of public institutions, laws, and norms. Agamben extended the idea of biopolitics from its liberal reading to the domain of sovereignty in which life might be taken "not in the literal sense of being killed, but in the figurative sense of being degraded or abandoned ... Dispossession without killing results in a provisional, precarious, merely factual existence" (Schütz 2011, 123).

Thus, on the one hand, biopolitics can be seen as a set of positive incitements versus sovereign power as a power to take lives – through sending people to battlefields, capital punishment, and so on. Yet, on the other hand, due to globalization, the nature of sovereignty is transformed. As many authors have argued, sovereignty now manifests itself through differentiation between "our lives" (subject to protection) and the lives of "aliens" (subject to "bare life") (see, for instance, [Kelly 2014]). The refugee crisis sharpens this issue by fueling anti-migration attitudes all across Europe and demands for more restrictive policies toward refugees and asylum-seekers. In other spheres, biopolitical tools, such as the proliferation of norms of anti-discrimination and tolerance as part of EU association packages, can be tools of soft power and external influence that may constrain national sovereignties. Emerging concepts with a strong biopolitical background, such as human security and humanitarian intervention, directly challenge the idea of unrestricted sovereignty.

What do the biopolitical outlooks elucidate, and what it makes visible, as compared to other, more traditional approaches to national identities? *First*, the idea of a biopolitical "norm" has strong moral and religious underpinnings, conducive to constructing a Self-Other dichotomy. The ultimate goal is the creation of a nation as a coherent community

based on a biopolitical understanding of national identity, which in extreme cases might evoke hygienic discourses of racial, ethnic, or cultural purification.

Biopower is not simply a technique of governance. It constructs identities and produces actors' roles as objects of control and regulation through a variety of institutions, including the church, medical establishments, educational institutions, and various cultural practices. Consequently, biopolitics can be a nation-building tool based on standards and norms of inclusion and exclusion. These norms, for example, may negatively mark certain sexual practices and lifestyles as culturally "inappropriate" and thus marginalize them. Biopolitics therefore defines rules of belonging and conditions of abandonment (as manifested in the idea of "bare life" coined by Giorgio Agamben), and thus shapes the borders of political communities. In other words, biopolitics articulates and forms a normative core grounded in the consensual understanding of a "correct" way of life, from birth to death.

Biopolitics can be regarded as a set of instruments that define belonging to the "imagined" community (Anderson 1991) on the basis of loyalty to official policies, and simultaneously ostracize those who do not fit the hegemonic biopolitical standards. Biopolitical regulations, implemented through bans and restrictions, become one of the main tools for articulating the rules of shaping the political community and drawing its political borderlines, that is, establishing the biopolitical distinctions with other communities. With all their restrictive effects, these bans unveil mechanisms of "inclusive exclusion:" "if someone is banned from a political community, he or she continues to have a relation with that group: there is still a connection precisely because they are outlawed" (Vaughan-Williams 2009, 734). The practices of political incarceration, ostracizing LGBT people, and fueling anti-migrant feelings among populations are pertinent cases of biopolitical restrictions, as opposed to liberal emancipation. In particular, in many post-Soviet countries, biopolitics denotes a particular way of anchoring dispersed and uncertain identities in a set of consensual nodal points to boil down to traditionalist understandings of social roles. Biopolitics in this sense is a two-sided phenomenon. On the one hand, it excludes bodies of those who are marked as unwanted, yet, on the other hand, it creates a sense of loyalty and solidarity within the national community.

Biopolitical discourses and practices can emanate from sources other than sovereign power, but the latter appropriates and hijacks them and makes them serve the purposes of national consolidation and patriotism. This leads to the merger of biopower and sovereign power well grasped by Giorgio Agamben. Using his take on biopolitics, one may claim that the state rules through normalizing, regulating, and administering citizens' bodies, with the ultimate goal of creating a nation as a coherent and unified community based on a biopolitical understanding of common identity. The key idea is a normalization of human bodies through administration, management, protection, care-taking, and so on. Many concepts in political discourses, for example, the concept of family as a constitutive background for political relations of domination, come from this biopolitical understanding.

This explains why some authors point to "the original 'secret tie' between sovereignty and biopolitical life ... (and. – A.M., A.Y.) the presumed necessity of sovereign action on biopolitical grounds" (Rosenow 2009, 512). Sovereign power can be reconceptualized not through the prism of fixed territorial borders, but "through bodies ... across society and everyday life" (Vaughan-Williams 2009, 732).

In line with this logic, Ekaterina Kalinina's article seeks to explore the common ground between biopolitics, post-Soviet nostalgia, and fashion. Taking off from the Foucauldian notion of biopolitics as a control apparatus exerted over a population, she provides insights into the modern construction of the Russian nation, where personal and collective sacrifice, traditional femininity and masculinity, Orthodox religion, and the Great Patriotic War

become the basis for patriotism. She shows how the state directly and indirectly regulates people's lives by producing narratives, which are translated (in some cases, designers act as mouthpieces for the state demographic or military politics) into fashionable discourses and create specific "gender norms" – women are seen as fertile mothers giving birth to new soldiers, while men are shown as fighters and defenders of their nation. The biopolitically constructed nostalgia for a war plays one of the central roles and becomes a ground for an idea of a nation as a single body with people's bodies becoming a battlefield for domestic politics. Fashion hence produces narratives of a normalized nation to ensure healthy lifestyles, but also securing military force.

Second, biopolitical practices can be projected outward and constitute an important element of foreign policies, identifying a field of issues defined through care-taking that are not necessarily connected to the possession of territories, including citizenship and passportization policies, religious diplomacy or "pastoral power," and civilizational constructs like the "Russian world." In the traditions of Michel Foucault, the concept of biopolitics represents an epistemological frame to analyze policies of managing and taking care of populations, rather than those of conquering or administering territories. Biopolitics is more about managing human beings and their bodily lives, as well as disciplining and supervising human bodies, rather than about possessing lands.

This is what Andrey Makarychev and Alexandra Yatsyk discuss in their article emphasizing an important distinction between geopolitical control and management of population as two of Russia's strategies in the "near abroad." This distinction is exemplified by the controversy between Eurasianism (as a set of geopolitical ideas more focused on governing territories) and the Russian world (as a biopolitical doctrine premised on protecting an imagined trans-territorial community of Russian speakers allegedly sharing a common ethnic and civilizational macro identity). The authors dwell upon genealogy and policy implications of both geopolitical and biopolitical approaches to demonstrate conceptual gaps between the two and areas of overlaps and mutual gravitation. As seen from this angle, citizenship can be a matter of protecting people through inclusion, or an instrument of denying such protection.

Third, the concept of biopolitics can help us to distinguish more nuanced lines of intersection between liberal democratic practices of incitement (Foucault) and practices of totalization (Agamben). In fact, what biopolitics tells us is that totalization is an unavoidable element of each power, including its liberal forms. This is not evident for a more traditional political analysis that tends to classify forms of regimes and draw typological lines of polarized distinction between them. From a policy perspective, biopolitics attempts to reproduce and ignite practices of totalization on a seemingly non-political basis, appealing either to "obvious" values of human life, or, on the contrary, to "evident" security needs.

Biopolitical practices range from a (neo)liberal instrumentalization of biopower for stimulating people to take care of their bodies and invest in their productivity, to the totalitarian regulation of lives and deaths through the imposition of regulatory normative frameworks. In other words, biopolitics can be understood "as a specific technology and rationale in the government of modern society" (Rosenow 2009, 509), on the one hand, and as a key element of "biopolitical totalization" (Timofeeva 2013) in a pursuit of not only "docile," but also obedient bodies, on the other. Many governments in Western democracies extensively use forms of biopolitics that might be characterized as potentially totalizing – juvenile justice, laws on smoking, age limitations in the mass media, the cult of healthy body, and even noise laws.

In a radical interpretation of Agamben, the policy of controlling human bodies has as its destination point the camp. Of course, this is not to say that this point ought to be reached,

but the possibility of totalitarian devolution always exists. This perspective is taken very seriously by multiple scholars who study bans and surveillance as key mechanisms of totalization. Such concepts as the global empire as the universal “biopolitical machine” (Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri), or “a society of control” (Etienne Balibar) serve as good testimonies to that.

In this vein, Olga Zeveleva’s article addresses the relationship between the concepts of national identity and biopolitics by examining a border-transit camp for repatriates, refugees, and asylum-seekers in Germany. Current studies of refugee spaces have drawn heavily on Agamben’s reflection on the “camp” and “homo sacer,” where the camp is analyzed as a space in a permanent state of exception, in which the government exercises sovereign power over the refugee as the ultimate biopolitical subject. But what groups of people can end up at a camp, and does the government treat all groups in the same way? Zeveleva’s article examines the German camp for repatriates, refugees, and asylum-seekers as a space where the state’s borders are demarcated and controlled through practices of bureaucratic and narrative differentiation between various groups of people. The author uses the concept of sovereign power to draw a theoretical link between national identity and biopolitics, and demonstrates how the sovereign’s practices of control and differentiation at the camp both reflect and construct German national identity. The study draws on ethnographic fieldwork at the German border-transit camp Friedland and on a discourse analysis of texts produced at the camp or for the camp.

Through the lens of these articles, one may assume that biopolitics helps to expand our understanding of nationalism and identity through raising a variety of issues constitutive for political communities – borders and boundaries, regimes of inclusion and exclusion, and the social construction of otherness. It is through this prism that the overall contribution of this special cluster might be assessed – as problematizing “big” concepts on the basis of specific case studies that appear to be indispensable for promoting biopolitical thinking as a crucial element of political analysis. Hopefully, these articles might contribute to future studies of biopolitics and identity from the viewpoint of biopolitical regimes of control and regulation, on the one hand, and various forms of resistance to them, on the other. This might help comprehending biopolitics not simply as a particular way of managing and administering the allegedly (pre)given populations, but primarily as a competitive policy milieu, a playground for imbricated actions and reactions aimed to shape a whole plethora of issues related to human lives, including corporeality, sexuality, and bodily practices of surveillance or emancipation.

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