**Bodies under autocratic rule: a paradox of freedom**

In this paper I will argue that the regulation of the bodies of citizens in authoritarian states poses a problem and a paradox. The problem arises from the different models of the state used in scholarship on the regulation of the body. The paradox concerns freedom.

In the modern world, the rising importance of the body, both for society and for the individual has been documented by many researchers (Turner, 1982). Some, like Antony Giddens, have emphasized social trends leading to a personalization of control over the body, which he conceptualized as the 'body as a project' (Giddens, 1990). Others have focused on the growing centralization of body management at the hands of the state (Foucault, 1975; Skrabanek, 1994; Rose,1999;). This led to the development of the concepts of 'biopower' and 'healthism'. With these concepts, the modern state has been seen as a source of power over the individual’s body, a power that is based on economic rationality and which produces invisible and indirect paths of influence.

It is important to note that most of these studies were focusing on one and only model of the state: liberal democracy. However, even though half of the political regimes in the world now are classified as authoritarian – as distinct from 'totalitarian' or democratic – there is still no developed theory of the relationship between this type of government and the bodies of its citizens. For example, in the last few years there have been some attempts to investigate this sphere in the modern Russian state, but all of them were using models developed for totalitarian regimes (Agamben, 1995; Prozorov, 2012) and due to that claim the absolute power of the Russian state (Martinez, 2012; Medvedev, 2013; Nartova, 2014 ).

I, on the contrary, would like to study Russian political corporeality, using the classical model of biopower. According to Foucault, this type of power is exercised in modern states through systems of welfare, which involve medicalization, birth management and a developed data base about the citizens of the nation. Following this model, we can say that the Russian state exercises a very limited power over the life of its citizens, as its statistics are of poor quality: many indicators are not recorded, many are recorded unreliably and some indicators have not been recorded for long enough. An example is that many government decisions do not have sufficient economic justification – to take the pension reform, the number of working and unemployed pensioners are only approximately known.

In Europe, the potential for state influence upon citizens is incomparably higher. We, in comparison, in the biopolitical sense, live almost in anarchy. Having established a high standard of human well-being, social democracy enforces this standard through a network of life management techniques: healthy food with state regulation of the food market, a flexible system of assistance to stimulate the birth of children, and compulsory medical intervention (for example, vaccination). In Russia, on the contrary, with its traditional political indifference to the individual, the old disciplinary mechanisms of power are still in use: to remove, punish, torture. They are much more cruel to those deemed guilty by state authorities, but – and this is the paradox – leave intact the bodies of the rest who have not crossed the borders drawn by the state. This paradox is similar to the problem of punishment addressed by Foucault (Foucault, 1975).

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About the author

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