

of qualitative research methods enables the scholars to uncover different dimensions of citizens' motivations for engagement in political action. What remains somewhat unclear in the volume is whether Russian scholars encountered any difficulty in securing interviews and asking politically sensitive questions in a repressive political regime.

One of the main findings to be gleaned from this study is that Russian citizens are torn between their longing for social solidarity and their yearning for individual autonomy. This tension is seen as a product of the Soviet experience, wherein citizens rejected the ideology-laden public sphere as a false reality and withdrew into the private sphere. It must also be noted that the book challenges a popular assumption that *Za chestnye vybory* has since its inception called for dismantling the political regime installed by Vladimir Putin. Erpyleva and Kulaev find that the majority of protesters did not see themselves as anti-Putinists. That personification of the regime was found to be uncommon among participants in the protests against electoral malpractice during the 2011 parliamentary elections and began to emerge only in the aftermath of Putin's re-election for a third term in office, in March 2012.

Analysis of citizens' motivations for participating in pro-government rallies might be an area for future research. The organization of regime-friendly public rallies is a common state countermove in Putin's Russia. The oft-cited reason for citizens' involvement in such rallies is fear of loss of employment or expulsion from university. Further research needs to be done to unravel the logic of compliant activism.

In sum, *Politika apolitichnykh* presents a masterful analysis of citizens' motivations for engaging in contentious collective action in Russia. Given the multidisciplinary nature of this research, the book will appeal to a wide audience, including political scientists and sociologists.

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***Dying Unneeded: The Cultural Context of the Russian Mortality Crisis.*** By Michelle A. Parsons. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2014. xii, 209 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Figures. Tables. \$59.95, hard bound. \$27.95, paper.

The epidemiological literature analyzing the profound drop in life expectancy in the Russian Federation after 1991 can benefit from thick cultural contextualization. Life conditions, everyday practices, shared perceptions, and socioeconomic dynamics all contributed to the "mortality crisis" of the 1990s, when male life expectancy dropped more than six years (to 58) and female life expectancy dropped more than three (to 71). Sociocultural anthropologist Michelle A. Parsons dedicated eleven months of fieldwork in Moscow in 2006 and 2007 to probing local interpretations of excess mortality, aiming for a ground-level understanding of "why Russians died" in the years just after the end of the Soviet Union (5).

Parsons and two local colleagues conducted forty in-depth interviews and life histories with older Muscovites. These conversations, alongside deep engagement with the ethnographic literature, led Parsons to turn her question around, positing, instead, a theory of how people *survive* social transformation. Understanding "what things make life worth living for Russians" (176) will, she hopes, account for the capacity of many to endure the multiple shocks of the post-Soviet period and, reciprocally, the fatal incapacity of others to survive.

In clear, readable prose, Parsons describes the life trajectories of the generation born around the time of World War II, who bore the brunt of the mortality crisis of the

1990s. In chapters on “War” and “Work,” Parsons discusses the hardships of this generation’s childhood years and the entailments and security of their “socially useful work” (86). In the chapters “Shock,” “Mortality,” and “Death of Society,” the author argues that the economic logic of the 1990s made people’s lives of labor irrelevant and invisible, ultimately rendering them “unnneeded.” Many citizens of the Russian Federation (whom Parsons calls, too uniformly, “Russians”) suffered a loss of collective purpose and social connection—losses born most profoundly by men.

In “Mortality,” Parsons carefully analyzes epidemiological studies spanning twenty-five years. While alcohol abuse is assumed to be the main factor causing the drop in life expectancy, there is contradictory evidence that “most alcohol use, even high levels of alcohol use, is not necessarily associated with poorer health. Rather, alcohol use is often associated with better health” (140). Parsons argues that “being unnneeded” is a critical, if distal, factor in the lowered life expectancy. The book offers many glimpses of the ways in which being needed protected people from dying early while being unnneeded set many adrift in an unconstrained social space characterized by reduced responsibility to others, a social freedom hazardous to the health of both body and polity. This cultural and historical contextualization provides dimensionality to sometimes flattened explanations of the mortality crisis.

*Dying Unneeded* is ideal for undergraduate medical anthropology courses and will surely be of interest to epidemiologists of Russia and other post-Soviet states. Anthropologists, sociologists, and social historians may find it less useful. Emic notions like *besporiadok*, *bespredel*, *dusha*, *sobornost’*, *volia*, *blat*, and *svoboda*, on which the book’s arguments hinge, have been analyzed thoroughly by ethnographers, and Parsons’s treatment does not add much that will be new to those familiar with this literature. The book’s theoretical assertion that people less socially connected are more prone to dying has been well known to social scientists since Émile Durkheim’s era. Parsons missed an opportunity to more closely correlate premature mortality with social “unnneededness.” Her interviews do show that people lament social disconnection and ascribe to it both excess mortality and individual deaths, but this is an observation about popular epistemology rather than an empirical finding.

There are some problems of ethnographic timelessness and political-economic vagueness as well. Parsons writes in sweeping terms of post-Soviet governance; a reader unfamiliar with Russia might not grasp how dynamic a political field it has been. The ideological shifts and policy directions of the Putin years do not figure here at all, though the author’s field research began in 2007. Beyond that, the book’s story rests on a weak characterization of the upheavals of the 1990s. It renders these as “shock therapy” and “free market monetarism” (103), courtesy of Milton Friedman and Jeffrey Sachs. This misses the systematic, criminal liquidation and expatriation of state resources chronicled by many authors over the past two decades. The mortality crisis was not merely a tragic side effect of “Russian capitalism” (176); the destruction of sociality was cynical and violent, which matters in the interpretation of dying and surviving.

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