

CONCEPTS OF PUTIN'S BIOGRAPHY: ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION

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Abstract

The study presents the findings of research into the biographies of Vladimir Putin written by various authors, employing a narrative analysis of the texts. Cognitive-linguistic structures are identified that reveal the authors' underlying concepts. Specifically, the concept of the expediency of Putin's actions by F. Short, the concept of Putin's identities by F. Hill and C. G. Gaddy, and the concept of Putin's traumatic childhood experience by K. Kurczab-Redlich are examined. The study incorporates data from a broad range of scholars on Putinism. It is noted that Short's concept serves as a justification for Russia's aggressive policies, with his interpretations of Putin's life events and political actions closely mirroring the explanations offered by Kremlin ideologists. Hill and Gaddy view Putin's identities as reflections of Russian history, politics, and culture, regarding the system he has created as a corporation designed to pursue a strategy of revenge. Kurczab-Redlich, on the other hand, highlights the traumatic circumstances of Putin's childhood, portraying him as a cynical and ruthless individual involved in criminal activities, including bombings of residential buildings, political poisonings, and murders. Each of these concepts excludes certain factors: Short's theory disregards the historical context of Putin's actions, Hill and Gaddy's theory omits psychological factors, and Kurczab-Redlich's approach overlooks historical and political influences. The article also explores the potential for analyzing Putin's biography through the lens of the historical psychology theory of prominent Ukrainian scholar Volodymyr Romenets.

Keywords: biography analysis, narrative analysis, psychological approach, Putin, putinism

Introduction

Gessen (2017) begins her book about Putin's Russia with an Indian parable about six blind men and an elephant. Each of them touches a different part of the animal – and comes away with a different idea of what the elephant is. “And even if some books supply descriptions of the tail, the trunk, and the body, very few try to explain how the animal holds together – or what kind of animal it is. My ambition this time was to both describe and define the animal” (p. 8). To explore this idea, Gessen turns to three Moscow intellectuals – a sociologist, a psychoanalyst, and a philosopher. Putin's Russia appears from different angles. It is impossible to achieve a comprehensive description and definition of what is happening in Russia. By the end of the book, Gessen no longer returns to her original goal. A pattern of humanitarian cognition emerges: the object of study enters the realm of human attitudes, values, and meanings. Any knowledge about the object inevitably carries the imprint of the researcher's individuality. In psychology, where theoretical frameworks can be quite rigorous, they still reflect the personal characteristics and perspectives of their authors (Kononovych & Myasoid, 2020). Progress takes place when the researcher enters into a creative dialogue

with their predecessors and builds on their work. The object of study reveals new properties, new knowledge becomes part of ongoing scientific dialogue, and the process of discovery continues. While complete, comprehensive knowledge of the object remains out of reach, the researcher's drive to "describe and define" inspires future generations to carry the search forward. These characteristics of humanitarian knowledge are directly relevant to those who write about the life of Vladimir Putin, President of the Russian Federation and the initiator of the devastating Russian-Ukrainian war.

As of the time of writing, 1,813 books have been published in nearly every language around the world about Putin's life and political actions (Putinism, 2025). Regarding Putin's biography in Russian, according to American authors, in the books "rather than the flow of information about the man who has led the country for a decade and a half growing stronger, ... there are only "stories" about Putin from unidentified sources" (Hill & Gaddy, 2015, p. 16). The works of these authors are listed among the nine best books about Putin published before 2015 (Laqueur, 2015). In 2024, the highest rating was given to the book by British author F. Short (2022). Polish researcher Kurczab-Redlich (2014) is the author of a controversial biography of Putin, offering a fundamentally different interpretation, explaining and describing the circumstances surrounding his childhood.

The subject of this study is the texts of Putin's biography, identified as a result of preliminary analysis. Notably, each author spent a significant amount of time in Russia, gathering material for their work and engaging directly with individuals who had close personal knowledge of Putin. The biography featured in Britannica (Ray, 2025) is also considered as part of the analysis.

The objectives of this study are: a) to analyze the texts of the books by Short (2022), Hill and Gaddy (2015), and Kurczab-Redlich (2014), identifying and evaluating the authors' concepts; b) to identify gaps in descriptions and explanations of Putin's life and political actions, and to address these gaps in light of data from other researchers; c) to identify and assess similar interpretations of Putin's biography by other authors; d) to raise critical questions regarding the nature and essence of the phenomenon of Putinism that require further exploration.

Understanding how Putin's life unfolded, his actions, and his current behavior are crucial questions that must be defined and explored. This is an essential contribution to comprehending the emergence of the phenomenon of Putinism and why its consequences are so deeply unsettling.

Research Methodology

The research method employed is narrative analysis, a qualitative approach commonly used in social research to examine and interpret stories and discourses. The life story of an individual, presented in textual form, is also subject to narrative analysis. "The term narrative analysis can refer to a variety of different approaches to data collection and analysis, including biography ... The researcher will want to consider what purpose the story serves and why the interviewee has chosen to present their account in this way" (Earthy & Cronin, 2008, pp. 422, 423). In psychology, a classic definition is provided by Bruner (1991, p. 4): "Narratives, then, are a version of reality whose acceptability is governed by convention and 'narrative necessity' rather than by empirical verification. Reality in a biography is shaped by the conventions or concepts of the author. Narrative analysis involves identifying the conceptual framework underlying the text. As in other texts, the narrative here functions as "a cognitive structure," a "representation of experiencing minds", conveyed within a specific discursive context. It reflects the individual's experience through the dynamic representation of events and facilitates communicative interaction (Herman, 2009, p. xvi).

In this study, the object of narrative analysis is the texts of Putin's biography. The aim of the analysis is to identify the author's concept within the narratives, which forms the basis for their descriptions and explanations of Putin's life path and political actions. The focus of research shifts to look at the very construction of narratives. In narrative analysis, this is a categorical approach, requiring the isolation and evaluation of linguistic structures that reflect the author's concept. These structures encapsulate the author's intent and personal stance toward the subject of study and his own attitude to what is happening in Putin's Russia.

Narrative analysis is employed in studies of Putinism to explore how Russian collective identity was constructed in state media during Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine (Eremenko, 2024).

The results of narrative analysis are inevitably shaped by the personality traits of its author.

While this influence is unavoidable, it does not diminish the need for continued research into the nature and essence of the criminal Russian regime.

Research Results

This paper presents the results of a narrative analysis of biographical texts on Putin by Short (2022), Hill and Gaddy (2015), and Kurczab-Redlich (2014). Unlike the official biography found in Britannica (Ray, 2025), these works represent unofficial accounts of the Russian president's life.

Both the official and unofficial biographies recount the same sequence of events. In 1974, Putin graduated from the Faculty of Law at Leningrad State University, named after Andrei Zhdanov. He was a member of the Communist Party. From 1975 to 1991, he served in the KGB, first in Leningrad and later in Dresden, East Germany. Beginning in 1991, he worked at Leningrad University before joining the St. Petersburg City Administration as an assistant and deputy to Mayor Anatoly Sobchak. In 1996, Putin entered the administration of President Boris Yeltsin. In August 1999, Yeltsin named him as his successor, and in March 2000, Putin was elected president with 71.31% of the vote.

The official and unofficial biographies also present key events from Putin's time in the Kremlin in a largely similar manner. In 1999, following a series of residential building bombings in Moscow and other Russian cities, he initiated the "Second Chechen War". Beginning in 2000, his administration launched economic reforms that significantly improved living standards for many Russians. In 2003, after the arrest of oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovsky, Putin consolidated control over the media as well as the country's economic and political systems. He was re-elected president in 2004. In 2008, he formally transferred power to Dmitry Medvedev; that same year, the Russian-Georgian War began and ended in Russia's favor. In 2012, after suppressing anti-government protests, Putin returned to the presidency. In 2014, Russia annexed Crimea and provided military support to separatists in the Donbas region. That same year, opposition leader Alexei Navalny was arrested for the first time; in 2015, Boris Nemtsov was assassinated; and in 2018, former spy Sergei Skripal was poisoned. Declaring the United States and NATO as threats to national and global security, Putin soon deployed Russian forces to Syria. On February 24, 2022, he ordered the launch of a "special military operation" in Ukraine. The devastating Russian-Ukrainian war continues.

The official biography presents a chronological account of events in Putin's life, whereas the unofficial biographies both describe and explain these events. Narrative analysis of the unofficial texts reveals significant differences in how these events are explained (Table 1)

Table 1

Narrative Structures of Explanations of Events in Putin's Life

Putin's life events	Authors' explanations and narrative structures		
	Short (2022)	Hill and Gaddy (2018)	Kurczab-Redlich (2014)
Birth	He was born in 1952, in a city that endured a blockade, where instances of cannibalism occurred.	If the facts are unverified, the biography is unreliable.	The biography is falsified. He was born in 1950. An illegitimate child
Childhood	His father was a communist and resorted to physical punishments. He suffered from meningitis. His behavior was deviant.	Life experience shapes identities, which determine an individual's way of thinking and worldview.	Until the age of three, he lived with his grandparents in the Urals, and later in Georgia. He was subjected to cruel treatment by his stepfather. Raised in a foster family, his adoptive father also resorted to physical punishment. He grew up in a neighborhood where 'wolf laws' prevailed. His behavior was deviant and aggressive. Researchers who investigated the circumstances of his childhood have died.

Putin's life events	Authors' explanations and narrative structures		
	Short (2022)	Hill and Gaddy (2018)	Kurczab-Redlich (2014)
University education (1970 – 1975)	He reacted strongly to the death of his friend and was known to have had a KGB handler.	The “Outsider” identity.	He was admitted to university through the intervention of the KGB. He responded sharply to the death of his friend, which he had caused.
Service in the Soviet KGB (1970 – 1975)	Characterized by a withdrawn nature and a low sense of risk, he strongly opposed the collapse of the USSR.	Served as an intelligence officer abroad.	He displayed a reduced awareness of danger and actively opposed dissidents and “agents of imperialism”.
Work in the St. Petersburg City Administration (1991 – 1995)	The allegations of economic crimes were unproven.	The “Survivalist” and the “Case officer” identity. He applied the skills acquired in the KGB.	He engaged in economic and criminal activities, collaborated with organized crime, and amassed excessive wealth.
Work in the Administration of the President of the Russian Federation (1996 – 1998)	He initiated criminal investigations against officials while shielding his friends from prosecution.	The “Statist” identity.	He gained Yeltsin’s trust and provided compromising material on General Prosecutor Skuratov.
Director of the FSB (1998), Acting President (1999), Prime Minister (1999–2000)	The accusations of bombing houses are unfounded. In his “Millennium Message” article, he presented the notion that Russia is the successor to the empire. The brutality in Chechnya, he argued, was a price worth paying to avoid even greater suffering.	The “Outsider” identity. The article “Millennium Message” echoes the KGB’s mission — to safeguard the security and strength of the state.	He was implicated in the FSB bombings of residential buildings, which served as the pretext for the “Second Chechen War”. Russian forces committed atrocities in Chechnya.
President of the Russian Federation (2000 – 2004)	He implemented successful economic reforms and consolidated control over the country’s regions, political parties, parliament, and media. His response to the sinking of the “Kursk” submarine was widely regarded as inadequate. He also ordered the assault on hostage locations.	The “History man” and the “Free marketer” identity. An advocate of Russian conservative ideology. He appointed FSB officers to key government roles.	He suppressed independent media, seized control of parliament, and militarized the country. His response to the sinking of the “Kursk” submarine was widely regarded as cynical. He issued a criminal order to storm hostage situations and garnered the support of Western politicians.
President of the Russian Federation (2004 – 2008)	Imprisoning Khodorkovsky on charges of financial fraud. Asserting control over the oligarchs. Corruption took root within the state apparatus. The regime was implicated in the poisoning and assassination of political dissidents. Diplomatic relations with the United States and NATO worsened significantly.	He recreated the personalized system of Moscow in the form of a corporation. He is pursuing a mission of revenge.	There was a resurgence of the USSR in its authoritarian and imperial form. He was involved in eliminating the opposition, rigging election results, and orchestrating political assassinations. The West showed its inability to challenge Putin’s Russia.
Prime Minister of Russia (2008 – 2012)	Russia is governed as a tandemocracy. The Russian-Georgian war was triggered by Georgia’s military actions in South Ossetia.	He orchestrated a “political castling” with Medvedev. He launched an invasion of Georgia. He used KGB tactics in suppressing the opposition and protest movements.	He launched an unprovoked attack on Georgia and suppressed the emerging protest movement.

Putin's life events	Authors' explanations and narrative structures		
	Short (2022)	Hill and Gaddy (2018)	Kurczab-Redlich (2014)
President of the Russian Federation (2012 – 2018)	Russia annexed Crimea. The conflict in Donbass has been framed as clashes between the Russian-speaking population and Ukrainian nationalists. He supported Assad and was accused of involvement in the murder of Boris Nemtsov and the poisoning of Sergei Skripal. Western sanctions have strengthened domestic unity in Russia. The United States is blamed for the deterioration of relations between Russia, NATO, and Washington.	Russia functions as a corporate state without a guiding ideology. It annexed Crimea through military action and continues to pursue militarization. It levels baseless accusations against the U.S. and NATO and denies the legitimacy of Ukrainian statehood. The new Cold War risks escalating into open conflict.	Russia combines elements of post-Soviet dictatorship with gangster-style capitalism. It has demonstrated animosity toward Ukrainians and maintains its occupation of Crimea. The regime has been implicated in the murder of Boris Nemtsov. The psychological instability of one man has become a global threat. The world watches in fear and retreats. He has surrounded himself with individuals capable of starting a third world war.

Notes. Short's biography concludes with an account of the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. In contrast, the biographies by Hill and Gaddy, and Kurczab-Redlich, end with the description and analysis of the circumstances surrounding the annexation of Crimea.

Short notes that Putin grew up in relatively comfortable material conditions. As a young man, he expressed his desire to join the KGB and had a “curator” (handler) during his university studies. In both his roles in the St. Petersburg City Administration and the Kremlin, he was highly effective. The accusations regarding bombings, economic crimes, political assassinations, and poisonings “do not stand up to criticism”. While Putin’s system of governance remains corrupt, the material well-being of Russians has significantly improved, and the country has become one of the world’s more economically developed nations. Initially, Putin sought to improve relations with the West, “while America insisted on abolishing the ABM Treaty, rather than amending it as the Russians had proposed; it continued to pursue a national missile defense program despite Russian objections; NATO expansion continued unabated, soon reaching Russia’s borders; and Russia’s concerns about the American invasion of Iraq, which were shared by many of America’s allies, were firmly dismissed” (Short, 2022, p. 430). The issues between Russia, Ukraine, and Georgia stemmed from “ethnic and nationalist tensions” in the post-Soviet space, and Russia’s invasion of Ukraine is described as “an aftershock of the collapse of the USSR” (p. 731).

Similar viewpoints are expressed by other authors. Belkowski (2014) argues that the KGB is not central to Putin’s political career, that he is not seeking to restore the USSR, but instead follows his own vision of the state. He also claims that Putin is lenient toward his enemies, not a murderer by nature, and does not aim to alter history, positioning himself as beneficial to Western Europe. Sakwa (2020, p. 16) argues that “in the absence of benign and transformed European international relations, the transition from ‘strategic partnership’ to open confrontation was, if not inevitable, then likely.” Similarly, Krone-Schmalz (2023, p. 7) contends that “the build-up of a gigantic military threat on Russia’s western borders in late 2021 and early 2022 – however risky and excessive it may have been – served a single purpose: to compel the political West into serious negotiations with Russia”.

Short asserts that he is attempting to provide an impartial account of Putin’s life and political actions, while criticizing those “who are contemptuously referred to as ‘Putinverstehers’ in Germany” (2022, p. 34).

Kurczab-Redlich presents a narrative of Putin’s early life that contrasts with Short’s account of Putin’s childhood. According to her, Putin’s parents were different people, he was subjected to abuse as a child, and he was forced to conceal elements of his past—factors that, she argues, deeply influenced both his life choices and his actions as president of the Russian Federation. “Abuse at the hands of a man seen as a father figure leaves a permanent mark on the psyche... Children abandoned by their biological mother are hard to recover” (2014, pp. 37, 64). Kurczab-Redlich depicts Putin as a cynical and ruthless figure, asserting that he dismantled democratic rights and freedoms in

Russia, engaged in criminal dealings, and was implicated in the bombings of residential buildings, political poisonings, and assassinations. "If people whose deaths could be linked to Putin were buried in one place, their graves would occupy a cemetery alley. They died from gunshots, poisons, heart attacks – despite being in perfect health – accidents, or under unclear circumstances. The common factor among these deaths is the causal link to him, a connection strong enough for honest judges to pass a guilty verdict". (p. 231). She places full responsibility for both the current state of Russia and potential future crises squarely on Putin, stating: "When Putin brings the world closer to another global war by instigating the conflict in Ukraine, his excessive ambitions and serious psychological problems will become problems for the whole world" (p. 87).

Other researchers also suggest that Putin was adopted and raised in a foster family. Belkowski (2014) argues that only a psychological approach can help to "understand Putin". Unlike Kurczab-Redlich, he believes Putin's issues aren't due to abandonment by his mother, but because he grew up without parental love. "Putin spent most of his adult life searching for a father and even found two: Anatoly Sobchak, the former mayor of St. Petersburg, and Boris Yeltsin... Vladimir feels like a real orphan compared to the distant, strong, and hostile Washington" (p. 38). Felshtinsky and Pribylovsky (2009), using similar data to Kurczab-Redlich, add that "Putin joined the KGB primarily to find a new family and settle accounts with the world that had wronged him" (p. 37). They describe Putin's rise to power in the Kremlin as part of the KGB/FSB "Successor" operation. Yeltsin was expected to transfer authority to a secret service representative to restore order and return the country to its former greatness. Following this plan, Putin dismantled Russia's democratic institutions, took control of the oligarchs, implemented economic reforms, and began reclaiming lost territories by force. As a result, the "corporation of oligarchs" was replaced by a "corporation of secret service directors," who pursued their objectives with relentless determination.

Hill and Gaddy also describe Putin as a representative of the KGB and characterize the Russian system of governance as a corporate entity that has consolidated control over the country's economic and political life. Felshtinsky and Pribylovsky similarly attribute the current state of Russia to the KGB, viewing the corporate system as a longstanding tradition in the country. However, Hill and Gaddy emphasize Putin's pivotal role within this system. "Putin makes the strategic decisions for Russia, Inc. The juridical owners of Russia's big resource companies (the oligarchs) at the core of the system are for him merely managers?" (2018, p. 208). In this framework, Putin's actions are described as part of a broader "task of revenge," shaped by identities deeply entrenched in Russian history, culture, and politics (p. 28). The overarching goal, according to Hill and Gaddy, is the restoration of Russia's former power and prestige. They interpret the fulfilment of this goal in terms of Russia's confrontations with the United States and NATO, as well as its aggression toward the former Soviet republics. Echoing Kurczab-Redlich's perspective, Hill and Gaddy suggest that the conflicts initiated by Putin could serve as a prelude to a new world war.

Hill and Gaddy also speak of Putin as a representative of the KGB and call the Russian system of state governance a corporation that has subordinated the economic and political life of Russia to itself. Felshtinsky and Pribylovsky place responsibility for what is happening in Russia precisely on the KGB, and consider the corporate system to be traditional for Russia. Hill and Gaddy, on the other hand, note the special role of Putin in this system. "Putin is the principal strategist behind 'Russia, Inc.' For him, the legal owners of the country's major resource companies – the oligarchs – are nothing more than managers executing decisions within a system he controls" (2018, p. 208). In this system, Putin performs the "task of revenge" and acts within the boundaries of identities that are "rooted in Russian history, culture, and politics" (p. 28). The main task is to restore Russia's former greatness. Hill and Gaddy see the fulfilment of this task in both Russia's confrontation with the USA and NATO, and in Russia's aggression against the former republics of the USSR. Like Kurczab-Redlich, they believe that the wars Putin is unleashing could be a prologue to a new world war.

According to Short, Putin's life is shaped by a series of events driven by external circumstances and his responses to them. For Kurczab-Redlich, his behavior reflects deep psychological trauma rooted in childhood. F. Hill and C. G. Gaddy interpret Putin's political actions as expressions of multiple identities. Each biographer presents a distinct conceptual framework (Table 2).

Table 2

Concepts of Putin's Life Path and Political Actions

Author	Concept	Contents of the concepts		
		Putin's profile	Interpretation of Putin's actions	Characteristics of the concept
Short (2022)	Concept of the appropriateness of actions.	A politician protecting Russia's interests.	Reacts to external circumstances and threats from the USA and NATO.	Dismissal of accusations directed at Putin; overlooking the historical, social, and psychological factors of his actions/
Kurczab-Redlich (2014)	Concept of childhood trauma.	A person with a noticeably disturbed mental state.	Cynical, cruel actions, lacking compassion for people.	Attributing Putin's actions solely to psychological factors, disregarding political and historical factors.
Hill and Gaddy (2018)	Concept of identities.	Representative of Russian conservative ideology.	Personification of Russian history, culture, and politics/	Depriving the concept of identity of its psychological content, excluding psychological factors from the analysis.

Short is guided by the concept of political expediency; Kurczab-Redlich by the concept of traumatic childhood experience; Hill and Gaddy by the concept of multiple identities. Putin emerges as a defender of Russian interests, a psychologically unstable figure, and an embodiment of Russia's historical tradition.

Discussion

Short considers it unproven that Putin was raised in a foster family, that the bombings of residential buildings in Russian cities were orchestrated by the FSB, or that Putin persecutes political opponents and authorizes political assassinations. He frames the crimes committed by Russians in Chechnya as preventive measures against potentially greater atrocities and attributes the Russian-Georgian war to an order from President Saakashvili to attack South Ossetia. However, there are no explanations for why investigators who probed into Putin's childhood met with untimely deaths, or who might have committed even worse crimes in Chechnya, or where one might find the supposed order from Saakashvili in Short's book. Short interprets Putin's actions on the international stage as a reaction to NATO's bombing of Belgrade, the U.S. recognition of Kosovo's independence, and the expansion of NATO to Russia's borders. His book does not entertain any other potential reasons for Russia's confrontational stance toward the West. He justifies the occupation of Crimea and Russian involvement in the Donbas war as efforts to resolve "ethnic conflicts" in the post-Soviet space, echoing Putin's rhetoric of a "common history" and the claim that "Crimea was handed over to Ukraine by Khrushchev." In Short's portrayal, the Russian-Ukrainian war is depicted as Putin's response to the aggressive policies of the United States and NATO. Despite his stated intention to provide an impartial characterization of Putin, Short's analysis ultimately becomes a justification for the Kremlin's aggressive policies and actions. Consequently, his interpretation of Putin's political moves closely mirrors that of Kremlin ideologues. Short's attempt to avoid the label of a "Putin-versteher" (one who sympathizes with or understands Putin) has, therefore, been unsuccessful.

Kurczab-Redlich compares Putin to Stalin, while others frequently draw parallels between him and Hitler (Church, 2016; Langdon & Tismaneanu, 2020; Moscatelli, 2022; Sosnovskykh, 2017; Snyder, 2018; Thom, 2018; Žalimas, 2017). Snyder highlights similarities between Hitler's and Putin's attitudes toward Ukrainians, noting Putin's alignment with the ideas of the philosopher Ivan Ilyin, who admired Mussolini and Hitler. Church, Sosnovskykh, and Žalimas further argue that Putin's speech during the annexation of Crimea in March 2014 mirrors Hitler's speech during the Anschluss of Austria in March 1938. Fukuyama, in an interview, asserts that like Hitler, Putin employs ethnic issues as a basis for his policies, including the annexation of neighboring territories (Naïem, 2014).

Short asserts that certain books about Putin “should be treated with caution, their authors, like prosecutors, select the necessary evidence” (2022, p. 760). However, the selection of evidence is an inherent part of any analytical or explanatory process. The critical issue is not the fact that evidence is selected, but the criteria and methodology by which that selection is made.

Short halts his analysis when describing Putin's emotions at his friend's funeral. However, Kurczab-Redlich (2014) extends this narrative, revealing that the friend's death resulted from a trauma inflicted by Putin himself. Short references the memories of Putin's teacher, Vera Gurevich, who recounts how Putin “staged the trial of a duck,” but he fails to mention that Putin took on the role of “executioner,” personally decapitating the animal. Although Short acknowledges that Putin's dissertation contains instances of plagiarism, he overlooks the evidence suggesting that the dissertation was, in fact, written by someone else. When discussing the Ozero cooperative, Short dismisses claims that its members took control of Russia's financial flows (Belton, 2020). Furthermore, Short does not address the fact that Putin began his presidency by shutting down independent media outlets (Gessen, 2012). Like the Russian court system, Short contends that Mikhail Khodorkovsky's imprisonment was the result of financial fraud rather than political motives. While Short mentions that journalist Anna Politkovskaya was “stopped” while en route to cover the Beslan terrorist attack, he omits the crucial fact that she was poisoned and subsequently murdered. Similarly, Short writes that Putin cried at Anatoly Sobchak's funeral, but neglects to mention the deaths of his bodyguards. In his analysis of Putin's article “Russia at the Turn of the Millennium,” Short fails to recognize what Hill and Gaddy (2015) identify: Putin had already embarked on a path of confrontation with the West prior to becoming president. In each instance, Short halts his analysis where it ought to continue.

Kurczab-Redlich characterizes Putin as someone who experienced maternal abandonment in early childhood. In contrast, Belkowski (2014) attributes Putin's psychological difficulties to the absence of a paternal figure and cites Schaller (1995) in support of this view. However, Schaller did not examine Putin's consciousness, and it is worth noting that Putin did not know his father. By contrast, he did know – and evidently remembered – his mother. Kurczab-Redlich recounts that, as a child, Vova cried when she was insulted in a Georgian village. If such a reaction reflects a strong emotional bond, it raises the question: how profound must the psychological impact have been when she indeed abandoned him? According to Freud (1901/2001), traumatic childhood experiences do not simply vanish without consequence; rather, they manifest in symptoms that require psychoanalytic interpretation. While Kurczab-Redlich does not draw on psychological theory, her interpretation of Putin's personality—unlike that of Belkowski – is supported by observable evidence.

Fromm (1956/2013) distinguishes between “unconditional” and “conditional” forms of upbringing. In the former, the mother accepts the child as they are and offers protection from external criticism. In contrast, a maternal figure who replaces the biological mother tends to offer affection based on the child's behavior, while her partner may display cruelty toward the child (Assor et al., 2004). Research suggests that such harsh upbringing often produces cruelty in the child themselves (Petrović, 2021). In Putin's case, this potential for cruelty is reflected in the alleged murders of political opponents and the perpetuation of a “culture of terror,” a concept deeply embedded in Russian historical experience (Reid, 2015). Viewed through the lens of his personal history, these patterns gain additional significance.

Erikson (1950) argues that the lack of maternal care during the first year of life leads to a “basal distrust” of others in the child, and by the age of three, it disrupts “critical ritualization,” which involves the ability to distinguish between good and evil. Bowlby (1955) asserts that growing up without maternal affection results in traumatic experiences with far-reaching and often irreparable consequences. In adulthood, they develop distorted views of the world and exhibit a “pattern of emotional alienation,” marked by an inability to form and sustain “strong, affectionate attachments with select individuals.” This includes challenges in treating others with warmth, being loyal, trusting others, and a tendency to act in ways that harm those around them. Kurczab-Redlich refers to those who speak of Putin's psychopathy and paranoia. However, “preclinical psychological assessments are insufficient to draw definitive medical conclusions... Military researchers who conducted assessments based on observations of Putin's movements reported that they were unable to substantiate their theories, as they lacked the ability to “conduct a brain scan of the Russian president”” (Waller, 2021, p. 3). Hill and Gaddy, on the other hand, view Putin's actions through the

lens of his identities, which they argue are shaped by Russian history, politics, and culture, though they apply their own interpretations to these concepts. In psychology, identity refers to aspects of self-identification within an external coordinate system (Howard, 2000). While they link Putin's "Survivalist" identity to his personal experiences, their analysis does not adequately consider the psychological factors driving his actions. Hill and Gaddy also fail to address the role of Russian history and culture. They describe the corporate structure of Russia's state administration, which was established with direct involvement from the KGB, and analyze the "revenge mission" that Putin performs within this system. Despite some limitations, Hill and Gaddy's biography remains one of the most comprehensive accounts of Putin's life and political trajectory.

Conclusions and Implications

When Hill and Gaddy focus on Putin's political actions, the historical and psychological dimensions of those actions are largely absent. Short, by contrast, considers historical context – but limits it primarily to the history of the Soviet Union – and offers little to no insight into Putin's psychological traits. Kurczab-Redlich, on the other hand, adopts a psychological approach in analyzing Putin's biography, but in doing so, tends to overlook both Russia's historical trajectory and the political circumstances surrounding his actions. This raises a key question: how can historical, political, and psychological factors be integrated into a single coherent conceptualization of a biography? A compelling response to this challenge is offered by Fest (1973/1992), biographer of Adolf Hitler. He argues that if we attempt to move "from individuality to historical events," we risk attributing the crimes of Nazi Germany solely to Hitler's "abnormal personality." Yet the world of the 1930s and 1940s was itself marked by profound instability – "convulsing" with political, social, and economic crises and saturated with "apocalyptic moods."

Germany, traumatized by its defeat in the First World War, sought a leader who could project to the world "the signs of its own degeneration." Hitler emerged as a historical figure through a singular convergence of individual disposition and socio-historical conditions. He "came into contact with the time, and time with him." While this does not absolve him of personal responsibility, it does "distribute it among all." A similar view is expressed by Fromm (1973, p. 433), who notes: "What was unique was the sociopolitical situation in which he could rise; there are hundreds of Hitlers among us who would come forth if their historical hour arrived."

A parallel can be drawn between Hitler's Germany and Putin's Russia: Germans experienced collective trauma following their defeat in the First World War, while Russians were similarly affected by the collapse of the Soviet Union. Despite this similarity, the two represent distinct historical narratives. Fest and Fromm situate Germany's history within the broader context of European civilization, where Hitler's individual psychology is understood as part of a universal historical process shaped by the direct presence of the individual – an approach aligned with the principles of historical psychology. The study of Putin's biography can be convincingly situated within this same framework. Scholars of Putinism have identified imperial aspirations among the Russian population (Langdon & Tismaneanu, 2020; Plokhly, 2023; Thome, 2018). The trajectory of psychological cognition thus advances along a trajectory that leads from individual and social psychology to historical psychology, moving from explanatory dualism toward a more integrated monism (Myasoid, 2016).

The theory of historical psychology was developed by the eminent Ukrainian psychologist Volodymyr Romenets (Romenets, 1995; Romenets & Manokha, 1998). According to Romenets, being of a human is fundamentally defined by the concept of the deed – a form of action that is shaped over the course of human history and materialized in the cultural products of each historical epoch. The logic of the deed, however, is inherently "blind," which, for Romenets, constitutes the core tragedy of historical psychology. This tragedy is particularly evident in the psychological landscape of the twentieth century, marked by revolutions, world wars, crimes against humanity, and events such as the Holodomor in Ukraine. Some nations begin to declare others inherently "evil," leading to attempts at domination. Alongside this dynamic, the "projection mechanism," the "unification mechanism" is also activated: as the process of "cultural escalation" intensifies, "worldview pluralism" is gradually eliminated. Following this trajectory, societies often construct a "cult of personality" – they elevate a leader to a symbolic "pedestal," glorify his actions, and, over

time, experience disillusionment. As Romenets observes, history “does not teach anyone anything... One can speak of the absurdity of human historical behavior” (1995, p. 12).

In the twentieth century, Hitlerism stood as a stark testament to the tragic trajectory of humanity; in the twenty-first century, this role is increasingly embodied by Putinism. Within the Russian populace – much like within the German population – “mechanisms of projection and unification” appear to be actively at work. “The Ukrainian people are being declared “evil,” while Russians, under the influence of the ideology of the “Russian world” (Russkiy mir), are gripped by a collective drive to annihilate Ukraine”. As was once the case in Nazi Germany, a “cult of personality” has taken root in contemporary Russia. President Putin is praised, his actions glorified, and his calls to violence—specifically, to wage war against Ukrainians – are met with widespread compliance. The expansion of the “Russian world” has already been accompanied by crimes against humanity that, in their scope and brutality, evoke comparisons with – or even surpass – those committed under Hitler’s regime. The specter of a new, and potentially final, world war looms ever larger. As Romenets warned, the human deed remains “blind” and unrestrained.

Both Hitlerism and Putinism represent tragic manifestations of historical psychology. As with Hitlerism, a comprehensive understanding of Putinism requires a methodological shift “from historical events to individuality” (Fest), with careful attention to the figure whom the Russian people have “placed on a pedestal” (Romenets). However, the existing biographies of Putin rarely engage with the theoretical developments within the field of historical psychology. This disciplinary gap highlights the need for a different interpretive framework –one that allows for a monistic, internally coherent reading of both Putin’s biography and the broader phenomenon of Putinism. It is essential to integrate historical, political, and psychological dimensions within a unified theoretical framework for biographical analysis. In this context, the continued scholarly investigation of Putin’s life trajectory and political behavior remains not only timely but necessary.

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