

Biopolitical Shifts: Mobilising Identities and Negotiating Buryats-Mongols Relations in The Afterword of Russian War Mobilisation

Zuzanna Bogumił

Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology

University of Warsaw

z.bogumil@uw.edu.pl

ORCID: 0000-0002-6774-7235

Zolzaya Nyamdorj

Freedom Wing NGO

zolzaya.nyamdorj11@gmail.com

Byambabaatar Ichinkhorloo

Department of Anthropology and Archaeology

Centre for Development Studies

National University of Mongolia

byambabaatar.i@num.edu.mn

ORCID.org/0000-0003-2685-8868

Abstract

Russian full scale invasion of Ukraine has significant geopolitical and biopolitical consequences for Russian Buryats and Mongolian society. By referring to the existing literature on biopolitics and geopolitics, and the field research in Mongolia among Buryat migrants, the contributors show how the announcement of the partial mobilisation by Vladimir Putin on September 21st, 2022 affected lives of both Buryats and Mongols, and how the war affected Buryats – Mongols relations. Article shows how the Putin's biopolitical regime was slowly getting tougher in the region and how it was experienced by the Buryats up to the announcement of mobilisation. Further, the article discusses the reactions of the Mongolian society on the massive migration of Buryats by investigating challenges it provoked for Mongolian civic organisations. Finally, the article shows how the Mongolian state became a subject of the Putin's biopolitical and geopolitical regime, and what was a reaction of both politics and society on them.

Keywords: biopolitics, Buryats, Mongol, partial war mobilisation, migration, geopolitics

(...) in April, my friends and I discussed the fact that there would most likely be mobilization and that most likely it would be the non-Slavic population of Russia that would be mobilized. And, most likely, there will be a lot of people from Buryatia. [MN-04-ZB]

A beautiful sunny day, we are sitting in the coffee in Ulaanbaatar, the capital city of Mongolia with a young Buryat who just a few years earlier served in the Russian Army and we are talking about what means the Russian-Ukrainian war for him, and how he experienced the partial mobilisation announced by Vladimir Putin on September 21, 2022. As he explained: „When a special operation began, (...) ... my friends started dying there, every day.” [MN-05-ZB] Another Buryat men that we met a day before who used to live in Moscow and came to Ulan-Ude for family wedding just before the announcement of mobilisation, remembered that time in such a way: “I come there with my wife, (...). There is no Covid, no war in Moscow. There is some kind of panic in Buryatia. We are coming anyway. This tension, all the friends reports on the dead.” [MN-02-ZB]

These two statements are taken from over twenty interviews that we took with Russian-Buryats who fled to Mongolia after the announcement by Vladimir Putin of the partial mobilisation. All interviews were taken in frames of the international, intervention academic project carried out in nine countries to which Russians escaped from mobilisation¹. If compare interviews we took with Buryats in Mongolia with those taken with non-Buryat Russians in Europe, Caucasus, Kazakhstan or Turkey, it is clear that in the Republic of Buryatia the war and later mobilisation were more bodily and real life experienced than in other regions where the war, though traumatic, was rather an experience mediated by media.

This article examines the entangled experiences of Russian-Buryats and Mongols in the context of Russia's war mobilization following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Drawing on a biopolitical framework, we analyze how the Russian state's increasing control over life has profoundly shaped the lives of Russian Buryats, an Indigenous people from Siberia. We explore how, even before the war, Russian Buryats were subjected to an intensifying biopolitical regime, and how this regime escalated dramatically after the invasion, disproportionately targeting ethnic minorities for conscription. At the same time, we examine how Mongolia, as a neighboring state and a culturally proximate space, became a key site of refuge for Russian Buryat

¹ Research project's title: Crossing borders, building walls. Towards ethnography of Russian war mobilisation

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migrants. We consider how this sudden influx challenged Mongolian political institutions, civic society, and collective imaginaries. By investigating the ways in which Mongols experienced and responded to Russian Buryat migration, we highlight the shifting dynamics of belonging, kinship, and national identity. The article thus offers a dual perspective on how biopolitics and geopolitical pressure have shaped both the displacement of Russian Buryats and the reconfiguration of Mongolian perceptions of Mongolianness and regional solidarity.

Biopolitics

The concepts of biopolitics was introduced by Michael Foucault who perceived biopower as “the set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human species became the object of a political strategy, (...)” (Foucault et al. 2009, 1). As French philosopher claimed biopolitics are used by modern state to stabilize and legitimize the power relations by taking the control over life of populations (Foucault 1990). In this article we follow broader understanding of biopolitics, as it was introduced by Andrey Makarychev and Alexandra Yatsyk to describe biopolitics of the Post-Soviet states (Makarychev and Yatsyk 2019). As they argue: “biopolitics does not only correspond with regulation of (pre)existing populations, but also might be part of nation-building, a subjectifying force that produces various collective identities grounded in accepting sets of corporeal practices of control over human bodies and their physical existence” (Makarychev and Yatsyk 2019, IX). Through mechanisms of social inclusion and exclusions biopolitical communities, whether national or religious, are created by the sovereign, while others are excluded and repressed.

Every political regime implements certain biopolitical strategies to govern. These are healthcare policies, social welfare programs, abortion and other demographic measures. At the heart of these actions lies the desire to manage populations—not only to ensure physical survival, but also to shape productive, loyal, and ideologically aligned citizens. Both Mongolian and Russian political regimes use and implement variety of biopolitical tools.

In case of Mongolia its geopolitical location, the country is a landlocked between Russia and China, and history, which provoked that significant Mongol groups live both on territory of Russia and in Inner-China, they provoke significant geopolitical and biopolitical consequences for Mongolia. Real Mongols are those who live on the today's territory of the Republic of Mongolia. Inner Mongols who live in China and Buryats who live in Russia are perceived as half Mongols and various sentiments, stereotypes, anxieties and expectations are assign to them. As Franck Billé stresses Inner Mongols are perceived as “Mongols gone bad, in the sense that they have become Sinicized” (2015, 79), while Buryats are perceived as “*Alag makhonii tasarkhai, altan yasonii khelterkhii*”. In direct translation it means that they are “Part of the speckled flesh, fragment of golden bone”. Discussion about a

need to issue a law supporting Mongol ethnic compatriots living abroad which would create the conditions to support the return and integration of these people, provide legal framework that allows them to settle in their historical homeland, participate in Mongolian society, and contribute to the preservation and development of shared traditions and history called the "Mongol Card" are frequently discussed.

At the same time, however, the Mongolian national discourse has strong biological dimension and it stresses a need to preserve the poor Mongolian gene at all costs. Its consequence is a perception of a role of women who is responsible for the future of the group as a biological entity. In result, mixed marriages or abortion, which is allowed by law, are stigmatized in the nationalist discourse (Valdur 2020). It concerns also gay men, who in the nationalist discourse are portrayed as not fitting the heteronormative and reproductive ideals of the nation. (Billé 2015,169)

In case of Russian political regime, its biopolitical dimensions are multi-layered. Three of them are particularly important for our further discussion: ideological, international and of domestic politics. In the sphere of ideology, a new fashionable national narrative on the Russian World was invented which stresses the importance of the orthodox religion for Russian identity (Bekus-Gonczarowa, Korzeniewska-Wiszniewska, and Wawrzonek 2016), value of privet and collective sacrifice, and national memory of the Great Patriotic War (Kalinina 2017). This way of thinking build on a clear opposition to the West, stresses a threat of the Western "pseudo-values" for the Russian traditional values and warns about the existential threat coming from the West (Hanukai 2023). The Russian world got its protagonists in the sphere of culture and public life (Makarychev and Yatsyk 2018a). The Russian Orthodox Church, revived after the time of communism, has become a useful biopolitical tool actively engaging in construction of what is called "bio-geo-political-theological situation" (Makarychev and Yatsyk 2018a, 15). The result was the appearance of the Russian's neo-imperial national identity (Makarychev and Yatsyk 2017), and a bionationalism, which quite quickly started to be understood in very ethno-cultural terms (Naterstad 2023).

In the sphere of domestic politics the biopolitical turn provoked extension of state sovereignty over the private lives of the citizens (Makarychev and Yatsyk 2017). Restrictions on citizen's sexual rights (Stella and Nartova 2015), development of social programs stressing the traditional femininity and masculinity (Kalinina 2017), state controlled reproduction (Naterstad 2023), all these changes provoked severe securitization of ordinary routine social practices (Makarychev and Medvedev 2015). One of their consequences was development of secularized hygienic discourse stressing dangers threatening from "internal Others" and immigrants to Russia. The result of the Putin's biopolitical focus on citizens' bodies, and their linking with "traditional values" provoked that

the Russian state started to be described as “a nation–state of ethnic Russians”. (Teper 2016)

Finally, in the international relations, the biopolitical turn materialized in supplementing the geopolitical strategies focused on control over territories of neighbourhood countries and development of biopolitical instruments focused on management of populations of these countries, (Makarychev and Yatsyk 2018b). Another biopolitical discipline mechanisms were used to manipulate ethnic Russian minority that reside in many post-Soviet countries. Moreover, state biopolitics are actively supported by the Russian Orthodox Church in spreading of traditional values over societies where orthodoxy is dominant faith (Bekus-Gonczarowa et al. 2016; Makarychev and Yatsyk 2018b).

The biopolitical strategies of Putin’s regime reached a critical culmination in 2022 with the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Justified by claims of a “biological threat” allegedly orchestrated by the West to undermine and replace Russian “traditional values” with Western “pseudo-values” (Hanukai 2023), the war intensified the regime’s biopolitical control. These developments had an immediate and disproportionate impact on minority populations, including the Buryats. From the onset of the invasion, Buryats were overrepresented on the front lines (Vyushkova 2023). The partial mobilization announced in September 2022 was implemented with greater rigor and efficiency in Buryatia than in many other regions of the Russian Federation. Simultaneously, the tightening of the regime’s biopolitical grip in the region spurred a significant outflow of Buryats, many of whom sought refuge in neighboring Mongolia. The sudden and substantial influx of Russian Buryat migrants into Mongolia created a significant biopolitical challenge for both the Mongolian government and civil society. Unprepared politically, institutionally, and infrastructurally, the state faced the urgent task of managing the bodies, identities, and legal statuses of these new arrivals. The migration exposed the limited capacity of Mongolia’s welfare, healthcare, and border control systems to absorb and care for such a large group. At the same time, the arrival of ethnically related but foreign-born individuals forced a renegotiation of Mongolia’s identity politics, revealing the tensions between ethnic solidarity and state sovereignty in a moment of geopolitical crisis.

Zuzanna Bogumił – “They zombify us!” - Buryat Reflections on Russia’s Biopolitics

In this section, we draw on interviews conducted with Buryat migrants to explore how, from a retrospective standpoint several months after their arrival in Mongolia, they reflect on and narrate their experiences of the tightening biopolitical regime under Putin’s regime and their decision to move to Mongolia. Judging from the perspective of time, interviewers say that the first symptoms of tithing of Putin’s regime in the region were visible much before the war. It was already in 2004, when Putin started to appoint

the leaders of regions, by assigning people subordinate to him. As one of the interlocutors said: "As soon as we got a protegee, that is, a person not from Buryatia, it was Vyacheslav Nagovitsyn, this is the second president of the republic, he de facto began to declare war on local business." [MN-04-ZB] Moreover, in 2008 there were introduced administrative changes aiming at consolidation ethnic Russians (Rus. ukрупnenie) in the region and provoking that ethnic Buryats became more spread in Siberian republics (Jonutyte 2023). As one of the interlocutors explained that changes: "We were manipulated by them. They used to say that we are Buryat-Mongols, but now we are not Mongols. Our language was Mongolian, now it is Buryat. We are like that, we are divided into different ones, and on purpose." [MN-02-ZB] As another interlocutor stressed: "In 2015, they also began to remove the Buryat language from business circulation, that is, they began to remove advertising signs in the Buryat language. Some other documents that were in the Buryat language they were translated into Russian and became Buryat, well, simply, it was a period of very serious attack on Buryat culture." [MN-04-ZB]

A significant moment stressed by many interlocutors were the presidential election in March, 2012, when a process of the strengthening of authoritarian governing was visible (Dagbaev 2013). It resulted in a growth of the impact of the federal center on the functioning of the republic, uses of the party "Edinaya Russia" as the instrument of control of political elite (Dagbaev 2013), and rigging local elections. As one of our interlocutors who in 2019 lived in Ulan-Ude and worked at the state TV channel said: "We had a mayoral election and it was necessary to slander the opponent of this mayor. (...) . And I decided to quit and develop my channel, and not work on state television anymore, because in 2019 it was no longer possible to work there." [EE-02-ZB]

The consequences of this biopolitical ruling in Buryatia were that on the eve of the Russo-Ukrainian war, the republic rich in natural resources was very poor in terms of income and level of poverty, nearly all opposition was destroyed or migrated abroad, those who stayed were loyal to the regime. As one of the interlocutors said: "I saw these changes, how they began to zombify us, they were preparing us for this genocide." [MN-02-ZB]

Economic inequality, high unemployment provoked that military service or service in other power structures such as the police or security services became the only chance to make career allowing for an average standard of living (Jonutyte 2023). In consequence, since the beginning of the full scale invasion Buryat soldiers were present in the Russian Army. As one of the interlocutors said: "My wife' cousin went, some other cousins, too. They fell for this contract and ended up all at war. Because there is no work. (..) [MN-02-ZB] Some men went on the war voluntarily. As one of the interlocutors said: "There was no mobilization then. There was a fluid mobilization, but many went. From all villages. They mobilized them before the war. Due to economic reasons, because we are really the poorest in this

Russia.” [MN-02-ZB]. But others, were forced, particularly when mobilisation started.

That night is particularly well remembered by the responders. As one of the interlocutors stressed: “I personally know these people who were called. It was three o’clock in the morning, (...). They took them at night. (...) It was a hostile night. It was such a night. Everyone calls it Bartholomew’s Night. [MN-05-ZB] As the interlocutor further stressed: “I was completely confused. I was very confused. (...) I didn’t know what to do. Parents, sister, brother-in-law, we all gathered at home at night. What should I do? [MN-05-ZB] His decision as many other Buryats was to fled from Russia.

Most of our interlocutors emphasized that they chose Mongolia as their destination for migration due to existing family ties, and because Mongolia is perceived as a brotherly nation—culturally and linguistically close, especially for those who speak Buryat. They believed that, within Mongolian society, they would be seen as ‘one of us’ rather than ‘the other.’ This sense of belonging was particularly important given that, from the outset of the full-scale invasion, Western media often portrayed the Russian invader as a ‘sausage-eating Asian barbarian,’ a racialized and dehumanizing image that many Buryats found both alienating and painful. Most of our interlocutors say about high tension, stress that they experienced while approaching and waiting on the border. In turn, crossing the border was a time of relieved: “when we crossed the Russian border and already went to the Mongolian border guards, we were calmed.” [MN-01-ZB] People felt that they liberated themselves from Putin’s biopolitical regime. Though, for many a reconstruction of life in Mongolian society, finding job, learning language, were great challenge.

Zolzaya Nyamdorj - Buryat Influx and the Mongolian Civil Response

The announcement of the partial mobilization by Vladimir Putin on September 21, 2022 and the mass migration of Mongol ethnicity to Mongolia was a critical experience for Mongolian society. One of our interlocutors Buryat from Russian well described that events: “The Mongols were shocked, because the whole center [of Ulaanbaatar: ZB], was just, full in Buryats, (...). In one day, up to seven thousands people arrived there. (...) And on the second day several thousand people. On the third day there are thousands of people, too.” [MN-04-ZB]

The Mongolian society in their majority reacted with empathy and hospitality on the flux of Buryats migrants. Nonetheless, some critical moments have emerged. One was an accident when one drunk Buryat killed a Mongolian with whom they were drinking together. This case was widely discussed in media and it provoked some fears among Mongolian society (arlsan.mn 2022). Many our interlocutors recall that tragic event in their interviews. One person said: “At the beginning, I remember that there was a case, two men, one Mongolian, the second from Russia, I don’t remember

whether he was Buryat or not, but they got drunk and someone killed someone. And there was a wave of negativity that they were coming from Russia,...." [MN-01-ZB].

The Mongolia's official position regarding the Russian Federation full scale invasion on Ukraine was an abstention (UN News 2022). After the announcement of the partial mobilisation, Ariunbayar Bazarvaani, CEO of the Academy of Political Education, stated that the Mongolian government should actively involve Mongolian NGOs to offer a favorable environment, including employment (Ariunbayar 2022). Mongolia is dependent from Russia in many economic spheres. In the same time, as a democratic country it must support human rights of migrants in order to be recognized by the international democratic community. However, being located and depended on the autocratic regime limits the possible means of action. Thus, the most rational option for the government became to support NGOs.

Immigration Agency has worked out regulations that privileged Mongol ethnicity migrants. On October 3, 2022, Uuganbayar Nergvi, Chief of the Immigration Agency of Mongolia responded, "...under the given circumstances, if they [Buryats] apply for a temporary residency in Mongolia, a decision was made to grant them temporary residency permits upon review and verification of applications" (News.MN 2022). The issuance of temporary residency permission was proclaimed by the government of Mongolia and it was said that the permission is valid until the conflict in Russia subside.

Many organizations started to support Buryats, among them the communities that work for Mongolian Ethnicity, foundations and associations which work for Buryat culture, International Human Rights Organization, civic movements and mushrooming volunteer groups. Initially, some of them organized events, website or chat with information helping Buryats to settle in Mongolia, while other NGOs were monitoring and analyzing the situation on borders and in the country. The official statement of the human rights organizations was not to deport anybody and not to discriminate anyone.

Visas and accommodation were the priority issues to solve. NGOs also tried to help with employment and learning language. NGOs supported works on legal recommendations how to extend visa, and allow migrants to work in Mongolia without necessity to pay high tax that migrants were obliged to pay according to existing Mongolian law. The recommendations were later delivered to the Government of Mongolia. Apart of local NGOs, many civic movements were actively engaged in helping migrants.

Some organizations were defining Buryats as refugees while others argued that they are just tourists since many of them came on tourist visas. Interesting example was the Buryat Culture and Heritage Development Fund (BCHDF). During one of the meetings with Bilegsaikhan Soyolsuren, the president of the foundation, who during his talk made some parallels between the current situation of Buryats with the past events. He stressed

that in 1919, after the October Revolution in Russia, many Buryats were fleeing to Mongolia in search of shelter, just as now. At the same time, however, he stressed that the war is not the most important, and that the Foundation focuses on the cultural issues. Thus, BCHDF made a request to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and Immigration Agency, to smooth the process of obtaining visa for cultural exchange.

In turn, the World Mongol Federation NGO working for solidarity and human rights of World Mongols started to support asylum seekers. Their main project called "World Mongol scholarship" was extended to include Buryats fleeing from mobilization. One group called "Volunteer group to help Mongolian Ethnicity" started to organize free of charge Mongolian language course lasting for 2 years and in such a way helping Buryats to find job and get education visas. Some lawyers voluntarily gave Buryats free consultations.

One of the challenges that had to be solved was the illegal work of migrants and exploitation of their labor by unfair employers who did not pay the migrants. As Purbo Dambiev, the coordinator of the Buryat Center said during one of our meetings in 2023: "There are 472 cases of work without being paid". Therefore, the Buryat Center lobbied for development of the legal system that would allow Buryats to work and to permit them to do the same business as Mongolian citizens may do. According to current law, Mongolia has no legal provisions for Mongolian Ethnicity. It recognizes them as foreigners. To solve this problem a project called „Mongol Card" was initiated by the representatives of Mongolian Ethnicity of Russia together with citizens of Mongolia in 2023. It is said in this law project that "the law is limited to the territory of the former USSR. The Mongol Card allows a person to obtain rights of citizen of Mongolia, with the exception of the rights to elect and to be elected, as well as to work in the secret services of Mongolia, without losing their previous citizenship."(Dzhangar Turbeev from interview with Anna Zueva) (Zueva 2024)

The NGOs also started to help in international assistance to people being in life danger. Mongolia has not signed International Refugee Convention of 1951, but the UNHRC refugee agency is located in Mongolia and it offers limited assistance. Nevertheless, the only protection that refugees may get in Mongolia now, it is to temporarily kept them in Mongolia until they go to a third country. Well know is a case of a human rights activist from Kalmykia who fled to Mongolia with an expired passport with hope that he will be supported by Mongolia. According to the extradition law agreement between Mongolia and the Russian Federation, Mongolia is supposed to deport people perceived by Russian law as "criminals" to Russia. However, the NGOs and volunteers helped this activist to fled from Mongolia to third country, thus he was not extradited to Russia.

The Russian biopolitics, which lead to the war in Ukraine and push Russian Buryats to flee to Mongolia, had far reaching consequences for Mongolian NGOs. It forced them to collaborate one with another, to connect

with different parties, contribute to the establishment of the information databases, and built their capacity. The arrangement of the issues related to the Buryats' deportation, helping in application process of refugee status, providing a support to asylum seekers were the most important activities for me for last two years. At the same time, the situation showed how much a new law and organizations which would work for refugee affairs and coordinate relevant issue are needed in Mongolia.

Byambabaatar Ichinkhorloo – Ripple Effects: The Ukraine War and Mongolia's Geopolitical Balancing Act

The Russian war (called special operation by Russian authorities) in Ukraine brought more political and financial burden to Mongolia by dividing public opinions and increased risks in Mongolian geopolitics and economy. The war impacted significantly on Mongolia's financial sector. According to Bank of Mongolia, the dollar rate fluctuated for eight months between March and November 2022. One US dollar by 24 February 2022 was equal to 2862 togrogs and increased to 3444 by 28 December 2022 despite the "restriction of cash withdrawal by Mongolian commercial banks" (Uuriintsolmon 2022). The foreign reserves had also dropped from USD 4.0 billion to USD 2.6 billion between January 2022 and August 2022. It seems that the Russian financial institutes (Lenta.Ru. 2022) entered Mongolia and converted the ruble to US dollars and withdrew over 1 billion dollars between March and May 2022 out of Mongolia. This way, Russian war and mobilisation contributed to the depreciation of the Mongolian togrog and outflow of dollar reserves.

In the geopolitics, Mongolia's ruling political party and opposition party had different positions in the war as the former was neutral and the latter was pro-Ukraine. When the war started, the government of Mongolia waited and abstained in all votes on Russia-Ukrainian issues at the UN and other high-level meetings. Mongolian government, later, openly appealed for peace and peaceful solutions. Publicly, Mongolian officials, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Otgonbayar 2022) and the President of Mongolia (UN 2022), announced that Mongolia will stand for peace, not supporting one side of conflicting parties and keep its neutrality to prevent possible economic sanctions from Russia and to avoid isolation from the West. Mongolian president at the 77th UN General Assembly called countries and people for "Pax Globalica" by reminding the term "Pax Mongolica" of the 13th century. Mongolia's neutral policy does not mean that Mongolian public and politicians kept silent on this war.

In turn, the Mongolian democratic party made bold statements about the Russian war and why Russian Ambassador Iskander Kubarovich Azizov was called to explain his conduct at the Mongolian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 29 March 2022. Mongolian democratic party, the minority with 13 seats in the parliament of 76 members, issued its official statement (Eaglenews 2022) on the Ukrainian war. They condemned the so-called

Russian army's special operation as an invasion of Ukraine and expressed solidarity with the Ukrainian people on 28 February 2022. After the Mongolian democratic party made a statement followed by "No War" demonstrations in February-March 2022, the Russian Embassy in Mongolia made a statement for the "attention of the members of the Mongolian Democratic party and the supporters of the United State's Liberal Domination" in their page in Facebook (PossolistvoRossiya 2022) on 24 March 2022. The post was about the Russian war, and the Embassy claimed that its author was Trump's advisor who revealed the truth and they translated it for Mongolians.

Many Mongolians got angry that the Russian ambassador instructed Mongolian people what to do and what to think. There were many Russian misconducts that Mongolian public carefully such as: repeated intimidation by Russian politician Vladimir Zhironovski and other Russian politicians (Ichinkhorloo 2022); Chairman of the Russian Duma Vyacheslav Volodin's (Gerel 2023) refusal to give respect to Chinggis Khaan statue in his official visit in 2023. Azizov's "intervention" in 2022 is the one of these classic examples of Russian diplomacy. Mongolian democratic party members opposed his posts as a "provocation and the direct intervention in Mongolian domestic affairs and violation of the Vienna Convention" on the same day (Saran 2022). They demanded an explanation and apology from the Russian ambassador and insisted he return to Russia (Batjargal 2022). Following up these statements, Mongolian foreign minister Battsetseg called Russian ambassador Azizov for an explanation on 29 March 2022. Azizov complained that Russian embassy had received pressures from Mongolian demonstrators. Russian foreign minister visited (Ariunbold 2022) Mongolia on 5 July 2022. Mongolian government silenced public protest and hoped to agree on its long-discussed proposal to transit the Russian gas pipeline through Mongolia to China. However, the members of the democratic party continued to protest the war during Lavrov's visit.

Following the statement of the Democratic party, the first "No War" demonstration was held on 1 March 2022 in the central square in front of the Parliament building, and the "No War" movement organised 54 demonstrations every Saturday in front of the Russian Embassy in Mongolia (NHRCM 2023). Also, the World Mongol Federation NGO posted its appeal to support Mongolian ethnic people in Russia on its website after receiving an open request letter from Buryat National Democratic Movement (WorldMongol 2022). According to their post, Russia was using Mongolian ethnic people, including Buryats, Kalmyks and Tuvans, for their war in Ukraine as a shield, which raised the question of Mongolian ethnic cleansing. The document they uploaded in the post was believed to be the list of prisoners of the war in Ukraine, and 50 people out of 70 POWs were Buryat ethnic people. It caused many people to accuse the Russian war in Ukraine and change their profile photo with the Ukrainian flag on social media, including Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. The "No War" demonstration

organisers informed the public that they did not oppose or support any conflicting parties, and we appeal to peace and no war.

In parallel with the "No War" demonstration, the Ukrainian people in Mongolia organised a peaceful demonstration at the square of the Beatles band statue on March 5, 2022, and at the square in front of the National Drama Theatre on March 6, 2022. This demonstration triggered a pro-Russia opposition demonstration (Maralmichid 2022) with posters "No Fascism" and "Russia Ura!" by Russian people living in Mongolia and some Mongolians on April 9, 2022. Furthermore, this drama continued with twin demonstrations (Batchimeg 2022), which were held in the same square in front of the statue of Russian marshal Georgy Zhukov on 7 May 2022, ahead of the Russian "victory day," 9 May 2022. Even though both demonstrators announced that they did not support one side and appealed for peace, these two demonstrations were organised by pro-Russian and pro-Ukrainian organisations and supporters. Friends of New Russia NGO (Novorossiia anduud), Alumnia Association of Soviet and Russian graduates NGO (ZKhU and OKhU-d togsogchdiin kholboo), Coordination Council of the Organization of 'People with same liver' [heart as] with Russians in Mongolia NGO (Mongol dakh orosiin eleg negtnuusiign baiguullagiin zokhitsuulakh zovlol) had organised demonstration against "No war" demonstration under strict control of police. Mongolian former military members and NGO members participated in pro-Russian demonstrations with Mongolian military music instruments.

In response to these dramatic events, the government of Mongolia moved to silence them. Mongolian court charged five organisers of the "No War" movement for false accusation against the Mongolian Prime Minister by restricting their movement for 12-14 months on 8 November 2022. Mongolian parliament, under the majority of the Mongolian People's Party, rushed to cancel the parliamentary group of the Democratic party to silence their opposition to the Lavrov's visit. Mongolian police forces restricted "No War" demonstrators and secured the street. These political moves and Mongolia's long summer holiday silenced the war discussions until Putin decided on mobilisation.

Moreover, the year 2022 marks a "news war" between Russian "secret forces" and the Mongolian public on the war. It seemed that not only people with aspirations of democracy and peace but also many other forces and secret organisations started to intervene and organise activities in Mongolia since the start of the war and mobilization. According to "No War" demonstrators (Tuguldur 2022), the "Russian embassy and their secret police conducted surveillance on demonstrators all the time." Pro-Russia demonstrations, social media trolls and manipulative posts, along with increased media and cultural news about Russia's glory and Russian success, were activated since March 2022. Russian journalist Georgi Zotov (Zotov 2023) from Argumenti i Facty, a Russian news agency, wrote a story about Russians in Mongolia. According to him, most ethnic Russians hate

Mongolia's disgusting culture and way of living. This article was copied and circulated hundreds of times on Russian news websites and Television.

Many fake and temporary accounts were created on Mongolian social media in support of the Russian war. Mongolian parliament and government proposed an amendment to the "law on procedure on conducting demonstration and assembly". They drafted a new "law on protection of human rights in social media" to increase control of demonstrations and fake social media posts since January 2022. The amendment to the demonstration law is still postponed, and the newly adopted social media law was repealed. (Legalinfo 2023) Due to a presidential veto stemming from public protest and discontent on 31 March 2023. Gradually, war related demonstrations and social media posts for pro-Russia and pro-Ukraine had decreased until Russian mobilisation triggered new activities.

Finally, it is important to stress that immediately after the announcement of mobilisation, massive flux of hundreds of Russians to Mongolia had significant consequences for the society. Around 157 thousand Russian males and 175 thousand Russian females had entered Mongolia since the Russian war until October 2023. We do not have detailed information about where these people left. However, the difference between entry and exit numbers is between 1700 and 1500 people, which suggests that these numbers of people might stay in Mongolia. By analysing the statistics (NSO 2024) (see Table 1), it can be said that Mongolia received over 10,000 war refugees (men) including Mongolian ethnic Buryats, Kalmyks and Tuvans between March and October 2022.

Russians		2022-I	2022-II	2022-III	2022-IV	2023-I	2023-II	2023-III	Cum. Total
Entry	Male	833	16,054	37,990	23,057	21,351	27,874	30,766	157,925
	Female	4,337	16,826	28,809	29,403	27,507	31,797	36,839	175,518
Exit	Male	4,051	12,336	31,381	28,626	20,714	28,246	30,822	156,176
	Female	567	19,815	27,721	30,338	26,326	32,653	36,519	173,939
Stay	Male	-3,218	3,718	6,609	-5,569	637	-372	-56	1,749
	Female	3,770	-2,989	1,088	-935	1,181	-856	320	1,579

Table 1. Entry and exit of Russians in Mongolia in 2022-2023

Many Russians including Buryats and Kalmyks travel through Mongolia to other countries such as Thailand, Korea, Kazakhstan, European countries and the United States. One interviewee reported that Russians travel to Mexico to enter the United States as they can not take any American visa in Ulaanbaatar. In an expert interview, one professor who had contacts with Russians said that nine-tenth of those Russians had left Mongolia for

other countries. Another interviewee reported that only one-third of Russians might stay in Mongolia temporarily, and the rest would leave for other countries (Batsaikhan 2022).

In the interviews, most refugees informed that they, in the first time, feared about potential deportation (Anonymous 2022), and later, they felt safe in Mongolia. Majority of Russian refugees including all Kalmyks and senior Buryats in Mongolia reported that they are very happy to be in Mongolia because of their same Mongolian ethnicity, culture and religion. However, many of the war refugees are younger below 30 and their beliefs and opinions differ significantly from the seniors. The first-time visitors of ethnic Russians demanded Mongolians to speak Russian in the streets, restaurants, bars, and shops in Mongolia. Later on, they found out that the most of Mongolians below 40 do not understand one word in Russian.

Our researchers conducted participant observation in one local bar called "Republic," where Russian people had gathered since the mobilisation. Usually, LGBT people gather in this bar, which makes it the best place to hide from others, as most Mongolians prefer not to go there. This place was the temporary place of gathering of Buryat and Kalmyk people until March 2023, when Buryats and Mongolians got into a fistfight. According to the bartender, the fight started from the argument that Buryats refused to admit that they were Mongolian ethnic people. Buryats kept saying that they are Buryats who are separate from Mongolia and citizens of Russia. In return, those drunken Mongolian youths intimidated them by asking why they fled Mongolia if they loved Russia. Such arguments became intense, and led to fight which stopped them to gather in this bar again.

Conclusions

The Russian war in Ukraine and partial war mobilization in September 2022 have been a significant biopolitical experience for Russian Buryats. It has also provoked a serious fear in Mongolian society and politics that Mongolia would be the next victim of Russian aggression in economic and political terms. Moreover, the war and mobilization revealed differences in Mongolian identity among those Mongolian ethnic groups living in Russia and Mongolia. Cultural assimilation and political ideologies in Russia made many Buryats think of themselves as ethnic Russians. Others started to discover their Mongol identity. When we visited Ulan -Ude in 2023, we found out that many younger Buryats, they speak in Buryat Mongolian and use Mongolian terminologies used in Ulaanbaatar. These were probable these Russian Buryats who fled Russian after the announcement of mobilisation, lived in Mongolia till summer 2023, and later returned to Russia.

This war also opened the question of why Russia conscripted its ethnic minorities more than Slavic Russians and why Russia left the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) in 2023. Due to geopolitical shifts in the region many Mongol ethnic groups live

in various countries including Mongolia, the Russian Federation, China, but also Kazakhstan. Mongolian politics stress these ties and use them as their biopolitical soft power. In the same time, however, the severe Russian geopolitics and biopolitics towards both Buryats and Mongol impact on the Buryat – Mongol relations and may have negative consequences for them.

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