

MAKSIM KULAEV

Trade unions, transformism and
the survival of Russian authoritarianism



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Supervisor: Viacheslav Morozov, Professor, Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies, University of Tartu

Opponent: Emilia Palonen, PhD, University of Helsinki and University of Jyväskylä

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SUMMARY

This study explores the mechanisms of domestication and neutralization of social and labor protests in Russia. While economic difficulties and governmental policies regularly provoke grassroots discontent and spark conflicts, these do not present any political challenge to the regime. Some of the numerous protests formally succeed as the authorities satisfy the demands from below. At the same time, the success remains localized. Local victories contribute to the sustainability of the existing regime and do not enhance the capacity for protest mobilization. This dissertation uses the concept of transformism proposed by Antonio Gramsci and developed, in a poststructuralist setting, by Ernesto Laclau. Transformism refers to processes accommodating protesters' demands from below within the current political and social order. This concept comes along with the distinction between democratic and popular politics. Democratic politics unfolds within the confines of the existing system of rule, while popular politics is antagonistic toward the present order. When trapped in the transformist paradigm, grassroots protests generate democratic politics, but avoid confronting the regime and thus do not engage in popular politics. This study demonstrates how transformism works by studying Russian trade unions. It analyzes the structure of the unions, their discourses, and then focuses on concrete cases of unions' activities in three North-Western regions of Russia, as well as the 2018 nation-wide campaign against the pension reform. Trade unions are regularly involved in social and labor conflicts by spearheading local protests, which often succeed in getting concessions from the employers and the authorities. In the process, however, social and labor conflicts are channeled into local agreements between the authorities and the workers. Thus, transformism neutralizes protest movements and contributes to the survival of the authoritarian regime.

INTRODUCTION

Since 2011, the Russian regime has experienced several crises. In the winter 2011–2012, massive protests erupted after the fraudulent elections. In 2014, Russia faced international sanctions after the annexation of Crimea and intervention in Eastern Ukraine. In December 2014, the depreciation of the Russian ruble indicated the beginning of a new economic crisis and subsequent stagnation. Although social and labor conflicts occur regularly, none of them present a challenge to the overall political stability.

The Russian regime cannot be considered democratic. It has made a long journey of authoritarian consolidation (Gel'man 2015). After 2011, Russian authoritarianism has become stricter and harsher. Censorship of mass media and repressions against opposition have intensified. Nonetheless, there is plenty of grassroots activism in Russia. Social movements, civic initiatives, and trade unions exist and often succeed. They pose various demands which are sometimes satisfied by the authorities.

The usual juxtaposition of the state and civil society does not explain relations between the Russian regime and grassroots movements. These relations are far from a unidimensional picture of repressions from above and resistance from below. In today's authoritarian Russia the regime can use remnants of the independent civil society to reinforce internal political stability. As highlighted by contemporary scholars, the state and civil society are not necessarily hostile to each other and can be understood as two parts of an integrated whole (cf. Riley and Fernandez 2014). The multitude of approaches to relations between the state and civil society helps to avoid an oversimplification of these relations.

Social and labor protests occur in Russia regularly, but they neither contribute to democratization of the country, nor challenge the regime. Although protest movements are usually considered as drivers of social and political change (cf. Sztompka 1993; Tilly 2004), the case of today's Russia demonstrates that there is a huge gap between grassroots protests and political change. My research explores this gap.

The problem of the protest failure is relevant across the globe. During the past few years, the world has seen various protest waves, whose political and social impact has been ambivalent at best, and often in contradiction to their declared goals. It is not clear how new social movements are related to the so called 'rise of populism' or how, and whether, they contribute to the sustainability of liberal democracies. This demonstrates that relations between protest movements and politics should be carefully scrutinized.

Russia does not exist in isolation from global trends. Despite the pressure from the authoritarian state, Russian social movements and trade unions are active and relatively independent. Even as they engage in protests, these are not necessarily suppressed, but their political impact remains marginal at best. This research addresses relations between grassroots activities and the authorities in Russia. These relations are multifaceted and are not limited to coercion. The authorities

often tolerate protests but use non-coercive means to prevent the emergence of political challenges to the regime. In this thesis I focus both on such non-coercive methods used by the authorities to hinder political development of protests and on the practices of grassroots movements that contribute to this outcome.

Hence, the research question is what prevents the social and labor protests from developing politically and transforms them from a potential challenge to the authoritarian regime to a factor of its survival?

Answers should be sought not only in repressions, propaganda, and economic conditions. I argue that there are allied and constructive relations between the regime and subaltern classes, which manifest themselves through labor and social protests. I focus on subaltern classes because politics and, more broadly, history cannot be made without the engagement of popular masses. Even the hypothetical situation of a 'palace coup', which is sometimes anticipated as a possible scenario of regime change in Russia, cannot be envisaged without taking into account people's activities and sentiments. It is even more evident when it comes to the relations between the authorities and grassroots initiatives. Importantly, attention should be paid to both sides of this alliance, because the regime would not have built constructive relations with the subaltern classes if the subaltern classes against their will.

In this thesis, I propose a political perspective on grassroots movements. My aim is to avoid sociology, which deduces politics from social conflicts and concentrates on interactions among individuals involved in protest activities. When protest goes beyond separate neighborhoods and workplaces, it enters the realm of politics, and this is where sociological theories reveal their limitations trying to explain political processes through social phenomena. However, my approach still prioritizes popular activities as the driving force of politics, while the behavior of the elites and state institutions is treated as reactive.

This research is based on theories advanced by Antonio Gramsci. The central concept of the dissertation is transformism. Gramsci employed this term to describe relations between subaltern classes and the system of rule. He analyzes the history of Italy in the second half of the nineteenth century, when several independent states were united into one centralized kingdom. As is well known, this process is usually called *Risorgimento* (the Resurgence). Gramsci noted that the unification and economic development of Italy was not accompanied by significant social changes. It means that, although the country was united due to massive popular movements, the majority of Italian population remained poor and suffered from social inequality. The country was unable to overcome the economic cleavage between the North and the South. Thus, Gramsci believed that even as the popular movements contributed to the unification of Italy, they did not result in an improvement of the social and economic conditions of subaltern classes. Besides, the kingdom was politically dominated by the upper classes of bourgeoisie and landowners. Representatives of grassroots movements did not obtain political influence. Gramsci used the term *trasformismo* to define the situation when popular movements did not come to power and did not significantly improve living standards of subaltern classes but some demands of these movements were

partially satisfied by the elites, which secured their dominance in this way. In the nineteenth century Italy, the demands for the unification and modernization, which were posed by popular movements, were satisfied by the existing elites. At the same time, these elites secured their political and economic dominance. Gramsci emphasized that capitalist development of Italy did not cause the overthrowing of the old elites. He contrasted this to France where revolutions and popular uprisings dethroned rulers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The Gramscian concept of transformism can be used as a tool to improve our understanding of the survival of Russian authoritarianism and of the relations between the regime and grassroots movements.

Scholars identify a period of a decline of protest activity in the early 2000s, when regional elites lost independence, the 'systemic' opposition weakened, the space for independent activities shrank, and economic situation stabilized (Robertson 2011). Yet this decline was not absolute and eventually gave way to a new wave of protest activities. In fact, there have always been successive cycles of protest in Russia.

The mid-2000s was the time of the emergence of new labor unions and social movements. The recovery of industries meant there was more demand for workers' representation. In 2005, the government attempted a 'monetization' by replacing many social benefits with direct payments. This measure was extremely unpopular and brought thousands to the streets across the country. Protesters held massive rallies and even blocked roads in some cities. These actions were partially successful and the 'monetization' reform was revised and adjusted. The 2005 protests are considered by some scholars as a turning point which indicated the revival of Russian social movements (cf. Clement, Demidov and Miriasova 2010). Later, numerous other governmental policies faced opposition from below. Grassroots initiatives tried to work together and established various coordinating organizations. It would not be an exaggeration to say that social movements, trade unions, and civic initiatives experienced a certain renaissance between 2005 and 2011.

The 2011–2012 protests were a turning point in many ways. They did not fulfill the expectations of those who were waiting for a democratization from below. However, it would be a mistake to argue that it was a drastic tightening of authoritarian policies which stifled these movements. The regime increased its harshness gradually, while adapting to possible challenges from below. The gradual evolution of the regime after the failure of the 2011–2012 protests was accompanied by a relative stagnation in the development of social movements and trade unions. Tomila Lankina (2014) believes that post-protest repressions forced citizens to alter their protest strategies. However, Graeme Robertson (2013) notes that the repertoire of actions had formed in the second half of the 2000s and did not change in the aftermath of the 2011–2012 protests. He distinguishes between 'symbolic actions' displaying dissent to 'influence broader publics and political decision makers' and 'direct actions' 'inflicting direct economic harm to press employers and/or the state'. Robertson argues that symbolic actions prevail over direct actions in the Russian protest since the late 2000s, while in the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s the situation was the opposite. Thus, social and

labor movements have not changed their strategies and methods after 2011. The 2011–2012 protests, however, demonstrated that the regime was more resilient than one might have expected.

After 2014, economic difficulties led to a growth in the number of labor and social protests (Crowley and Olimpieva 2016). Mikhail Dmitriev suggests that ‘economic discontent can also support other types of protest demands... This, in turn, could facilitate the linking up of economic protesters in the provinces with urban political protesters in the capital into a more concerted political movement’ (Dmitriev 2015: 240). Although economic and social discontent still fuels numerous protests, ‘a more concerted political movement’ has not emerged to this day.

In accordance with the Gramscian notion of transformism, this research argues that protest activities may contribute to the survival of the regime. Protest groups succeed in solving local problems but avoid aggravating the confrontation with the authorities. Social and labor conflicts result in mutual concessions between the regime and protest groups. These concessions imply deliberation: protest groups channel mass discontent into discussions with the authorities. Deliberation is instrumental in solving local problems, it deescalates conflicts and facilitates cooperation between the regime and protest groups. The responsiveness of the authorities allows social movements and trade unions to achieve particular goals but prevents potential political development, which presupposes an escalation of the conflict. Protest groups limit their demands to parochial issues and trade more radical agenda for the solutions to local problems. Thus, while some isolated demands are satisfied by the regime, political challenges are also prevented. Accumulation of local and isolated victories does not lead to any development of protest movements.

Mass discontent can be channeled into deliberation by various means. I focus on Russian trade unions. They bring together millions of employees and exercise various functions. Trade unions often act as social movements and address a wide range of issues besides industrial relations. As the government raised the age of retirement in 2018, trade unions led protests against the pension reform. However, they usually cooperate with the authorities and serve as an example of protest groups which channel mass discontent into deliberation. Of course, trade unions are not supposed to be a ‘revolutionary force’ threatening the regime. Exposing and escalating social contradictions by any means is not their primary task. At the same time, it is hard to imagine a scenario of a politically successful mass movement for democracy that would not rely on workers’ support. Besides, other movements, including the so-called ‘non-systemic’ political opposition, which do aim at regime change, also fail to challenge the existing order. These failures are to a large extent due to the transformistic processes which mollify multiple conflicts and protests. Trade unions and their activities are not the only display of transformistic mechanisms in Russia, but the most visible one.

Relations between trade unions and the state can be ambiguous. Analyzing labor movements in Latin America, Ruth Berins Collier and David Collier note that, in general, the state tries to control labor movements while simultaneously seeking their support, while trade unions hesitate between cooperation with the

state and resisting this cooperation (Collier and Collier 2002: 48). In Russian history, trade unions have played a political role several times. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, miners' strikes contributed to the collapse of the USSR. In the second half of the 1990s, numerous labor protests influenced the overall political situation in Russia. Today, trade unions are involved in regular social and labor conflicts. Since politics can emerge anywhere, local conflicts and processes preventing their escalation deserve a detailed examination. Recent protests in Belarus implicitly confirmed the significance of labor movements in post-Soviet countries. The protesters there counted on potential strikes, which could cause additional difficulties for the existing regime. However, the absence of large-scale strikes is among the reasons why the regime so far has survived (Kuznetsov 2020; Otkrytoie Obrashcheniie 2020).

I apply the Gramscian concept of transformism in a broader theoretical framework, which mostly builds on the work of Ernesto Laclau. In this research, Gramsci's and Laclau's theories are combined with approaches of other authors, mostly Alain Badiou and Sylvain Lazarus. The main advantage of these theories is their focus on popular activities. It was expressed in Lazarus's formula 'people think' (Lazarus 2015), which means that while dealing with politics, one needs to focus on people over state policies and individual interactions. 'People' here is used in the generic sense, as referring to common humanity. This appeal to people as such indicates that politics is open for everyone and not only for elites. Moreover, people's politics is understood as an independent sphere of activities, which is irreducible to economic or social issues. Badiou, who has been influenced by Lazarus, also elaborates an approach presupposing the autonomy of politics from the social and focusing on problems of political subjectivity.

Thus, the dissertation explores processes preventing political development of social and labor protests and contributing to the survival of the regime. The theoretical framework of this research can provide a fresh perspective on the political implications of protests in Russia.

The dissertation is organized as follows.

The first chapter provides an overview of conventional approaches used to describe relations between grassroots movements and ruling regimes. It demonstrates the shortcomings of generally accepted theories. The literature on grassroots protests is divided in two parts. The first part comes from the field of political science. The second part belongs to the sociology of social movements. I argue that while the former pays more attention to the elites and considers the subaltern classes as passive, the latter cannot estimate how social conflicts affect politics.

The second chapter explains the main terms of the dissertation, its theoretical background, and methodology. This part of the dissertation is based mostly on Ernesto Laclau's works, which are critically revisited from the viewpoint of Alain Badiou's and Sylvain Lazarus's ideas. I argue that a combination and critical examination of their theories provide a new tool for the analysis of the political implications of social and labor protests.

The third chapter addresses Russian discourses on subaltern classes, trade unions, and grassroots activities. I analyze the official discourse and discourses of the largest pro-governmental mass media. This analysis demonstrates that subaltern classes are portrayed as the regime's supporters. Grassroots activities are allowed within certain limitations and trade unions are considered as legitimate representatives of subaltern classes.

The fourth chapter covers the system of Russian trade unions, their organizations, and discourses. As previously mentioned, trade unions often channel mass discontent into deliberations and cooperation with the authorities and, hence, enable transformism. This chapter analyzes protest activities and discourses of main Russian labor unions.

The fifth and sixth chapters include case studies which describes examples of transformism. There, I analyze protest activities of trade unions in three Russian regions and the 2018 campaign against the pension reform.

CHAPTER 1.

Conventional approaches to relations between subaltern classes and the regime in Russia

This chapter reviews theoretical approaches to the study of grassroots activities and the states' response to such activities. Scholars often try to assess political consequences of protest movements. In the case of Russia, despite the increasing frequency of social and labor conflicts, their political effect seems insignificant. Scholars propose various ways to theorize relations between grassroots movements and the regime. The argument of this chapter is that conventional approaches have several shortcomings.

The first section of this chapter covers theories addressing mainly the regime's policies. The focus on the regime's policies presupposes that elites are understood as an active part in the relations between the regime and grassroots movements. According to these theories, the regime uses propaganda and effectively manages people's activities through intimidation, repressions, and pay-offs. Independent grassroots movements are almost impossible within this framework of analysis.

On the other hand, approaches embraced by the sociology of social movements admit that people can influence politics and be active. However, I argue that the sociology of social movements inaccurately assesses political effects of grassroots activities. Within this framework, protest movements are successful if they contribute to the development of deliberative procedures. In the case of Russia, successes of organized and independent protest initiatives and the improvement of deliberative procedures have the effect of blocking potential political development. These phenomena are not properly addressed within the sociology of social movements.

This chapter shows that the understanding of the relations between the regime and grassroots movements, and of the political consequences of these movements requires a critique of conventional approaches.

Propaganda, patronalism, and clientelism

The sustainability of Russian authoritarianism, its support from below, and the absence of significant protest movements have been extensively described in the scholarly literature, especially in the works on regime transitions. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the inconsistent attempts at democratization, Russia found itself under a new authoritarian regime, which still seems resilient today. The development of Russian authoritarianism and the perturbations of institutions are in the focus of approaches overviewed in this section. Since my research revolves around the relations between the regime and subaltern classes, I focus on those scholars who describe these relations and explain why protests from below do not challenge Russian authoritarianism.

As Adam Przeworski noted, '[a]uthoritarian equilibrium rests mainly on lies, fear, or economic prosperity' (Przeworski 1991: 58). This famous quotation has been cited and applied to the Russian situation numerous times. In other words, according to Przeworski, an authoritarian regime has three pillars: coercion, economic growth, and manipulation of information. Under the present conditions in Russia the economic pillar seems to be unreliable. Although the repressiveness of the regime has increased since 2011, massive repressions are generally absent as well (Gel'man 2015). Therefore, 'lies' or 'manipulation of information' remains one of the main pillars of the regime. However, what does 'manipulation of information' mean? Guriev and Treisman (2015) reduce this to propaganda, censorship, and the bribing of journalists. They connect efficiency of such practices with economic performance: '[I]ncompetent leaders can survive by manipulating the information so long as economic shocks are not too large' (Guriev and Treisman 2015). The popular metaphor describing Russian political processes as a battle between 'the TV set (the propaganda) and 'the refrigerator' (the deteriorating economic conditions). This metaphor presupposes that an economic crisis will undermine political stability, which rests on the propaganda. Yet economic difficulties seem to be less consequential for authoritarian regimes than for democratic ones. For instance, Grigorii Golosov (2016) proves that poor economic performance does not affect voter volatility in authoritarian regimes. Analyzing the role of the Russian television, Marlen Laruelle notes that state owned TV channels participate in maintaining national identity within the traditional framework and contribute to the preemption of a possible mobilization against the regime (Laruelle 2014). Sarah Oates shifts the focus from television to the Internet and demonstrates how Russian propaganda can also cope with challenges from the new media (Oates 2016).

Nonetheless, it would be an oversimplification to reduce the sustainability of the Russian regime to sophisticated propaganda: none of the previously cited scholars argue that only propaganda matters. Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way (2010) note that *United Russia* became the dominant party without any cohesive ideology typically needed as a base for propaganda. Hence, it is important to understand what embodies values proliferated by the propaganda and what is an organizational base for the activities desired by the regime. In other words, persuasion is not enough. There is a difference, for example, between support for the regime and the actual participation in voting for the incumbent. This is because under authoritarian regimes, which normally do not presuppose high level of grassroots political engagement, participation requires organizations.

Since propaganda alone does not make people act in a certain way, scholars pay attention to organizational issues and focus on political machines, clientelism, and patronalism. Political machines as such are a well-studied phenomenon which is rooted in the history of different (not necessarily authoritarian) regimes. Clientelism refers to 'asymmetric but mutually beneficial relationships of power and exchange... It entails votes and support given in exchange for jobs and other benefits' (Roniger 2004: 353–354). As Susan Stokes (2005) argues, clientelism and political machines, which are defined as clientelistic parties, flourish in

numerous countries and under varying conditions. Well known examples are the Tweed machine in New York in the nineteenth century and the Dowson machine in Chicago in the twentieth century, as well as similar phenomena in Mexico, in Argentina under Peron, and in Italy after the Second World War, when Christian Democratic Party operated as a clientelistic party in the South.

Along with clientelism comes patronalism, defined as ‘a social equilibrium in which individuals organize their political and economic pursuits primarily around the personalized exchange of concrete rewards and punishments’ (Hale 2015: 20). Both terms refer to interrelated phenomena and describe the hierarchical infrastructure of mutually beneficial exchange among elite groups and between elites and subaltern classes. The focus on the role of elites in this process suggests that subaltern classes do not play any independent role and it is only elites which of interest to scholars. Analyzing the case of Russia, Henry Hale notes that the stability of the Russian regime relies on an effective patronal network which was developed in the 2000s and subsumed previously independent competing networks. This network prevents the emergence of independent political actors. Governors and regional legislatures lost the autonomy they enjoyed in the 1990s. The opposition can no longer find independent sponsors (Hale 2015). Therefore, Hale analyzes mainly strategies and activities of presidents and top-ranking officials. He mentions the necessity of public support and the means used by the regime to obtain this support. The popular backing of the regime, however, is considered to be dependent on the elites’ policies.

Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, in their research on nondemocratic regimes, also focused on methods used by elites to mobilize subaltern classes. Although some nondemocratic regimes exist without ‘extensive and intensive mobilizations’, they mobilize subaltern classes occasionally and use ‘coercive or clientelistic methods’ (Linz and Stepan 1996: 44–45). Thus, authoritarian regimes use intimidation, repressions, and payoffs toward subaltern classes while the latter remain passive.

Clientelism, patronalism, and the functioning of political machines are studied on the Russian ground as well. These studies and the research on propaganda supplement each other and claim to provide a holistic picture of the relations between the Russian regime and the people.

Thus, Vladimir Gel’man describes what brought victory to *United Russia* in the 2011 parliamentary elections: ‘unhesitating use of the state apparatus to maximize the “United Russia” vote by all available means (ranging from workplace mobilization to shameless fraud); genuine support of the status quo regime on the part of peripheral voters; the apathy and nonparticipation of “advanced” voters...’ (Gel’man 2015: 117). Here, two aspects are important: workplace mobilization and the genuine support of peripheral voters. They reflect the clientelistic relations and effects of propaganda respectively. Gel’man describes subaltern classes as supportive of the regime. According to him, they are either passively subjected to mobilization at workplaces, or exposed to propaganda. In both cases subaltern classes are considered to be passive. This approach follows

Seymour Lipset's assumption on lower classes' commitments to authoritarianism (Lipset 1960).

Grigorii Golosov describes the main social groups which are usually included in the clientelistic system: 'First of all, this concerns the pensioners... The principal brokers in the clientelistic exchange are the state organs, mostly the local departments of social protection' (Golosov 2013: 476). Public sector employees including doctors and teachers can also be easily influenced by political machines because some of them 'have extremely low pay and are heavily dependent on the directors of the schools and clinics where they work' (Golosov 2013: 477). Here, Golosov focuses on the material conditions and organizations and puts propaganda aside. He supposes that pensioners may genuinely support the regime but the activities of state organs which facilitate voting for incumbents are more important.

Another social group which is often mobilized to vote are workers of state owned enterprises: 'Firms that are vulnerable to state pressure, such as those with immobile assets and those that are owned by or sell their output to the state, are more likely to mobilize votes for the regime because autocrats find it easy to induce the leadership of these firms to mobilize their workers' (Frye, Reuter, and Szakonyi 2014: 223). The leading role of the state in the Russian economy enables a large-scale and usually successful workplace mobilization of voters.

In this framework of analysis, scholars may be suspicious of grassroots activities, if they even emerge, because protests can be inspired and instrumentalized by elites to have leverage over intra-elite bargaining. For example, during the 1990s, governors provoked labor strikes to press the Kremlin for additional funding (Robertson 2007). Graeme Robertson and Ora John Reuter note that the regime takes protests under control by means of personal cooptation of protest leaders in regional legislatures and makes protests elite-led (Reuter and Robertson 2015). Thus, even when subaltern classes protest, these protests are organized or led by the elites. In this approach, only elites have any active role. This idea was bluntly expressed in a collective monograph *Making and Breaking Democratic Transitions: The Comparative Politics of Russia's Regions* (Gel'man et al. 2003). The authors argue that in Russia 'agents of mass politics, such as popular movements, labor unions, or political parties, with rare exceptions, either could not become actors ... or became instruments in the struggle for political dominance among elite actors' (Gel'man et al. 2003: 14). This assumption confirms the theoretical framework in which 'only elite agents are regarded as actors, while the masses are considered to be a resource' (Gel'man et al. 2003: 15).

Samuel Greene and Graeme Robertson (2019) admit that the Russian regime does not rely only on coercion but also enjoys popular support. Although they address people's sentiments in their book *Putin v. the People*, Greene and Robertson focus mainly on the regime's policies. According to this book, the so called 'simple people' consider the current rule as inevitable and do not see any alternative. This is the starting point of Greene's and Robertson's analysis. However, they quickly shift to the regime's actions, including propaganda, mobilization of supporters, repressions, and the intervention in Ukraine. The people,

which were mentioned in the book title, are treated as an object of the elites' policies. Although the authors mention the non-systemic opposition and its protest actions, 'simple people' are not deeply involved in these actions.

The studies, addressed here, shed light on an important part of the relations between the regime and subaltern classes. Various social groups support the present regime either because they are paid or coopted or because they are afraid of being punished for any potential disobedience or the lack of loyalty. However, this approach has at least two disadvantages. First of all, it addresses and explains only a limited set of phenomena such as voters' mobilization and participation in pro-Kremlin events. These practices are examples of coercive or nearly coercive methods. While the regime uses its centralized state apparatus and administrative capacities to influence public sector employees, these frequent practices of pro-regime mobilization do not reflect the full spectrum of the relationship between subaltern classes and the regime. What scholars usually miss are the mechanisms which do not belong directly to the state apparatus but involve day-to-day management of protest activities. This management does not require payments, manipulations or threats.

Secondly, political scholars pay attention mainly to the functioning of the elites and the state apparatus while ignoring grassroots activities. Studies of political participation may constitute an exception as they address not only state policies but also citizens' activities. Political participation is defined as 'legal activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take (Verba, Nie and Kim 1978: 46). At the same time, students of political participation focus on activities 'within the system' and 'regular and legal ways of influencing politics' (Verba, Nie and Kim 1978: 48). Also, within this approach, political participation is grounded in culture. In other words, politics is not considered as an autonomous realm. As previously mentioned, the autonomy of politics is of crucial importance for my theoretical approach.

Analyzing political participation in Russia, Danielle Lussier explains patterns of Russian citizens' activities by referring to the political closeness of the regime and the absence of 'genuine' liberalization (Lussier 2016: 275). Thus, discussions on citizens' activities are still attached to state institutions, political culture, and regime policies, which provide a framework for grassroots activities.

In the case of Russia, subaltern classes are inaccurately considered to be passive and supportive of the regime, which is not completely true. 'Peripheral voters' sometimes do not vote for incumbents. For example, compared to the Russian population as a whole, a smaller share of workers in the mining sector and metallurgy tend to vote for *United Russia* and Vladimir Putin (Miryasova 2014). Therefore, it would be a mistake to say that subaltern classes and especially employees of state owned or state dependent units are, by definition, supporters of the regime. Subaltern classes are not absolutely passive. Russian regions regularly experience independent social and labor protests that often are not suppressed by the state. In short, the relations between the regime and the subaltern

classes are more complex than the one-sided picture that emerges when focusing on manipulation, intimidation, and payoffs.

Even though grassroots activities are often missed in the framework of comparative politics, they are in focus of the sociology of social movements which I address in the next section.

Social movements and the public sphere

Relations between the state and grassroots activities, and the potential evolution of regimes under the pressure from below, are examined within the frameworks of two complementary fields: the sociology of social movements and studies of deliberative democracy. In this section I also discuss the philosophical ground associating these two very different fields of research. One main problem of the sociology of social movements and studies of deliberative democracy is the prioritization of public debates in politics. This prioritization is rooted in the philosophical grounding of the two subdisciplines and hinders a more accurate understanding of the potential for the political development of grassroots activities.

It could be argued that the foundation of both frameworks is Kantian political philosophy, as it was retrospectively interpreted by Hannah Arendt (1992). The central position in this philosophy is occupied by the world-spectator. Spectators constitute the public and this makes them central to every event. In order for an event to become significant, spectators should perceive, contemplate, and reflect on it. Arendt noted: 'The public realm is constituted by the critics and spectators, not by the actors or the makers... Or, to put it in another way, still in Kantian terms: the very originality of the artist ... depends on his making himself understood by those who are not artists (or actors)' (Arendt 1992: 63). In the well-known example of Immanuel Kant's attitude toward the French revolution, the spectators' privileged position allowed them to judge what was right and what was wrong with this revolution: '[W]hat counted in the French revolution, what made it a world-historical event ... were not the deeds and misdeeds of the actors but the opinions, the enthusiastic approbation, of spectators, of persons who themselves were not involved' (Arendt 1992: 65). Arendt ultimately concluded that, in Kantian philosophy, 'the spectator had precedence' over the actor (Arendt 1992: 65).

Arendt did not equate contemplation with action but insisted on the importance of public actions which make people free; contemplation, however, takes priority and enables debates because the possibility to contemplate and to be a spectator is a precondition for the existence of the public sphere and, hence, of debate. In Arendt's philosophy, the latter becomes overwhelmingly significant because, as she argued, 'debate constitutes the very essence of political life' (Arendt 2006: 236).

Then Arendt contrasts politics with truth, because, according to her, 'truth strikes at the very roots of all politics' (Arendt 2006: 228). Hence, politics relies on opinion, which is in opposition to truth. For Arendt, truth brings about a threat of uniformity that can eliminate plurality. Plurality, on the contrary, is necessary for political activities because Arendtian political actions require plural and

diverse spectators who can judge these actions (Arendt 1998, Passerin D'Entreves 1989). Indeed, public debates need a plurality of opinions. This approach prioritizes specific types of activities, requiring deliberation and mechanisms for communication among different actors.

Therefore, in this Kantian-Arendtian construction, debates are the foundation of politics. This construction does not disqualify actions as such, rather it puts all activities within specific frameworks presupposing that political development requires plurality of groups involved in debates. Then, it suggests that activities are analyzed and estimated in terms of the quality of discussions and public spheres. However, this approach ignores other types of political actions, which do not presuppose plurality and deliberation.

Alongside Arendt, Jürgen Habermas builds his theory around the concept of the public sphere. In his *Transformation of the Public Sphere*, he studies the formation and function of the modern bourgeois society and the way in which private people came together to debate publicly (Habermas 1991: 27). These public debates of private people expressing their opinions on turn affect the political realm. Habermas upholds the significance of deliberation and individual judgment for politics. In this sense Habermas is even more radical than Arendt, as he does not distinguish debates from actions. This framework is limited in the way it requires mainly the development of deliberative mechanisms, which should involve as many participants as possible.

Between theories of Arendt and Habermas and the sociology of social movements still exists a missing link. Nancy Fraser bridges this gap between political philosophy and empirical research. She notes that Habermas's concept of the public sphere contributes to theorizing social movements (Fraser 1990); Fraser tries to radicalize his theory by demonstrating how public spheres and hence, deliberative processes, can be expanded. While Habermas focused on the bourgeois public spheres, she advanced the notion of 'counterpublics' (Fraser 1990). The bourgeois public sphere is exclusive, unequal, and largely inaccessible for numerous social groups, including subaltern classes. According to Fraser, this means that multiple publics and counterpublics should exist, ensuring the participation of all groups. From a normative point of view, she sees the implementation of social justice as a 'participatory parity' relying on the 'democratic processes of public debate' and repudiating 'monological' decisions (Fraser 2003: 43). Therefore, social movements and theories of the public sphere are interconnected. In the rest of this section, I focus on the way in which the sociology of social movements studies the relationship between grassroots activities and politics, and further discuss problems caused by the prioritization of deliberation.

Social movements can be defined as 'collective challenges, based on common purposes and social solidarities, in sustained interaction with elites, opponents, and authorities' (Tarrow 2011: 9). Charles Tilly considers social movements as 'a major vehicle for ordinary people's participation in public politics' (Tilly 2004: 3). While social movements differ from political parties and groups of interests, they are related to labor unions and civic initiatives. Tilly (2004) reminds us that the history of social movements began in the nineteenth century United Kingdom

with the first workers' organizations; the decline of the labor movement in the second half of the twentieth century, however, brought other movements to the forefront of academic interest. Mario Diani (1992) emphasizes that, by definition, social movements act 'largely outside the institutional sphere and the routine procedures of social life' (Diani 1992: 7). The fact that trade unions are more institutionalized and routinized in comparison to social movements does not mean that unions cannot act outside routine procedures. In some contexts, trade unions use 'noninstitutional forms of protest, such as unsanctioned strikes, rallies, and street actions' and 'resemble a social movement' (Bizyukov and Olimpieva 2014: 65). While trade unions are not necessarily part of social movements, they can circumstantially act *as* social movements and be considered through the prism of the literature on social movements. Besides, acting in a manner of social movements and addressing issues beyond industrial relations are among strategies used by trade unions to recover and secure their influence (Jansson and Uba 2019).

According to Sydney Tarrow (2011), social movements generate so called 'contentious politics' which is different from representative politics because contentious politics involve 'ordinary people' confronting elites and authorities. Tarrow argues that if contention 'spreads across an entire society' and is 'organized around opposed or multiple sovereignties, the outcome is a revolution' (Tarrow 2011: 16). Elaborating on the term 'contentious politics', Graeme Robertson (2013) notes that this concept includes also social and labor protests, civil wars, rebellions, riots, and so on. Scholars see a continuum between local protests and revolutions. Thus, social movements have a political potential and can evolve into significant challenges to existing regimes.

'Contentious politics' is considered as a continuum from moderate rallies to revolutions. Analyzing contentious politics, Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow argue that it 'involves interactions in which actors make claims bearing on someone else's interests, leading to coordinated efforts on behalf of shared interests, or programs, in which governments are involved as targets, initiators of claims, or third parties' (Tilly and Tarrow 2007: 4). Here, governments are a necessary element of contentious politics. Defining political actors, Tilly and Tarrow also mention governments. Political actors are defined as 'recognizable sets of people who carry on collective action in which governments are directly or indirectly involved, making and/or receiving contentious claims' (Tilly and Tarrow 2007: 74). In other words, this approach attaches politics to governments, social conflicts, and social movements. This approach does not treat politics as an autonomous realm.

Social movements promote social changes and can espouse democratization (Sztompka 1993, Tilly 2004). The specific perspectives of scholars analyzing social movements also influence their approach to politics, democracy, and democratization. In general, they emphasize the importance of citizens' participation, deliberative mechanisms, and quality of the public sphere. According to Tilly, 'democratization means the formation of a regime featuring relatively broad, equal, categorical, binding consultation and protection' (Tilly 2004: 128). Hence, the main contribution of social movements to the formation of democratic regimes is

consultation and deliberation, including the promotion of dialogue with the authorities.

Donatella Della Porta and Mario Diani (2006) note that successful social movements change public policy by increasing citizens' involvement in legislature procedures and other processes of decision making. One example of success are the social movements in Porto Alegre (Brazil), where activists achieved participatory budgeting ensuring their participation in the adoption of the local budget and, hence, in the decision making. Nina Eliasoph emphasizes that civic practices create 'contexts for political conversation in the potential public spheres' (Eliasoph 1996: 263), which is a precondition for democracy. Social movements are capable of creating a public sphere, whose function is 'to make society hear their messages' (Melucci 1985: 815).

In short, social movements contribute to the improvement of the public sphere and, therefore, promote democratization which presupposes the development of deliberative procedures.

Deliberation is important because, according to many authors, it is a precondition and a significant part of democracy (cf. Mansbridge et al. 2012). Even though deliberative systems may, in principle, exist under non-democratic regimes, they typically serve as a tool or driver of potential democratization (Parkinson 2012).

Students of deliberative democracy mention the role of Habermas in 'reviving the idea of deliberation in our time, and giving it a more thoroughly democratic foundation' (Gutmann and Thompson 2004: 9). The 'marriage' of democracy and deliberation, concluded in Habermasian thought, meant that democracy needs to include as many citizens as possible. Deliberation, according to some scholars, assists in avoiding extremism and enables citizen participation in decision-making regardless of the distribution of political, social, and economic power (Rostboll 2008; Shapiro 1999).

At the same time, social movements might be presented as a threat to deliberative processes. Some scholars argue that grassroots direct actions espouse confrontation rather than deliberation (Young 2001). However, confrontation also can result in peaceful debates and finally contribute to deliberative processes. Archon Fung and Erik Olin Wright (2003) claim that grassroots movements involve citizens into decision-making procedures, balance other groups of influence, and, hence, deepen democracy. In other words, confrontation provoked by protesters adjusts and balances, rather than undermines, deliberative processes.

Donatella della Porta, among others, notes that contemporary liberal democracies lose their legitimacy (Della Porta 2013; Della Porta 2019). Inequality, lack of trust in political parties and state institutions, and the erosion of nation states challenge democracy. These challenges are fuelled by right-wing populists. Della Porta argues that democracy can be saved by social movements promoting participatory and deliberative models of democracy.

Della Porta also seeks to address concerns that social movements may potentially threaten already established institutions and damage deliberative values. She notes that 'what we need to restore democratic legitimacy and efficacy ... is

more participation by the citizens. Not only is participation essential to restoring trust in institutions, it is also a way to develop good citizenship' (Della Porta 2019: 613). According to her, social movements bridge participatory and deliberative forms of democracy and contribute to peaceful solutions of conflicts through dialogue (Della Porta 2013). In fact, social movements stabilize existing regimes. Della Porta mostly focuses on democratic regimes, while also noting that social movements promote transition to democracy. In the current dissertation, however, I demonstrate that grassroots protests can play a stabilizing role not only in democratic, but in authoritarian regimes as well.

At the same time, Della Porta mentions that the 'institutionalization and moderation of social movements in the 1980s and 1990s and their integration into increasingly institutionalized forms of politics' led to their isolation in 'the institutional sphere of politics' (Della Porta 2013: 165). Since non-institutionalized movements consequently obtain an image of violent protesters, they face harsh response on the part of the state. However, Della Porta does not explicitly criticize the institutionalization of movements and does not analyze what leads protesters to institutionalization. Christian Davenport (2015) summarizes factors which lead to a decline and demobilization of social movements. Besides external factors, which include resource deprivation, repressions, and propaganda, and internal factors, namely burnout, factionalization, loss of members, lost commitment, and rigidity, he points out so called 'positive demobilization'. This term refers to a situation where a social movement has succeeded and no longer needs to engage in protest. A social movement organization might decide that its goals have been achieved and 'the claims-making effort has been accommodated and/or incorporated into the existing political economy' (Davenport 2015: 22). Thus, accommodation and incorporation are considered as a sign of success.

One of the main problems faced by a deliberative democracy is the maintenance of participation. As previously mentioned, participation requires developed grassroots initiatives which enable the inclusion of various social groups. In this way, social movements and deliberative democracy are interconnected and justify each other. Social movements involve citizens in public politics and make deliberation possible and meaningful, while deliberative procedures provide tools enabling social movements to achieve specific goals. Building on these relations among grassroots movements, deliberation, and democracy, I will now address the application of the reviewed theoretical approaches to the Russian case.

The development of social movements and trade unions and their contribution to politics in Russia were summarized in a detailed study by Karine Clement, Olga Miryasova, and Andrey Demidov, *From Philistines to Activists*. This book, published in 2010, predicted that 'step by step, alongside the growth of civic initiatives horizontal ties among local and thematic movements are getting stronger' (Clement, Demidov and Miryasova 2010: 647). Here, the strengthening of social movements meant enhanced cooperation of different protest groups.

The authors thought that this development could have led to 'deep social changes' and to 'undermining of the existing relations of domination and subordination' (Clement, Demidov and Miryasova 2010: 658). This would have been

possible because the participants of social movements accumulated new experience and recognized their confrontation with the 'power vertical'. The book argued that the recognition of this confrontation and the engagement with the problems of the society as a whole was equivalent to the 'politicization' of social movements. The authors believed that a gradual development of protest initiatives could 'teach' protesters how to create a political subject.

The book represented a perspective on relations among social movements, trade unions, the state, and politics, in which Russian social movements and trade unions were expected to turn into a political challenge to the regime. This idea was reaffirmed in a later study *Urban Movements in Russia in 2009–2012: On the Way to the Political* (Clement et al. 2013), where the authors conclude that political movements are a logical continuation of social protests.

Graeme Robertson expected that protests from below could 'help break down elite consensus and monopolistic consensus' and improve 'the quality of political participation in the future' (Robertson 2010: 212–213). He and Samuel Greene wrote about numerous labor protests and strikes provoked by the 2008–2009 economic crisis: 'Politically, too, the strike wave has potentially threatening implications for the current regime' (Greene and Robertson 2010: 91). They assumed that examples of successful labor and social movements might inspire other people who were 'dissatisfied with the narrow politics of Putin's Russia' (Greene and Robertson 2010: 91). Stephen Crowley and Irina Olimpieva (2018) mention that although labor and social protests do not threaten the regime at the moment, these protests can become politicized.

However, these predictions did not materialize; no political project has emerged out of social movements or trade unions in Russia. I argue that this prognostic failure reflects certain key problems in the sociological approaches in general. They suppose that successful social movements are agents of 'deep social changes', whereas in fact their successes often strengthen authoritarian regimes. For example, Lorenzo Bosi claims that democratization is galvanized by the incorporation of social movements into the 'formal political terrain' and their institutionalization (Bosi 2016: 340). Hence, the main contribution of social movements to the formation of democratic regimes is consultation and deliberation, including the enhancement of the dialogue with the authorities. In the existing literature, the absence of significant social change is often connected to a lack of the institutionalization of protest movements (for example: Klimov 2014).

Samuel Greene, who highlights 'the amorphous nature of the [Russian] state', explains the difficulties of social movements by referring to the deinstitutionalization of the state, which atomizes 'the experiences of the citizens' (Greene 2014: 2018). Robertson (2011) argues that the lack of independent organizations hinders the development of social and labor protests, while trade unions are integrated in the 'power vertical'. The underdevelopment of the public sphere in Russia and the absence of a 'common program', which could unite various protests, are also mentioned among reasons preventing politicization of social movements (Clement et al. 2013).

Clement (2015) also argues that politicization of social movements is limited due to 'the narrowness of a politics that boils down to either supporting or opposing Putin, leaving little room for a political understanding of the problems of daily life'. According to Clement, 'state populism' is to blame for the lack of the political development of protests.

From my perspective, the enhancement of dialogue between protest groups and the authorities often defuses the political potential of protests. This problem is rarely addressed in the literature on social movements and trade unions. Stephen Crowley and Irina Olimpieva (2017) point out that although labor and social protests do not threaten the regime at the moment they occur, these protests can become politicized. Karine Clement and Anna Zhelnina (2019) note that protesters often address political issues at the local level but abstain from so called 'high politics' (Clement and Zhelnina 2019). Social movements studies, however, do not have tools to distinguish between different types of politics and cannot answer the question why protesters do not transit from 'low politics' to 'high politics'.

Within the sociology of social movements, politics is inextricably linked to participation in public debates. Then, it is not clear why even successful social movements, which address political issues and expand the public sphere, do not provoke any democratization in Russia. In other words, the sociology of social movements fails to address the limitation of the type of politicization that presupposes the development of deliberative mechanisms. Moreover, although social movements can successfully solve particular problems, they are not able to significantly improve people's lives. In the long term it can be said that protest groups arrive at an accommodation with the regime, and some of their achievements can be gradually undermined.

There is no satisfactory analysis investigating relations between politics and grassroots movements. Some scholars argue that institutions of authoritarian regimes can mutate and contribute to democratization. For example, Xi Chen (2008) argues that some institutions which were supposed to serve authoritarianism can be used for 'popular mobilization'. In the case of China protesters utilize 'collective petitioning' to affect decision-making processes. Since the Chinese political system permits petitioning, some institutions of this system can facilitate collective actions, and 'inside-out' type of mobilization can be effective. This assumption is based on Guillermo O'Donnell's and Philippe Schmitter's note about the possible 'conversion of older institutions, such as trade unions, professional associations, and universities, from agents of governmental control into instruments for the expression of interests, ideals, and rage against the regime' (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986: 49). In the case of Russia, where collective petitioning is also a widespread means of protest actions, there is no evidence of the conversion of institutions. Petitioning channels popular discontent towards compromises with the regime rather than converting institutions. Danielle Lussier (2016) considers petitioning as an example of 'contacting' and 'elite-enabling' activities which support and ensure the existing regime. 'Elite-enabling' activities are contrasted by Lussier to so called 'elite-constraining' activities promoting

democratization. However, not only petitioning but even protests that are typically classified as ‘elite-constraining’, such as rallies and strikes, can in fact contribute to the sustainability of the present regime. In other words, protest can be ‘elite-enabling’ as well as ‘elite-constraining’. Existing literature does not properly address this phenomenon.

I argue that conventional approaches to protest movements cannot accurately describe the relationship between protest movements and politics, as well as the capacities of these movements. In fact, there is a fragmented public space, where deliberative procedures are possible and protest movements can emerge and partially succeed. I propose a new perspective on the grassroots activities of subaltern classes and on the obstacles for the transition from social and labor protests to acquiring political subjectivity.

CHAPTER 2.

Transformism, political subjectivity, and popular politics

This chapter covers the theoretical framework of the dissertation and provides definitions of the main concepts used here.

First of all, I define transformism and discuss how this term is utilized by different approaches. Then, I elaborate on the distinction between the types of politics. This distinction was introduced by Ernesto Laclau, who did not, however, go into much detail. This chapter shows how the development of Gramsci's and Laclau's concepts contributes to the understanding of grassroots movements and their political impact.

The chapter also discusses the methods used in this dissertation and the case selection.

The definition of transformism in Gramsci's texts

For the current dissertation, three of Gramsci's terms are important, namely hegemony, transformism, and historical bloc. In *Some Aspects of the Southern Question*, Gramsci addresses 'hegemony of the proletariat', which is defined as the 'social basis of the proletarian dictatorship and of the workers' State' (Gramsci 1978: 443). He explains that '[t]he proletariat can become the leading and the dominant class to the extent that it succeeds in creating a system of class alliances which allows it to mobilize the majority of the working population against capitalism and the bourgeois State' (Gramsci 1978: 443). According to Gramsci, hegemony means building alliances or blocs in which one of the members plays a leading role.

Transformism is a notion connected to hegemony. According to Gramsci, transformism is defined as 'gradual but continuous absorption... of the active elements produced by allied groups – and even of those which came from antagonistic groups and seemed irreconcilably hostile' (Gramsci 1971: 215). This absorption is necessary for 'the formation of an extensive ruling class' (Gramsci 1971: 214). Ruling classes absorb, adjust, and accommodate to their own advantage the aspirations and intentions of other social groups.

Explaining this 'absorption of the active elements produced by allied groups', Gramsci introduces the notion of an 'historical bloc'. He advances this notion to adjust the classical Marxist concepts of 'structure' and 'superstructure', i.e. the relations of production and the realm of ideologies. Gramsci explained the concept of an historical bloc as follows: 'Structure and superstructure form an historical bloc. That is to say the complex, contradictory and discordant ensemble of the superstructures is the reflection of the ensemble of the social relations of production' (Gramsci 1971: 690).

It is widely recognized that the significance of the Gramscian thought consists, firstly, in considering the ‘superstructure’ as a realm which is partly independent from the ‘structure’ and, secondly, in problematizing the notion of class. In short, classes and their ideologies are not given from the very beginning. Classes are emergent phenomena which undergo transformations at both structure and superstructure levels. They can be divided into numerous social groups which may adhere to different ideas. These social groups form alliances that are reflected in ideologies. An alliance of social groups under a certain political regime and with a certain ideology is basically an historical bloc (cf. Morton 2007: 96–97). The term ‘alliance’ presupposes that relations among social groups within an historical bloc are cooperative. Although an historical bloc is organized hierarchically, stable relations within this hierarchical alliance require mutual concessions by different groups.

Gramsci developed the concept of transformism in the context of his reflections on passive revolution. Both of these phenomena explain the process of gradual capitalist reforms under the control of liberal or conservative bourgeoisie, without any revolutionary outbreaks. Gramsci compares the French revolution, which (from the Marxist viewpoint) destroyed the old regime and established a new capitalist order through the popular rebellion, and the Italian transition from the archaic feudal formation to capitalism, which left the old aristocracy in place and did not involve any popular uprisings. Gramsci argues that the transformist strategy of ‘absorption’ ‘was the brilliant solution of these problems which made the Risorgimento possible, in the form in which it was achieved (and with its limitations) – as “revolution” without a “revolution”, or as “passive revolution”’ (Gramsci 1971: 215). Therefore, while passive revolution means social and economic change in the absence of popular political subjectivity, transformism is the process which enables such changes by hindering political subjectivation.

There are two main approaches to the study of transformism. The first one is developed in International Political Economy (IPE). The second one is based on poststructuralist theories and can be found in the texts of Ernesto Laclau.

Transformism and international political economy

Adam David Morton, one of the leading scholars who has developed the concept of transformism in the field of IPE, defines transformism as ‘attempts to remove substantive difference and establish a convergence between contending social class forces’ (Morton 2007: 98). Writing on passive revolution, he describes it as ‘a condition in which capitalist development is either instituted and/or expanded, resulting in both “revolutionary” rupture and a “restoration” of social relations’ (Morton 2011: 4). It means that passive revolution combines capitalist economic development, and modernization, on the one hand, and preservation of the ruling elites, conservation of inequality, and suppression of popular activity, on the other hand. The social, political, and economic order forged under a passive revolution is conservative and reactionary but requires an alliance between dominant and

subaltern classes, even though this alliance is always unequal and hierarchical. Morton's definitions elaborate the classical proposed by Gramsci. While Gramsci focused on political issues, Morton adds an economic dimension.

Robert Cox, another important IPE scholar and neo-Gramscian theorist, adds that transformism is a 'major feature of passive revolution' and 'can serve as a strategy of assimilating and domesticating potentially dangerous ideas by adjusting them to policies of the dominant coalition' (Cox 1994: 55). As he also mentions, passive revolution is an 'introduction of changes which did not involve any arousal of popular forces' (Cox 1994: 54). Thus, transformism and passive revolution presuppose the evolution of the regime and moderate social and economic changes which do not lead to an elite change. Also, Cox mentions an important metaphor of 'domestication', which implies that a group challenging ruling elites gradually loses the independence and turns into a subordinated ally of these elites.

Transformism and passive revolution require an expansion of the state apparatus. 'The "passive revolution" ... issues as a kind of "statisation" of the transition which destroys the impact of every popular initiative' (Buci-Glucksmann 2014: 219). Morton also emphasizes that the 'modern state imposes itself on society and space through an attempt to homogenize relations of power' (Morton 2010: 12). Cox notes that 'one typical accompaniment of passive revolution ... is caesarism: a strong man intervenes to resolve the stalemate between equal and opposed social forces' (Cox 1994: 54).

The notions of transformism and passive revolution have been widely applied in the study of political, economic and social processes in Latin America. In 'Revolution and State in Modern Mexico' Morton describes the economic and state development as 'contested class practices' and analyses the interrelation between revolutionary rupture and restoration. He shows how the popular uprising, which accompanied the 1910 revolution, was later assimilated by the state. The ultimate establishment of an authoritarian regime in Mexico precluded independent political activity and modernized the country under the conditions of depoliticization. The regime incorporated the subaltern classes' organizations, which had emerged during the revolution, into the new social and political order. In short, the Mexican regime managed to neutralize the popular uprising through various methods, from coercion and repression, to cooptation and the building of alliances.

Morton supplements political economy with historical sociology. Though the state remains an important part of his approach, he criticizes state-oriented approaches: 'A compelling case is therefore made for a decentered conception of politics by examining the interconnectedness and permeability of state and civil society in order to appreciate the multiple sites of resistance contesting state hegemonic processes' (Morton 2011: 8–9).

Thus, Morton demonstrates that modern capitalism and the modern state in Mexico were formed alongside the incorporation of peasants' and workers' organizations into the social and political order, a process that played a significant role during the revolution. Morton emphasizes 'the development of property relations through state intervention – through the inclusion of new social groups

within conservative political order. There is no expansion of mass control over politics' (Morton 2010: 18).

Writing on the economic structure, Morton relies on the concept of uneven and combined development, which foregrounds regional heterogeneity and the influence of the global capitalist economy on the national economies (Morton 2010). The focus on heterogeneity allows Morton to introduce spatial elements in his analysis. Uneven and combined development, a term originally advanced by Leon Trotsky, means that the development of the global economy affects the development of national economies, while developing countries combine in their economies social and political systems pre-modern elements inherited from their own past and modern elements borrowed from developed countries. Morton uses uneven and combined development in his own concept of 'internalization of the international (geopolitical) factors' (Morton 2011: 60). In other words, the analysis of economic and social development of any given country should take the international environment into account. Economically backward countries are influenced by more developed capitalist economies. Hence, their own modernization is conducted not by popular progressive movements, which would overthrow reactionary regimes, but by conservative elites modernizing their country under the economic pressure from outside. In this case popular movements are usually suppressed (cf. Hesketh 2017).

Neo-Gramscian IPE has been also applied to other countries of Latin America. For example, Jeffery Webber tries to explain agrarian reforms in Bolivia under Evo Morales through the lens of transformism. In his study of the reforms from 2006 to 2016 he argues that during this period 'relatively open contestation and contingency' were 'followed by the strong realignment of restoration through a novel agro-capital-state alliance' (Webber 2016: 345). According to him, the window of possibilities was opened with the beginning of the agrarian reforms in 2006 and was closed when agro-industrial capital forged a new alliance with the state and 'agrarian oligarchs' were 'reinstalled in power' (Webber 2016: 345). Webber demonstrates how, after the radical agrarian reforms introduced in the early years of Morales's rule and the popular mobilization they precipitated, previous conditions partly reemerged, followed by a decline of peasants' movements.

Chris Hesketh and Adam Morton study another period of Bolivia's history by looking at the 1952 revolution. They argue that 'the Bolivian revolution was to significantly reorganize social property relations but in a manner that continued forms of class domination perpetuated through the expropriation and dispossession of peasants by large-scale capitalist enterprises' (Hesketh and Morton 2014: 154). Even though the organized working class played a significant role in the revolution, workers' and peasants' initiatives were eventually co-opted by the state which created pro-governmental unions. '[R]adical class demands were displaced or defeated by the specific road to capitalism, shaped through the slow transformation of large landholdings into capitalist enterprises' (Hesketh and Morton 2014: 155).

As these examples show, neo-Gramscian IPE scholars have thoroughly revised the concept of transformism and demonstrated its applicability to a large variety

of cases. They analyze the economic, social, and historical conditions of transformism and passive revolution. However, IPE scholars concentrate mainly on the economic structure and consider the political struggle as largely determined by the former. The specific moments of transformism when grassroots activities and regimes' responses meet are usually eclipsed by over-detailed descriptions of the economic conditions and the international environment.

In contrast to this approach, I focus not on economic policies and kaleidoscopes of economic conditions, but rather on the people's activities and the regime's reactions. When Vladimir Lenin was defining the revolutionary situation, he mentioned two preconditions for such a situation: the lower classes do not want to live in the old way and the upper classes are unable to live in the old way (Lenin 1964: 213–214). This contradiction between willingness and capacities of the subaltern classes and the elites is essential for my analysis. Willingness and capacities emerge and change in specific and unique moments of time and do not necessarily depend on economic conditions.

Concepts of transformism and passive revolution are regularly applied to the analysis of long-term developments. Morton, for example, described the epochs of Machiavelli, Risorgimento, and fascism. He studied the evolution of the Mexican regime from the 1930s to the present times. Gramscian theorists have attributed these concepts to Stalinism, Fordism, and social democratic policies after the Second World War (e.g. Buci-Glucksmann 2014). Kees van der Pijl, meanwhile, explains Russian history from 1861 to the collapse of the USSR (the October revolution was a short interruption) in terms of passive revolution (van der Pijl 1994). This macrohistorical approach, however, cannot address short moments of political events.

To summarize, the approach of IPE explains macrohistorical evolution while neglecting mechanisms of transformism under particular conditions of relations between grassroots movements and regimes' responses. Then, the concept of transformism is often used to analyze reforms which are not connected to grassroots activities (cf. Bruff 2010). Although transformism is possible during periods of 'ordinary normal life' without revolutions, the approach of IPE tells us nothing about the day-to-day management of grassroots activities. My approach is closer to Ernesto Laclau's poststructuralist analysis in that it distinguishes popular politics associated with revolutionary upheaval from democratic politics in a nonrevolutionary context.

Transformism, popular politics, and democratic politics

Laclau reinterpreted Gramsci's concepts within the framework of poststructuralist discourse analysis. He distinguishes between two logics that define the interaction among discursive elements, i.e. articulatory logics. The first one is the logic of equivalence. This logic combines particular elements 'by making them all bearers of a meaning which transcends their particularity' and creates 'equivalent chains' (Laclau 2000a: 303). The second is the logic of difference,

which works in the opposite way by conserving the particularity of discursive elements. Laclau associates the logic of difference with transformistic strategy. On this basis Laclau differentiates between democratic and popular demands: 'The first can be accommodated within an expanding hegemonic formation; the second presents a challenge to the hegemonic formation as such' (Laclau 2005a: 82). Democratic demands are 'the punctual demands which the system could absorb in a transformistic way', while popular demands are 'a large set of simultaneous demands presented as a unified whole' (Laclau 2005a: 82).

Here, Laclau relies on the notion of hegemonic formation. Laclau and Mouffe develop this notion on the basis of Gramsci's concept of historical bloc, by adding Michel Foucault's concept of discursive formation. The term 'discursive formation' addresses 'a regularity' 'between objects, types of statement, concepts or thematic choices' (Foucault 2002: 41). At the same time, Foucault emphasizes that discursive formation is 'a system of dispersion' (Foucault 2002: 41). In other words, discursive formation is not a 'well-defined alphabet of notions' or 'permanence of a thematic' but a series of gaps and transformations and 'various strategic possibilities' (Foucault 2002: 41).

Laclau and Mouffe also stress the incoherence of elements within an historical bloc, understood as a hegemonic formation: 'The type of link joining the different elements of the historical bloc — not unity in any form of historical a priori, but regularity in dispersion — coincides with our concept of discursive formation' (Laclau and Mouffe 2001: 136). Thus, a hegemonic formation consists of different spaces run by local but interconnected logics.

Popular demands are antagonistic to the current rule. Meanwhile, democratic demands co-exist with any present order and enable transformism to preserve the already existing formation. Oliver Marchart, who emphasizes the importance of Laclau's theory for the study of social movements differentiates 'between forms of "democratic protest" and those of "popular protest", where the former exhibit a low degree of antagonization due to the defense of merely corporate or sectoral interests, while the latter aims at a much wider alliance of struggles' (Marchart 2012: 236). Populism drives the building of coalitions and consequent political subjectivation and requires 'the generation of a political antagonism of such intensity that promotes the partition of society into two irreconcilable and rigid camps' (Peruzzotti 2017: 51).

In his analysis Laclau proposes an additional classification of demands and distinguishes between two types of demands. The first type is requests. A request is a demand addressing a local problem. This demand can be satisfied by the local authorities. Laclau writes: 'If it is satisfied, that is the end of the matter' (Laclau 2005a: 73). However, an unsatisfied request can turn into a second type of demands which is a claim. The main difference between requests and claims is that requests passively accept the legitimacy of the existing institutions while claims presuppose a critique of the institutions (Laclau 2006: 656). Thus, claims can give birth to politics. However, the specific type of politics is not yet predetermined. If claims are limited and isolated, popular politics does not emerge. Popular politics requires claims introduced against the whole hegemonic

formation. Laclau provides an example of demands posed by the 1917 Russian revolution: 'peace, bread, and land'. Initially these demands were addressed to the tsarist regime. Later, they turned into demands against the regime as such. 'Once we move beyond a certain point, what were requests within institutions became claims addressed to institutions, and at some stage they become claims against the institutional order' (Laclau 2006: 655).

In terms of social movements it means that a protest initiative starts with a request addressing a parochial problem. Then, this initiative can transit to a claim and criticize the local authorities. This claim becomes a democratic demand which enables democratic politics. However, democratic politics is inferior to popular politics, while transition from democratic politics to popular politics is never guaranteed.

Laclau's theoretical framework is anything but conventional. Students of social movements usually do not distinguish between popular politics and democratic politics. The development of democratic protests is equated with politicization. Moreover, the understanding of 'politicization' also varies. Scholars such as Grigorii Golosov describe politicization as 'the increase in the number of people who are interested in politics and ready to discuss and think about it' (Golosov 2018). Even though democratic protests can solve particular problems and promote relative improvements in a separate sphere or region, these improvements do not trigger significant political changes. At the same time, these relative improvements may be vulnerable to the countermeasures taken by the old elites.

According to Laclau, antagonism and, hence, popular politics create a political subject. Laclau borrows the concept of antagonism from Carl Schmitt. In his well-known work *The Concept of the Political*, Schmitt writes: 'The specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that between friend and enemy' (Schmitt 2007: 26). Thus, Schmitt defines politics through antagonism emerging from the distinction between friend and enemy. Laclau argues that one of Schmitt's merits is his focus on hostility and antagonism which is 'at the very center of political analysis' (Laclau 2005b: 11). At the same time, various types of politics can treat antagonism differently, and democratic politics mitigates antagonism. Chantal Mouffe proposes to distinguish between antagonism and agonism: 'Antagonism is struggle between enemies, while agonism is struggle between adversaries' (Mouffe 2000: 102–103). The difference between enemy and adversary is that the enemy is to be destroyed, while an adversary is 'somebody whose ideas we combat but whose right to defend those ideas we do not put into question... An adversary is ... a legitimate enemy, one with whom we have some common ground' (Mouffe 2000: 102). It is noteworthy that Laclau does not use the term 'agonism'. He emphasizes that the logic of equivalence, which underlies popular politics, 'introduces negativity and social division' and triggers antagonism which is always present in every society (Laclau 2000b: 7). Meanwhile, Mouffe considers the transformation of antagonism into agonism as a goal of politics. In her book *For a Left Populism* she argues that 'left populism' is supposed to establish a 'new order' within the liberal-democratic framework (Mouffe 2018). Laclau, on the contrary, does not restrict popular politics to

liberal-democratic frameworks. He rather criticizes the defenders of existing institutions and advocates ‘radical social changes’ linked to ‘a shift in the relationship of forces’ between social groups (Laclau 2012). Thus, Laclau’s and Mouffe’s approaches do not necessarily coincide.

However, politics is a generic term. Different approaches propose various definitions of politics and describe particular types of politics. Hereinafter, to avoid possible confusion, I will distinguish between ‘political subjectivation’ and ‘politicization’: the former presupposes action, while the latter can be reduced to increased societal interest toward political issues. Then, popular politics corresponds to political subjectivation and an antagonistic type of politics, while democratic politics corresponds to politicization and nonantagonistic type of politics.

Populism requires the unification of separate demands and the creation of a new hegemonic formation which is antagonistic towards the existing one. The political subjectivation of a social or labor protest is a transfiguration of particularistic democratic demands into popular demands. While populism presupposes that representatives of different groups overcome their particularities and compose a new subject, transformism does the opposite. In transformism, particularistic demands of protest groups are partly satisfied and transformed, leading to these groups being unable to broaden their protest activity. Since democratic politics involves punctual and sectoral demands and does not unify them in a whole, it facilitates transformistic processes.

Here, it is obvious that Laclau’s approach to populism is far from mainstream approaches which regularly define populism as an ideology contrasting ‘elites’ and ‘the people’ (cf. Enyedi 2015, Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017). This term is usually used in a pejorative way. While critics of populism condemn this phenomenon as a threat to democratic institutions and an instrument of manipulation in the hands of irresponsible politicians, Laclau points out that institutionalism prevents popular mobilization and alienates people from politics (Laclau 2012).

The mainstream understanding of populism seems vague because it lumps together disparate political forces. Since populism is a form of political struggle, it can be used by various actors. From this point of view, politicians such as Donald Trump, Viktor Orbán, or the Italian *Five Stars Movement*, who are usually blamed by mass media for being populists, may simply employ some populist strategies. As previously mentioned, Laclau argues that antagonism is a necessary dimension of politics, and that social divisions are irreconcilable. Hence, all political actors have to deal with antagonism and hostility in some way. Since mainstream approaches normalize liberal democracy, they presuppose that politicians should avoid antagonism and smoothen up social divisions. As clear from the above, Laclau does not prioritize societal consensus over political conflict – rather, he is in favor of the latter due to its importance for popular representation.

In Laclau’s terms, populism has three preconditions: ‘the formation of an internal antagonistic frontier separating people from power’, ‘an equivalential articulation of demands making the emergence of the people possible’, and ‘the unification of these various demands into a stable system of signification’ (Laclau

2005a: 74). In other words, Laclau's populism requires a popular political movement. Thus, a simple appeal to people and critique of elites do not suffice as criteria of populism. Populism constructs a new people and a new hegemonic formation instead of modifying the existing one. As previously mentioned, the construction of a new formation means a shift in the relationship of forces between social groups (Laclau 2012). As every hegemonic formation is hierarchical, this shift also means the destruction of an old hierarchy and the creation of a new one.

This in-depth, strict, and rigorous analysis of populism distinguishes it from transformism. The contrast between populism and transformism lies in the fact that populism entails antagonism, the unification of demands and, hence, politics, whereas transformism refers to an anti-political administration which neutralizes antagonism (Beasley-Murray 2010: 46). While populism constructs a new hegemonic formation and a new people, transformism revises old ones.

Administration and politics

The distinction between politics and administration is important for the understanding of transformism. Laclau argues that the political moment is a moment of hostility, while 'administration' sets limits to hostility. Thus, the logic of equivalence, which drives political subjectivation, triggers social division by introducing negativity, while the logic of difference 'organizes the positivity of the social' (Laclau 2005b: 7). Laclau equates his distinction between logic of equivalence and logic of difference to the distinction between politics and administration. Besides, he refers to Jacques Rancière, who distinguishes between the police and politics in the same way. A brief analysis of Rancière's thought clarifies the difference between politics and administration.

According to Rancière, the police is a 'system of distribution and legitimization... The police is essentially, the law, generally implicit, that defines a party's share or lack of it...' (Rancière 1999: 28–29). In other words, the police is the administration which structures the existing order. It defines and redefines the positions of different elements in this order. Politics is an 'extremely determined activity antagonistic to policing: whatever breaks with the tangible configuration whereby parties and parts or lack of them are defined by a presupposition that, by definition, has no place in that configuration – that of the part of those who have no part' (Rancière 1999: 29–30).

Therefore, while the police is a conservative process which rules over the existing order and establishes a hierarchy and links among its elements, politics breaks the order. Rancière explains the contradiction between the police and politics by analyzing the trial of Auguste Blanqui, a French socialist, in 1832. When asked about his profession by a prosecutor, Blanqui replied that he was a 'proletarian'. Rancière notes: 'For the prosecutor, embodying police logic, profession means job, trade... The proletarian class in which Blanqui professes to line himself up is in no way identifiable with a social group. The proletariat are neither manual workers nor the labor classes. They are the class of the uncounted...'

(Rancière 1999: 37–38). According to Rancière's idea, particular identities are maintained by the police or the administration. Due to the fact that Blanqui's self-identification surmounted separated workers' identities imposed by administration and attached to specific jobs or trades, his gesture was seen as significant and dangerous for the police order.

Rancière introduces the metaphor of 'counting' to demonstrate the abstract mechanism of relations between the 'police order' and the subaltern classes. The latter are divided into particular professions that have much in common with other social groups such as entrepreneurs, for example. The subaltern classes are not counted in the 'police order' as the whole but they can be counted as workers of separate particular professions or jobs.

Transformism and Rancière's police address the same phenomena. Whereas the police represents only one side of transformism, the regime's response to grassroots activities, transformism as a whole is a process in which not only the regime but also the subaltern classes are involved. In other words, transformism is possible when the police is successful and effective, and the subaltern classes do not move from democratic politics to popular politics. Thus, I will use the term 'the police' to describe the regime's responses to grassroots activities within transformistic processes.

Rancière further demonstrates that the subaltern classes are divided into particular groups, which are only counted by the police. This significant division is one which I will analyze in my empirical sections.

The problem of universality

The dichotomy of particularity and universality is an important issue which directly concerns the concept of transformism. As the opposite of transformism, populism presupposes overcoming particular identities. Gramsci wrote: 'The proletariat, in order to become capable as a class of governing, must strip itself of every residue of corporatism, every syndicalist prejudice and incrustation' (Gramsci 1978: 448). Thus, Gramsci's understanding of politics is connected to universalism. He elaborated here on Lenin's approach toward the development of 'class political consciousness'. Lenin argues that political consciousness does not derive from the experience of workers as a separate social group. In his important text *What Is to Be Done?*, Lenin writes: 'To bring political knowledge to the workers the Social Democrats must go among all classes of the population' (Lenin 1960: 422). Politics comes into existence if workers do not restrict themselves to their parochial problems and interests but engage in 'the sphere of relationships of all classes and strata to the state and the government' (Lenin 1960: 422), i.e. if they become a universal class. This idea derives from Karl Marx's works. In his *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, Marx famously writes that proletariat is 'a class of civil society which is not a class of civil society, an estate which is the dissolution of all estates, a sphere which has a universal character by its universal suffering' (Marx 1975: 186). However, the difference here is that for Lenin and

Gramsci proletariat is not given but needs to be constructed as workers have to overcome their particularism.

In the same line, Alain Badiou calls differences and particular identities apolitical: '[W]hat we must recognize is that these differences hold no interest for thought, that they amount to nothing more than the infinite and self-evident multiplicity of humankind... Only a truth is, as such, indifferent to differences' (Badiou 2001: 26–27). He leaves differences to 'vulgar sociology'. For Badiou, universalism, the need to overcome particular identities, is a necessary precondition of politics: 'It is a question of knowing what identitarian and communitarian categories have to do with truth procedures, with political procedures for example. We reply: these categories must be absented from the process' (Badiou 2003: 11).

Laclau, however, disagrees with Badiou on the issue of universality. Laclau argued that universality 'is the result of displacement of the frontier between the countable and the uncountable – i.e. of the construction of an expansive hegemony; if articulation is given its proper central role, naming the void is constitutively linked to the process of its filling, but this filling can only proceed through an uneasy balance between universality and particularity' (Laclau 2004: 127). For Laclau universality is inevitably contaminated by particularity because universality as such is a hegemonized particularity (Laclau 2000b: 51). Since hegemonic procedures still transfigure particularity, however, 'no particularity can become political without becoming the locus of universalizing effects' (Laclau 2000b: 56). Laclau does not specify how the hegemonized and universalized particularity changes through the universalizing and hegemonizing effect. Badiou's critique of particularism shows that universalization and hegemonization presuppose overcoming of sectorial identities and differences among them. In other words, the agent of hegemony cannot maintain its identity that exists before hegemonization.

Although Laclau and Badiou assert different views on ontology, contradictions between these two authors are not irreconcilable when it comes to universalism in politics. Laclau and Badiou, like Rancière, are antisociological thinkers. Their antisociologism does not neglect empirical studies but prevents deducing politics directly from the social.

Laclau claimed that the social is a realm of objectivity, heterogeneity, and particularity (Laclau 2000b) and argued that 'the sedimented forms of "objectivity" make up the field of what we will call the 'social'' (Laclau 1990: 35). On the contrary, the field of the political is constituted by 'the moment of antagonism' (Laclau 1990: 35). Politics does not derive directly from the social but rather is possible as a break within the social. This idea is shared by Rancière, who also posits that politics starts from a break with the police order and the emergence of a new subject, rather than from mere aspirations of any social group counted by the police. He illustrates this by turning to a moment in ancient Roman history when the plebs, who demanded equal rights with patricians, retreated to Aventine Hill and named itself the *populus*. Rancière notes that plebeians did not only leave the city. It was not a pure exodus, nor was their act limited to

declarations. Rancière notes: '[T]hey establish another order... [T]hey pronounce imprecations and apotheosis; they delegate one of their number to go and consult with their oracles; they give themselves representatives by rebaptizing them' (Rancière 1999: 24). Thus, the Roman plebeians, who were an unprivileged class, did not request privileges for themselves but broke with the whole order and established a new one because they were not the *populus* within the old order (Rancière 1999). Marchart (2007) observes the resemblance between Laclau and Rancière in the way Laclau's populism is a construction of a new political subject or a new people and Rancière's plebeians literally constructed a new people by creating an antagonistic frontier between them and the patricians: 'To translate Rancière's example into "Laclause": what the plebeians do is to construct an antagonism vis-a-vis the patricians... For Laclau, the "people" of populism is a plebs who claims to be the only legitimate *populus*' (Marchart 2007: 16–17).

Although the political subject acts under given social conditions, politics does not merely represent social conflicts: it needs specific circumstances to exist. In his seminal book *Anthropology of the Name* Sylvain Lazarus emphasizes that 'politics is not a permanent instance of societies; it is rare and sequential' (Lazarus 2015: 72). He calls the type of politics which seeks its own foundations outside itself 'politics in exteriority'. On the contrary, 'politics in interiority' has its foundations within itself. While interiority is 'marked by the homogenous multiplicity of sites', exteriority is 'characterized by a heterogeneous multiplicity and presents itself as having a single locus – the State' (Lazarus 2015: 73). Here, Lazarus follows the tradition which distinguishes politics from administration. Thus, the state is not political. It administers spheres of law and economy. According to Lazarus, the state 'stifles the prescription at work in political decisions' (Lazarus 2015: 2). The prescription is a characteristic of the political subject. The political subject prescribes solutions and makes decisions that change social relations. Lazarus argues that the contemporary state imposes consensus which limits the field of political possibilities. The state is 'identified by clear evidence of technicality and its related constraints (decisions are always presented as being good technically)... [T]he State is no longer in an antagonistic or programmatic context' (Lazarus 2015: 76). Agents of politics in exteriority express their opinions on the functional aspect of the state and discuss mainly law and economy. Although the contemporary state imposes consensus on society, the state preserves heterogeneity within society. Consensus emerges among heterogeneous groups of society due to the functioning of the state. Agents of politics in exteriority, hence, operate under the conditions of heterogeneity and have to rely on the state, which administers the relations among heterogeneous groups.

Exteriority refers not only to heterogeneity, but also to the failure to think politics from within itself, while interiority points to the self-referential character of politics. Hence, 'politics in exteriority' is not politics as such. It does not overcome heterogeneity or break with the present order, and is subordinated to the state rather than independent of it.

While Lazarus's politics is always singular, there is a difference between his politics in interiority and politics in exteriority, on the one hand, and Laclau's

popular politics and democratic politics, on the other hand. Because Lazarus understands politics as discrete sequences of unique events, while Laclau's politics is rather a process, popular politics is what potentially leads to politics in interiority and democratic politics is what potentially leads to politics in exteriority. However, the most important aspect of this comparison of Lazarus and Laclau is that popular politics breaks with the state while democratic politics cooperates with the state.

Lazarus's concept of politics in exteriority highlights the connection between social movements and parliamentarianism. He draws on his criticism of movements and parliamentarianism in his analysis of the political history of France in the 1960s–1980s. After the 1968 protests, leftist political parties experienced a gradual decay and were replaced by social movements, which were less radical and aimed at more local goals than traditional parties. Finally, these movements aligned themselves with the socialist presidency of François Mitterrand and became part of the parliamentary consensus. Thus, Lazarus describes the transition of French politics through 'the shift from the problematic of the Party to that of the movement to that of parliamentary consensus and the parliamentary State' (Lazarus 2015: 21). Lazarus argues that politics of movements is a type of politics in exteriority, because they associate their activities with the state. They are heterogenous and require the state to be their 'principle of transition to the whole' (Lazarus 2015: 21). Hence, movements achieve their goals through the state. In Laclau's terms, agents of democratic politics pose particular demands within the current hegemonic formation which makes these demands possible, meaningful, and worthwhile. Since democratic demands are isolated, they do not enable the creation of any new formation and have to coexist with the current one and, hence, cooperate with the state. According to Lazarus, parliamentary mode of politics in exteriority presupposes that politics becomes 'an opinion on the government of the functional State' (Lazarus 2015: 77).

Lazarus's thinking allows for a clarification of the conditions of possibility of popular politics and the relations between politics and the state. Since Laclau refers mostly to strategies, these strategies require a context and a discussion about the environment before one can estimate their efficiency and potential outcomes. Besides, Lazarus notes that politics in exteriority relies on the state. He also discusses the implications of the entanglement of politics in exteriority with the state. Agents of politics in exteriority deal with the functioning of the state. They strive to affect the way in which the state administrates relations among heterogeneous groups of society. In short, politics in exteriority improves state functions and contributes to the consensus imposed by the state on society. Although Laclau himself does not explicitly relate to these ideas, he is always critical toward institutions. He argues that 'we start having the people of populism' when grassroots demands become 'claims against the institutional order' (Laclau 2006: 655). While Laclau is critical towards existing liberal capitalist states, his critique sometimes remains uncertain. For example, he does not identify the relationship between different types of politics and parliamentarianism. Lazarus's perspective adds details to the discussion on grassroots movements and the state.

Neither Lazarus nor Laclau advocate an anarchist understanding of politics and the state. However, they both prioritize popular activities over state institutions. Lazarus substantiates the preponderance of the people over the state.

Thus, politics in exteriority is associated with the existing state, and democratic politics seeks a dialogue with the existing state, while politics in interiority breaks with the existing state and popular politics is antagonistic toward the existing state. Politics in interiority and politics in exteriority are better understood through Badiou's concepts of the event and truth. Since Badiou accepts Lazarus's influence in his own theories (Badiou 2006), the comparison of these two philosophers is justified. An event is a rupture within a situation, a real change which 'compels us to decide a new way of being' (Badiou 2001: 41). Borrowing terms and logic from set theory, Badiou defines situation as a persistent multiplicity (Badiou 2005). It means that there is no stable unity. Instead, different objects are grouped together and counted as one. Laclau interprets Badiou's situation as 'the field of objectivity' (Laclau 2004: 121). Basically, a situation is the normal, objective, and conventional order of things. However, this order of things includes the void, or a term which the situation cannot count and recognize, something inconsistent in the conventional order. The most common example of the void is the proletariat in classical Marxism (Hallward 2004). Since the proletariat is deprived of social and political rights, it is the void of a situation and it is not counted by this situation. Hence, an event would be an uprising of the proletariat and obtaining of an independent political role.

Then, an event reveals truth. Sam Gillespie notes that, according to Badiou, 'truth is a process by which an original situation becomes extended to encompass, or account for, elements that were not previously recognized' (Gillespie 2008: 78). Both the event and truth relate to the appearance of something new which was hidden before. The subject is defined through the fidelity to an event, which means that the subject acts in compliance with this new way opened by the event. Badiou calls this process of the fidelity 'truth' (Badiou 2001: 42). Therefore, Badiou's event has consequences which shape further activities.

It is important for Badiou that subjectivation is based on an event. Badiou writes that subject 'needs something to have happened, something that cannot be reduced to its ordinary inscription in "what there is"'. (Badiou 2001: 41). In other words, the subject needs an event. After the event the subject invents 'a new way of being and acting in the situation' (Badiou 2001: 42).

Hence, politics in interiority is evental politics or, one can say, true politics. From Badiou's perspective, it is clear that politics in interiority is not associated with the state, which is inevitably conservative and preserves the existing social order. He points out that 'the State is indifferent or hostile to the existence of a politics that touches truth' (Badiou 2006: 100). Therefore, politics in interiority is anti-statist as such. It is noteworthy that the word 'state' is polysemic in Badiou's texts. While situation counts elements of multiplicity, state recounts them and secures the persistence of multiplicity. In *Being and Event*, Badiou equates his philosophical 'state' to the state apparatus, in as much as one deals with a 'historical-social situation' (Badiou 2005: 104).

The break with the state means that popular politics requires a procedure to unify separate demands and create a new hegemonic formation which is antagonistic towards the current formation. Then, political subjectivation of a social or labor protest is a transfiguration of particularistic democratic demands into popular demands. This understanding of politics is based on Gramsci's idea that 'the proletariat, in order to become capable as a class of governing, must strip itself of every residue of corporatism, every syndicalist prejudice and incrustation' (Gramsci 1978: 448). Politics presupposes that different groups overcome their particularities to compose a new subject. In transformism, on the contrary, particularistic demands of protest groups are partly satisfied and transformed so that these groups are unable to broaden the scope of their protest activities. From this point of view, social movements are not directly related to politics and possibility of their political subjectivation is not guaranteed, since the path from social conflicts to politics is not a direct or natural process. The same was meant by Lenin in *What Is to Be Done* when he insisted that the labor movement was not political from the very beginning and, if it became political, this type of politics was most likely a bourgeois politics or, in Laclau's terms, democratic politics which co-exists with every present regime. In *What Is to Be Done?* Lenin distinguishes "trade-unionist politics" and "social-democratic politics". The difference is that trade-unionist politics derives from economic struggle of workers at their workplaces while social-democratic politics emerges when the party goes 'among all classes of population' (Lenin 1960: 422). Writing on two types of politics, Lenin differs "the trade-union secretary" and "the tribune of the people". While the former restricts political activities to economic struggle of a separate social group, the latter addresses problems of the whole people. Lenin's "social-democratic politics" can be called popular politics or populism as he writes about problems and demands of all classes. Thus, the working class becomes the people by going beyond particular problems and demands of workers.

Lenin notes that 'to lend the workers' economic struggle itself a political character' is mainly the task of 'the progressive representatives of bourgeois democracy'. Hence, '[t]rade-unionist politics of the working class is precisely bourgeois politics of the working class' (Lenin 1960: 426). According to Lenin, trade-unionist politics also involves interactions with the government and struggle for economic reforms. However, these interactions and these reforms concern only one separate group but not the whole people. This politics remains bourgeois politics because, according to Lenin, struggle for economic reforms does not lead social-democrats to the seizure of power and overthrowing of capitalism. Besides, Lenin criticizes politicization of economic demands. He sees not a direct way from economic struggle to revolution but rather a break between trade-unionist politics and social-democratic politics. The term 'contentious politics' would for Lenin be inconsistent.

In *Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution* Lenin (1962) anticipated Laclau's distinction of democratic and popular politics. These two tactics were basically one of 'a bargain with tsarism' and one of popular uprising. Hence, social democrats could either join progressive bourgeoisie, who preferred

the way of mutual concessions with the autocratic regime, or deepen and radicalize popular movements. It is worth to note that Lenin considered both ways possible to promote democratization of Russia. He wrote: 'The transformation the economic and political system in Russia along bourgeois-democratic lines is inevitable and inescapable' (Lenin 1962: 55). However, the tactics of 'a bargain with tsarism' or, in Laclau's terms, democratic politics would end in a 'deal between tsarism and the most "inconsistent" and most "self-seeking" representatives of bourgeoisie' (Lenin 1962: 55). Consequently, this deal would result in 'a docked constitution' and the preservation of autocratic remnants and the domination of landlords. As is well known, the 1905 Russian revolution ended in the establishment of the Duma and the declaration of some civil liberties. Yet, the autocratic regime was preserved, the Duma was subordinated to the tsar and his government, and declared civil liberties were almost annulled. Genuine democratization of Russia was postponed as democratic politics prevailed.

Opinion and politics

Differences between popular politics and democratic politics also depend on their relations to public debates. As previously mentioned, social movements are associated with the development of deliberative procedures and deliberative democracy. Within the theoretical framework of the current dissertation, deliberation is considered as a sign of democratic politics. Adherence to deliberative procedures enables the coexistence of democratic politics and existing regimes. Besides, deliberation and public debates require the preservation of particularism.

If popular politics emerges when particularism is replaced by universalism, the prioritization of deliberative processes should be recognized as a mistake made by the sociology of social movements. Badiou is among those who disapprove of this prioritization. He criticizes the Arendtian equation of politics and 'the public exercise of judgment' (Badiou 2006: 13) and insists on differentiating between truth and opinions. The latter are 'representations without truth' (Badiou 2001: 50). Although opinions are 'the cement of sociality' and 'the primary material of communication' (Badiou 2006: 50–51), they do not affect politics because they represent existing particular groups. As previously mentioned, politics for Badiou is a break within the social and overcoming of particularities. From this point of view, deliberation is based on expression and exchange of opinions and has no connection to politics as such. Rather it is a conservative procedure which reproduces existing social relations. Badiou argues that 'the essence of politics is not the plurality of opinions. It is the prescription of a possibility in rupture with what exists' (Badiou 2006: 24). Hence, since the state opposes popular politics, the state encourages the plurality of opinions and aims at 'fashioning a consensus of opinions' and 'harmonizing the interplay of conflicting interests' (Badiou 2006: 100).

Opinions and deliberation, Badiou continues, open the door to parliamentarianism, which manifests pluralism and diversity. Lazarus classifies parliamentarianism as a mode of politics in exteriority. Although the parliament collects heterogeneous and diverse opinions, it organizes them under domination of the state. Lazarus interprets the development of protest movements after the 1960s as a gradual shift to parliamentarianism. From this perspective, it becomes clear that social movements and trade unions, which do not overcome their particular identities, are able to be politicized and involved in democratic politics but this politicization leads to politics in exteriority. Successful social movements and trade unions that do not elevate to popular politics can become a kind of appendix to parliamentarianism. This statement is true even under authoritarianism, where parliamentarianism is debilitated. Deliberative mechanisms can exist even under authoritarianism. For example, although there are no fair elections in Russia and the parliamentary system is underdeveloped, social movements and trade unions enjoy enough possibilities to exist, express their opinions, and deliberate problems with authorities even through local legislatures which formed via non-competitive and fraudulent elections.

In Laclau's terms, deliberation is considered a part of transformism, because the exchange of opinions involves both elites and the subaltern classes and an antagonistic frontier between them becomes blurred in this way. Deliberation can mean communication between elites and subaltern classes. This communication in turn facilitates the incorporation of grassroots demands into the current political order. The multiplicity of heterogeneous opinions, which is necessary for deliberation, is a manifestation of the logic of difference. Laclau and Mouffe note that 'the logic of equivalence is a logic of the simplification of political space, while the logic of difference is a logic of its expansion and increasing complexity' (Laclau and Mouffe 2001: 130). Thus, deliberation and the logic of difference both conserve high complexity of the social. Indeed, deliberation requires numerous equal opinions and judgments. These opinions appear as 'objective differences within the social' and maintenance of them and their diversity stabilizes an existing order. Polarization and a consequent split of the discursive formation damage the plurality of opinions while giving rise to politics. Forces which may undermine the proper exchange of opinions are banished to the periphery of the hegemonic formation (Laclau and Mouffe 2001). A deliberative process involving both elites and subaltern classes can be seen as a part of anti-political administration due to the blurring of the antagonistic frontier between the regime and the masses.

Capillary power

Since the concept of hegemonic formation presupposes dispersion rather than stable unity, one should acknowledge that hegemonic formations and historical blocs are not homogenous but diverse. By developing this point, Laclau and Mouffe build on Michel Foucault's ideas. Foucault, they write, 'makes dispersion itself the principle of unity' (Laclau and Mouffe 2001: 106). Dispersion and

diversity leave space for relatively autonomous zones and local activities, which are absorbed into the hegemonic formation via transformistic processes. As transformism is driven by the logic of difference, it enhances heterogeneity by reorganizing relations among discursive elements.

The transition from medieval religious pastoral care for souls to the 'political government of men' in the seventeenth century influenced the evolution of ideas of autonomy and self-regulation (Foucault 1971). According to Foucault, the modern type of governing presupposes that society should be run by 'natural processes'. 'It means, of course, that not only will there be no justification, but also quite simply there will be no interest in trying to impose regulatory systems of injunctions, imperatives, and interdictions on these processes' (Foucault 2007: 451). Here 'natural processes' is a metaphor which means that all diverse zones obtain their local logics of regulation. Local autonomous logics are perceived as 'natural processes', in contrast to direct interventions of the central apparatus.

In the case of Russia, even the long history of various nondemocratic regimes has not eliminated civil society institutions. Employing Foucault's theories, Oleg Kharkhordin demonstrates that civil society existed in the USSR and exists in today's Russia (Kharkhordin 2002, Kharkhordin 2010). A variety of discourses and practices can be found in different periods and under different conditions. In fact, diversity is necessary for transformism and the logic of difference. Transformistic processes include diverse discourses and practices into the hegemonic formation. The lack of diversity would lead to antagonism and hinder transformism. Foucauldian studies of governmentality and dispersion of discourses shed light on the environment which makes transformism possible. Transformistic processes can be successful due to the internal diversity within discourses.

The Foucauldian approach was preceded and indirectly influenced, via the structuralist philosophical tradition, by Gramsci's critique of civil society. Gramsci did not contrast civil society and the oppressive state. Institutions of civil society do not oppose coercive state apparatus but supplement it (Fonseca 2016). Thus, it should be admitted that there is neither a clear division, nor a necessary confrontation between the state and civil society.

Self-regulation and diversity of autonomous zones in which protests are possible are necessary for the sustainability and resilience of hegemonic formations. Hence, such autonomous zones and their self-regulation as well as mechanisms which bind these zones together should be scrutinized.

If a hegemonic formation is not unity but dispersion, the factors that bind its elements together need further explanation. Gramsci's term 'capillary power' which means diffuse indirect pressure is helpful in understanding these factors (Gramsci 1971: 295).

The metaphor of 'capillary power' presupposes that state power is exercised not only through a centralized apparatus, but also through various decentralized elements which penetrate society as a whole. Even though mechanisms of capillary power are not necessarily run directly and rationally, they are still an integral part of the regime's policy. While the police, the army, and the central

government belong to the centralized apparatus of the state, capillary power consists of organizations of civil society associated with the state indirectly.

The notion of capillary power presupposes that the peripheral machinery depends more generally on the central apparatus but possesses relative autonomy. Transformism retains zones where protest is possible and governs these spheres on the basis of self-regulation and decentralization.

The wide-spread opinion that Gramsci focused mostly on cultural and ideological issues is true to some extent. Indeed, he criticized economic determinism and worked on problems of anticipated the new proletarian culture; however, organizations and infrastructures are essential for Gramsci's texts.

Gramsci argues that institutions are connected to intellectuals who play a key role in the functioning of capillary power. In 'Some Aspects of Southern Question' he examines the organization of ('capillary') power and mass consent in Southern Italy and notes that 'the Southern peasant is bound to the big landowner through the mediation of the intellectual' (Gramsci 1978: 456). Gramsci defines intellectuals more broadly as not only scholars or artists but organizers of society in general (Gramsci 1971: 135). They not only produce ideology but also (and more importantly) disseminate it to enable and ensure social coherence at different levels. Representatives of a class who 'have the capacity to be an organizer of society in general, including all its complex organism of services, right up to the state organism' are defined as 'organic intellectuals' (Gramsci 1971: 135). 'Organic intellectuals' assimilate 'traditional intellectuals' who may be from the subaltern groups (from peasantry, for example, if we speak about 'Gramscian' Italy) and occupy subordinated positions as 'executors' of the 'orders' received from above.

Intellectuals in the Gramscian thought are not far from bureaucrats (Gramsci 1971: 413). Similar to intellectuals, bureaucrats structure and stabilize 'relations between the leaders and the led' (Migliaro and Misuraca 1982: 74). Both bureaucrats and intellectuals organize society and supplement each other to such an extent that sometimes it is difficult to see a difference between them. Since discursive practices do not work in a manner of magic spell by mere articulation, ideology and discourse both rely on institutions. Gramsci's intellectuals cannot be understood without a deeper analysis of organizations and infrastructures. Intellectuals are also involved in the state apparatus, which imposes the bureaucratic *modus operandi*. The interlacement of administration and traditional intellectuals at grassroots levels means that school and university teachers appear as bureaucrats, just as an example.

Although intellectuals and bureaucrats are involved in the same process, they have different functions. While intellectuals elaborate and reproduce ideologies, bureaucrats maintain institutions. This is not a clear-cut division: intellectuals and bureaucrats exercise each others' functions. Some institutions are used to disseminate ideas and some intellectuals maintain institutions.

As previously mentioned, capillary power is decentralized and relatively autonomous at the grassroots level. This happens also in authoritarian regimes and does not make them more democratic. The possibility of such a co-existence was noticed by Carl Schmitt, who employed the concept of *Verwaltungsstaat*,

i.e. the state of administration or bureaucracy. *Verwaltungsstaat* involves a combination of authoritarian order and sovereign will at the highest level of the state apparatus and self-administration at grassroots levels (Schmitt 1968: 9). While Gramscian capillary power does not deny the existence of an overall center, it focuses more on the peripheral mechanisms, which possess relative autonomy and their own logic.

Gramsci's concept of diffuse indirect power was developed by Louis Althusser with his concept of 'ideological state apparatuses': '[T]he larger part of the Ideological State Apparatus is ... part of the private domain. Churches, parties, trade unions, families, some schools, most newspapers, cultural ventures, etc., etc., are private' (Althusser 2014: 243). Althusser draws attention to the necessity of institutions and organizations for the dissemination of ideas and stresses the connection between the state and the domain of civil society. This connection requires additional mechanisms besides the centralized coercive apparatus to govern civil society. Althusser's concepts of ideological state apparatuses also influenced Foucault's thinking on governmentality. Both of these concepts contribute to a broader understanding of capillary power which seems to be a more flexible phenomenon. Capillary power attracts attention to discrete actions and interactions of bureaucrats and intellectuals, while these actions and interactions are often deemphasized within structuralist theories.

Capillary power manages grassroots activities on a daily basis with non-coercive methods, constitutes the infrastructure of transformism, and enables the linkage of the police and potential challenges from below. Hence, transformism, capillary power, and the police determine the positions of lower classes within the hegemonic formation. Since subaltern classes are not passive, the next section will describe how subaltern positions are determined via transformistic processes.

Subaltern classes within hegemonic formations

Gramsci explained the positions of subaltern classes through their interrelations with the state and hegemony. Subaltern groups are subordinated to the state and the hegemonic formation established by dominant classes (Gramsci 1971: 202). The notion of subaltern classes was necessary to expand on the classical Marxist vision where oppressed classes were equated to industrial proletariat. In early twentieth century Italy, uneven and combined development produced a situation where the capitalist modernization faced the remnants of previous epochs. An analysis of this situation required consideration of not only workers from the developed Northern regions but also various factions of peasants and other groups divided by different dialects of Italian. 'Subaltern groups' was a term that referred to all these groups rather than just workers. Gyan Prakash notes that this Gramscian notion 'refers to subordination in terms of class, caste, gender, race, language, and culture and was used to signify the centrality of dominant/dominated relationships in history' (Prakash 1994: 1477).

Describing positions of subaltern classes, scholars also focus on the shortcomings of representation and limited agency or lack of capacity for subaltern classes to act independently. This means that dominant groups speak about and for the subaltern groups. This approach is related to the works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Spivak 1988) and the Subaltern Studies scholars. Viacheslav Morozov summarizes these definitions: '[T]he term "subaltern" refers to disenfranchised individuals and groups, those whose agency is limited and who are deprived by the hegemonic social order of the possibility to make their voices heard' (Morozov 2015, p. 1).

Spivak also mentions that subalternity does not 'permit the formation of a recognizable basis of action' (Spivak 2005: 476). Marcus Green and Peter Ives add that 'the political activity of subaltern groups rarely goes beyond certain limits' (Green and Ives 2009: 9). The subordinated position of these groups prevents their mobilization. If they try to act independently, they face numerous problems. Even if they are able to protest, their activity often appears ineffective and is always influenced by the dominant classes (Liguori 2015; Gramsci 1971).

While Gramscian theories concentrate on the non-coercive mechanisms of this domination and the relative consent of subaltern classes to be a part of the hegemonic formation, it is not clear what enables this relative consent. Why do subaltern classes often share the hegemonic ideology and sometimes even its most conservative variations? The answer can be found in the concept of common sense which derives from Antonio Gramsci's works. He describes common sense as 'traditional popular conception of the world' and associates it with 'spontaneous feelings' formed through everyday experience (Gramsci 1971: 433). The Gramscian tradition views 'common sense [as] debilitating for subaltern social groups' (Green and Ives 2009: 15). Andrew Robinson sees common sense as a source which is used by ruling elites to maintain status quo: 'Political propaganda does not enter a void; it enters into a situation where conceptions of the world and cultural hierarchies already operate, and its role is rearticulation and dissection of existing ideas' (Robinson 2005: 474). Although common sense is usually conservative and subjected to manipulations, it should not be considered in a one-dimensional way. In addition, Gramsci introduces the notion of good sense which is 'the healthy nucleus' existing in common sense (Gramsci 1971: 633). If the debilitating effects of common sense are overcome, it is due to good sense helping subaltern groups to protest.

It would be a mistake to say that subaltern groups have essential and unchanged ideological values. Green and Ives highlight 'the dissonance between the imposed worldview and the conditions and understandings of those who are supposed to accept it' (Green and Ives 2009: 15). In other words, this dissonance exists between conformist elements of common sense and good sense evolving from these 'understandings'.

To summarize, the positioning of subaltern classes within the hegemonic formation is problematic due to the fact that subaltern classes are not necessarily passive and supportive of the regime. The important question here is how subaltern classes adopt the hegemonic discourse and how this adoption influences protest activities.

Acceptance versus coercion: how subaltern classes accept the existing order

Sustainable hegemonic formations presuppose that subaltern classes accept the existing order rather due to their adoption of the hegemonic discourse than due to repressions. Consent of subaltern classes is no less important than coercion. However, coercive measures attract more attentions of scholars than adoption of the hegemonic discourse by subaltern classes, especially when it comes to authoritarian regimes. At the same time, the exploration of coercion without analysis of consent can invite additional questions. Since coercion can be considered as an integral part of politics, it is always present in political life (Kapustin 2003). Boris Kapustin (2003) notes that repressions from above may face a violent response from below. If repressions do not face a response from below, it can indicate the existence of consent.

Drawing on the Gramscian theory, Ranajit Guha notes that hegemony succeeds if persuasion outweighs coercion within systems of dominance (Guha 1997: 23). Guha describes the opposite situation in which the British colonial rule in India failed to obtain consent of the colonized and relied mainly on coercion. It means that the colonizers did not establish a hegemonic formation which would have included both the British authorities and the colonized. The sustainability of the hegemonic formation does not exclude coercion. Although repressions might be visible, no hegemonic formation can exist without consent of subaltern classes. Mechanisms enabling this consent are less evident and less explored than those of coercion. As an example, Michael Burawoy (1972) studied economic and managerial measures which secure workers' consent at workplaces. At the same time, the emergence of political consent outside workplaces remains understudied.

This theoretical framework reconsiders the relationship between the regime and the state apparatus which can be considered in some approaches as objective bureaucracy (Weber 1978: 978–979). Authoritarian regimes do not exclude the existence of the neutral and apolitical apparatus which can be responsive towards demands from below and is not involved in coercion. However, this apparatus is responsible not only for administrative functions. The state apparatus in general and the local authorities in particular accommodate grassroots demands within the hegemonic formation. Thus, if the authoritarian regime relies on the sustainable hegemonic formation, consent can outweigh coercion and the state apparatus can respond to and satisfy grassroots demands. This does not make an authoritarian regime democratic. However, from this point of view, a sustainable democratic regime also has to secure the consent of subaltern classes, which presupposes the existence of a hegemonic formation. In other words, both authoritarian and democratic regimes allow subaltern classes to communicate their demands and influence the authorities. Such mechanisms include elections and various deliberative formats. They function differently depending on the regime type, but are indispensable nearly everywhere for securing political legitimacy and contribute to the expansion of the hegemonic formation.

While elections, from a Gramscian perspective, could be considered part of the state apparatus, shifting the focus to other mechanisms highlights the role played by capillary power in bringing subaltern classes and dominant classes together. The Gramscian approach suggests that the imposition of the dominant worldview comes along with the assimilation of mass common sense, which represents entrenched feelings and views. Elaborating on Gramsci's understanding of common sense, Ted Hopf notes that although every successful hegemonic project has to compromise with mass common sense, the latter can be in opposition to elites and their discourses (Hopf 2013). Thus, the hegemonic discourse and mass common sense do not coincide: there is an interplay and mutual influence between them.

This responsiveness of the state apparatus presupposes the reservation of specific zones for legitimate expressions of discontent. Since subaltern classes are characterized by being underrepresented and unheard, it is to be expected that they seek to be properly represented and heard by the authorities. Thus, the expression of discontent may be a starting point of a protest which can become a part of democratic politics. Analyzing the 2011–2012 protests in Russia, Ilya Kalinin notes that protesters emphasized 'stylistic creativity, which became not only a means of the articulation of political protests, but its very content'. He argues that 'the problem of the expression of electoral will was conceived as the right to individual self-expression' (Kalinin 2018: 51). It suggests that sometimes the pursuit of expression of discontent and self-expression may become an intrinsic value and an ultimate goal of protests as well as a part of protesters' common sense. While Kalinin's argument addresses mainly the 2011–2012 urban protests, the prevalence of symbolic actions over direct actions, which was highlighted by Robertson (2013) affects Russian labor and social protests in general. Therefore, the pursuit of self-expression and adherence to symbolic actions which aim to attract public attention are a part of protesters' common sense.

A sustainable hegemonic formation allows subaltern classes to express their demands. In other words, subaltern classes are not completely unrepresented and unheard. In some cases they have the possibility to express their demands through legitimate protests. Some of these protests may be successful, in the sense of the state apparatus agreeing to satisfy some demands from below. Hence, the hegemonic discourse has to provide examples of legitimate protests which may be acceptable and successful. Protesters consequently adopt examples of acceptable and potentially successful activities. It means that the interplay between the hegemonic formation, which includes zones for expressions of discontent, and protesters, which 'settle' in these zones, constitutes a type of protesters' common sense which define trajectories of grassroots activities.

In sum, the existence of a hegemonic formation requires consent of subaltern classes. The sustainability of the formation presupposes that subaltern classes accept the hegemonic discourse as representing their interests, if not fully, then in most important respects. This acceptance relies on the responsiveness of the authorities, which accommodate demands from below, and on the workings of

capillary power, which propagates dominant views. As long as there is a functioning hegemonic order, it retains some limited but prominent zones for the expression of demands, while protesters normally adjust their practices to stay within these zones. These adjusted practices also contribute to the proliferation of the hegemonic discourse and the expansion of the hegemonic formation.

Operationalization

The diverse relations between the Russian state and protest groups cannot be reduced to oppression and cynical manipulation. First of all, the hegemonic discourse is not absolutely hostile toward independent grassroots activities. Second, the hegemonic discourse sometimes overlaps with discourses of protest groups. It is necessary to analyze the hegemonic discourse and assess how it affects trade unions and social movements.

Even though protest groups are not integrated in the hegemonic formation from the beginning, they are eventually included through processes of transformism. Social movements and labor unions usually address parochial problems which local authorities are responsible for. Constellations of trade unions, social movements, employers, and local authorities form a part of the hegemonic formation, where protest groups occupy their own position.

The inclusion of new and potentially challenging groups into the hegemonic formation leads to the expansion of this formation. This expansion is the essence of transformism.

Expansion means that authorities and protest groups do not establish an antagonistic frontier but, on the contrary, intensify contacts. The intensification of contacts often appears through the development of deliberative processes. Sometimes protests result in public debates between protesting groups and local authorities. Deliberation enables the regime's responsiveness and provides the opportunity to satisfy particular demands. As previously mentioned, this responsiveness and deliberative processes may prevent the political development of protest groups because this development requires antagonism. The disruption in the political development often preserves passivity and leaves problems unsolved. Minor successes and the intensification of public debates do not create any favorable environment for subsequent broader protests. In other words, the success of democratic politics may does not evolve into popular politics.

The process of transformism can be identified using certain indicators. First, protesters' demands are entirely or partially satisfied and the protest group which poses these demands arranges to meet and discuss local problems with authorities. Second, despite partial successes, the overall economic and social situation in the region remains poor, broader protests are unlikely or almost impossible, while protest groups do not want to risk their constructive relations with the authorities. Minor successes and gradual 'learning' of how to protest do not lead to political subjectification. In other words, minor successes combined with intensified deliberative processes and poor social and economic conditions serve as evidence

of transformism. Third, the failure of the political development of protests occurs when protesters do not try to find any new forms of activities even if the old forms seem to be ineffective.

Since transformism relies on capillary power, another task of this research is exploring the latter phenomenon. The indicators of capillary power are wide, extensive, and diversified connections among authorities, employers, trade unions, and various protest groups and initiatives. Trade unions exercise functions of capillary power if they protest at the workplace and outside, addressing a wide range of social problems, and they cooperate with other social and civic movements and connect them with the authorities. Hence, the focus here is on the mechanisms which enable contacts between protest groups and the authorities, and on the moment when a possible antagonistic frontier blurs. Thus, the question is how these contacts and mechanisms should be studied?

As previously mentioned, hegemonic formations are principally diverse within themselves, and today's Russia is no exception. This internal diversity manifests in two ways. Firstly, the diversity is discursive: the hegemonic discourse neither excludes the possibility of grassroots activities and protests nor marks them as inevitably dangerous and hostile. Secondly, the diversity occurs at the organizational level: trade unions, social movements, and civic initiatives are not suppressed but treated as a reasonable part of public deliberation.

Therefore, this research explores the hegemonic discourse and the development of social and labor protests. The purpose of studying the hegemonic discourse is to show how social and labor protests and grassroots activities in general appear there and exemplify how they are related to other elements of the discourse. A positive attitude towards grassroots activities within the hegemonic discourse is an indicator of transformism. Another indicator is a possible proximity of the discourses of trade unions and social movements to the hegemonic discourse. Then, by exploring the development of social and labor protests the current study demonstrates how the state apparatus cooperates with trade unions and other protest groups within the field of public debates and deliberation, thus preventing democratic politics from evolving into popular politics.

Methodology and case selection

The Gramscian approach to the analysis of hegemonic formations presupposes an analysis of both ideologies and actual relations between protesters and the authorities. Hence, the methodology of my analysis is two-pronged.

The first part is discourse analysis inspired by poststructuralist theories. The second part involves case studies of social and labor protests. The research starts with discourse analysis which provides an overall picture of the relations between the regime and grassroots activists. The second part includes case studies based on in-depth interviews and evidence from official web sites of trade unions.

For poststructuralist theories, the notion of nodal points is crucial and the task is to identify those within the discourse. This notion is elaborated by Laclau and

Mouffe, who associate nodal points with master signifiers and define them as privileged discursive elements which have a structuring function (Laclau and Mouffe 2001). Thus, discourses are organized around nodal points, while positions of other discursive elements can be comprehended through their relations to these nodal points.

Marianne Jorgensen and Louise Phillips define a nodal point as ‘a privileged sign around which the other signs are ordered’ (Jorgensen and Phillips 2002: 26). In poststructuralist discourse analysis, ‘the other signs acquire their meaning from their relationship to the nodal point’ (Jorgensen and Phillips 2002: 26). Thus, the meaning of signs is defined by their relations with each other. Here, post-structuralism is based on structuralist theories demonstrating that ‘signs derive their meanings not through their relations to reality but through internal relations within the network of signs’ (Jorgensen and Phillips 2002: 10).

Laclau and Mouffe argue that nodal points ‘fix meanings’ (Laclau and Mouffe 2011: 113). In other words, signs can acquire different meanings depending on their position in the discursive formation vis-a-vis other discursive elements. Nodal points determine the precise meaning of other signs. Mouffe (2018) notes that by structuring the hegemonic formation, nodal points provide ‘the normative framework’ of a society. David Howarth adds that while the ‘aim of hegemonic projects is to construct and stabilize hegemonic formations’, these formations are organized around nodal points ‘that partially fix the identities of a particular set of signifiers’ (Howarth 2004: 259).

Laclau and Mouffe postulate that relations among discursive elements are established through the logic of equivalence and the logic of difference. Chains of equivalence and, hence, hegemonic formations are incarnated in the empty signifier or ‘a signifier without a signified’ (Laclau 2007: 36). Since the empty signifier has no particular meaning, it both represents all elements of the equivalential chain and identifies the limits of this chain. Laclau argues that ‘the presence of empty signifiers is ... the very condition of hegemony’ (Laclau 2007: 43). The empty signifier symbolizes the unification of discursive elements. For example, a common goal, which all members of a group strive to achieve, or a common threat might be an empty signifier. This common goal or threat cannot be clearly defined and, hence, represent the subversion of signification.

Changes in relations among elements are possible due to the openness of discursive elements to ‘different ascription of meaning’ (Jorgensen and Phillips 2002: 28). Laclau and Mouffe call elements which cannot be attached to a permanent meaning floating signifiers. Floating signifiers acquire their meaning through the logic of equivalence which attaches them to a nodal point. Discursive practices compete over attaching of floating signifiers to nodal points.

Discourses of protest groups can be associated with hegemonic discourses through a set of interrelated nodal points. Elements of protesters’ discourses can be in a relationship of equivalence with elements of the hegemonic discourse and protesters’ discourses can be accommodated under in the hegemonic formation. Relations between discourses of trade unions and the hegemonic discourses

illustrate how the attachment of floating signifiers to specific nodal points reconcile different discourses within the frameworks of the hegemonic formation.

Therefore, my first task here is to analyze the hegemonic discourse in Russia, find its nodal points, and identify the positions articulated in the course of social and labor protests vis-a-vis these nodal points. The hegemonic discourse is analyzed through official statements and the largest pro-governmental media outlets. Then, I analyze discourses of social and labor protests and search for interconnections between them and the hegemonic discourse. Here, the next question is the selection of texts for analysis.

Lene Hansen proposes four models for intertextual research. These models address official discourse, wider debate (parliamentary or media debates), cultural representations, and marginal discourses, respectively (Hansen 2006: 57). In my case I focus on the official discourse as it is represented in the public statements by President Putin and the pro-governmental media. Popular and high cultures reflect the sedimentation of the hegemonic discourse and are not appropriate for the analysis of techniques limited in time but may reconstruct a background. According to Hansen, marginal discourses include materials that are 'concerned with policy' but have 'marginal status' (Hansen 2006: 55). This involves, for example, texts of trade unions or social movements which are connected to the hegemonic discourse.

Selected texts from the official discourse should meet the following criteria: 'they are characterized by the clear articulation of identities and policies; they are widely read and attended to; and they have the formal authority to define a political position' (Hansen 2006: 76).

To analyze official discourse I will use official texts such as the presidential addresses to the Federal Assembly, so called 'Direct Lines', and the annual press conferences where the president appeals to a broader audience. Another useful source for the analysis are articles published by the president to express his program before each presidential election.

For a wider sample, I use the major pro-governmental media outlets, in which I analyse the materials covering events related to subaltern classes, their mobilization in support of the regime, trade unions, and social and labor protests. These outlets include the two most important TV channels, *Pervyi* and *Rossiia*. Texts that were produced by these media have an advantage because they articulate the identity of subaltern classes and highlight specific policies.

Then, I analyze specific cases of protests led by trade unions. I focus mainly on empirical examples of grassroots activities within the structure of the Federation of the Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR, *Federatsiia Nezavisimyykh Profsoiuzov Rossii*), the largest federation of trade unions. I also analyze activities of the Confederation of the Labor of Russia (KTR, *Konfederatsiia Truda Rossii*), the second largest association of trade unions in Russia. It is not only trade unions which contribute to transformistic processes and mollify protests. However, trade unions and their activities provide a visible example of how social and labor conflicts are channeled to concessions between the authorities and protesters. Trade unions are not a part of the centralized apparatus, but cooperate with the

state at the same time, have sustainable organizations, and are permitted to organize protest actions.

First of all, I demonstrate that discourses of trade unions have much in common with the hegemonic discourse. For this purpose I analyze program documents of trade unions and official statements on important all-Russian events such as elections or the pension reform. This analysis should prove that nodal points around which the discourse of trade unions is structured are the same as those in the hegemonic discourse.

Then, I focus on several cases of unions' activities in the North-Western part of Russia, where labor organizations are relatively energetic and influential. The selected regions include Leningrad Oblast, Pskov Oblast, and the Republic of Karelia. Trade unions of these regions are regularly involved in numerous protests, but at the same time they collaborate with the authorities. Trade unions of the North-Western regions of Russia represent typical cases of unions' activities. The selected regions do not differ significantly in terms of political situation and the position of trade unions. In all cases the local unions are quite active and relatively influential. According to several surveys (cf. *Karta Trudovykh Protestov* 2017, *Reiting Protestnoi Aktivnosti* 2019), the amount of protest actions in the three regions is moderate and close to the Russian average. Thus, these are three regions with the moderate amount of protest actions and active trade unions, which are involved in labor and social protests and cooperate with authorities.

My main focus is on the social and labor protests where the FNPR was involved. Information about these practices is available on the official web site of the Federation and web pages of the regional organizations. However, web sites can provide only limited amount of information about protests and do not shed light on the communication between conflicting parties and, hence, on the workings of transformism. To better understand the functioning of trade unions, I took 11 in-depth interviews, all of which were conducted in the period from 2017 to 2018. My informants were leaders and activists of the FNPR as well as trade union experts and consultants. They are all involved in certain protest activities, yet simultaneously cooperate with local authorities. The interviews focused on the following themes: how do trade unions participate in social and labor protests? what makes these protests possible and what hampers their development? how do trade unions interact and collaborate with the authorities? All informants have been involved in activities of trade unions in the aforementioned regions. I recruited leaders and top-ranking officials of local trade unions as well as trade union consultants who are able to provide a broader picture of labor and social protests in the regions. The interviews were anonymous and recorded.

The interviews provide evidence of transformistic processes which neutralize and domesticate protests. I conclude that in all those cases protest was neutralized and domesticated, because, firstly, it succeeded on its own terms, which means that demands of the protest group were satisfied, but did not contribute to popular mobilization that could address the poor social and economic situation in the respective region. Secondly, interviewees acknowledge limitations of their forms of protest activities but do not try to find any new forms and prefer to deliberate

problems with the local authorities and intensify contacts with the regime. Thirdly, protests remain parochial and end with mutual concessions between the regime and protest groups. In general, this approach discloses that, although social and labor protests occur in Russia, they are included in the system of capillary power which prevents political challenges to the regime.

In addition, I address the specific case of protests against the pension reform in 2018. This reform raised the age of retirement in Russia and provoked mass discontent. Trade unions were involved in the organization of a nation-wide protest campaign. The development of the 2018 protests was reconstructed on basis of evidence from official web sites of the FNPR and the KTR and the newspaper *Solidarnost'* published by the FNPR. The 2018 campaign was among the most significant social protests in Russia for the entire last decade. The number of protest actions in the third quarter of 2018 was 2.8 times higher than the number in the third quarter of 2017 (Rost Protestnoi Aktivnosti 2018). However, the campaign ultimately failed. Since trade unions played an important role in the 2018 protests, it is important to explore which strategies of trade unions contributed to this failure.

Russian trade unions are rooted in the masses and handle protests on a regular basis. From this point of view, trade unions can potentially be more an important political actor than the non-systemic urban opposition. At the same time, the failure of the 2018 protests, which involved trade unions and the non-systemic opposition, demonstrates that neither the non-systemic opposition, nor trade unions were able to make the 2018 campaign effective.

Analyzing the example of trade unions and the protests they organize, I demonstrate that while democratic politics can emerge and succeed within protest activities organized or supported by trade unions, popular politics is effectively prevented by transformistic processes, which the trade unions support. The examination of unions' activities contributes to a practical understanding of transformism and the relations between the Russian regime and the subaltern classes.

The overall framework of analysis

This section summarizes the theoretical framework utilized in this dissertation. In short, the theoretical approach relies on a poststructuralist interpretation of the Gramscian thought.

Central notions of the dissertation are transformism and the hegemonic formation. The hegemonic formation is a hierarchical bloc of various classes, groups, and their discourses. 'Members' of this bloc are not equal as there is a dominant force which organizes the formation under its own hegemony. Hegemony mobilizes elements of mass common sense and thus presupposes that subaltern classes partially accept the existing political order.

According to Laclau, popular politics can threaten the existing hegemonic formation. Popular politics constructs a new people and draws the antagonistic frontier between the people and the old order. The notion of transformism addresses

processes which prevent the emergence of antagonism and, thus, preserve the existing hegemonic formation. Transformistic processes involve accommodation of demands from below within the hegemonic formation.

Since a sustainable hegemonic formation requires consent of the subaltern classes, elites have to respond to grassroots demands and partially satisfy them. Hegemony does not necessarily presuppose a suppression of protests expressing grassroots demands. Some protests can even go beyond local problems and give birth to democratic politics on a wider scale. The main difference between popular politics and democratic politics is that the latter coexists with the present formation and stops short of antagonism.

Protest movements which adopt non-antagonistic approaches to grassroots activities channel discontent towards mutual concessions between protesters and the authorities. It must be highlighted that channeling here is understood as an outcome of grassroots activities, which is not common in the existing literature. Jennifer Earl (2003), for example, considers channeling as a repressive policy that restricts protesters and forces them to alter activities. By means of restrictions, the regime channels protests toward moderate activities. Protest movements which adopt non-antagonistic approaches to grassroots activities channel discontent towards mutual concessions between protesters and the authorities.

To explore the workings of transformism in Russia, this dissertation examines the discourses and protest actions of Russian trade unions. Russian trade unions are in an ambiguous relationship with the state apparatus and the regime. On the one hand, trade unions organize and participate in numerous social and labor protests, some of which are successful. On the other hand, trade unions collaborate with the state; the discourses of the protesters intersect with the hegemonic discourse. This ambiguity allows trade unions to occupy zones within the hegemonic formation where the expression of grassroots demands is acceptable.

Transformism is characterized by protesters' adherence to deliberation and parliamentarianism. Therefore, the dissertation examines protest practices which consider public debates and parliamentary procedures as an intrinsic value. The prioritization of parliamentarianism also indicates democratic politics. Activities of trade unions provide an example of this adherence to parliamentarianism and deliberative procedures. As previously mentioned, this argument does not presuppose that trade unions are expected to overcome shortcomings of democratic politics and transit to popular politics. However, social conflicts and spontaneous protests, which occur in Russia, cause difficulties for the hegemonic formation. Trade unions defuse social tensions through deliberative procedures. The focus here is on processes which de-escalate social conflicts and channel mass discontent into discussions. Although other protest groups also channel grassroots discontent into deliberative procedures, trade unions are the most visible example of this channeling.

The theoretical framework presupposes a focus on practices and discourses of trade unions. This focus gives precedence to agency of protesters over economic, cultural or social factors and governmental policies. At the same time, the empirical part also addresses the hegemonic formation and the hegemonic discourse, which

recognizes the legitimacy of some grassroots protests. The discussion on the hegemonic discourse and positions of subaltern classes within the hegemonic formation provides a context for the examination of Russian trade unions, which can be considered as representatives of subaltern classes. The analysis of trade union discourses demonstrates the intersection between protesters' discourses and the hegemonic discourse. The exploration of protests which involve trade unions seeks to investigate how mass discontent is channeled to concessions between protesters and the authorities. In short, the analysis of discourses and practices of trade unions presents a broad sample that includes various forms of transformistic processes.

CHAPTER 3.

The Russian hegemonic discourse and subaltern classes

This chapter analyzes positions of subaltern classes and their activities within the Russian hegemonic discourse and how these positions affect transformism.

Representation of subaltern classes and especially workers in the hegemonic discourse has significantly changed since the Soviet Union's collapse and capitalist reforms of the 1990s. Some scholars note that in some liberal democracies and economies mass media often portrays subaltern classes in a pejorative way, as dangerous and inferior to middle classes (Jones 2012). However, it is not the case with the Russian official mass media. Subaltern classes are considered to be conservative and supportive of the regime. In this chapter, I demonstrate how the image of subaltern classes is constructed and how they are related to nodal points within the hegemonic discourse.

I argue that the hegemonic discourse reflects the position of subaltern classes within the hegemonic formation. This position is controversial. On the one hand, the hegemonic discourse represents the subaltern classes as the regime's genuine supporters which consequently means conservatism of subaltern classes. On the other hand, the hegemonic discourse does not preclude the possibility of labor and social protests, if these protests occur within certain limits. Therefore, local protests are both tolerated and prevented from transitioning to popular politics. In Laclau's terms, democratic protests and democratic politics of subaltern classes are permitted, while popular politics is preempted. The transition from democratic politics to popular politics is prevented by the accommodation of demands within the hegemonic formation in the transformistic way. Antagonistic frontier does not emerge between the elites and the masses. The hegemonic discourse represents subaltern classes and their demands as isolated from each other. In other words, the hegemonic discourse counts different social groups separately and highlights diversified connections between the subaltern classes and the regime. As previously mentioned, the metaphor of counting was applied by Rancière to explain the functioning of the police which divides subaltern classes into particular professions and hinders the emergence of the people from particular social groups. The division of subaltern classes into separate groups is also in line with Laclau's logic of difference which separates discursive elements. According to Rancière and Laclau, this separating count of subaltern classes and connections between them and the regime contribute to stability of the latter.

Source selection is complicated when it comes to representation of subaltern classes in the hegemonic discourse. On the one hand, subaltern classes are on the margins of the hegemonic discourses. They are not in the spotlight of the mainstream media. Unlike the Soviet ideology, the current official ideology does not prioritize the role of labor classes in history and politics. On the other hand, since subaltern classes are considered to be the regime's supporters, they do attract some attention of mass media and officials. As previously mentioned, I analyze

official texts, namely presidential addresses, press conferences, and other statements of the president and the prime minister. Additionally, I selected media messages of two largest TV channels (*Pervyi* and *Rossiia*) and the most circulated pro-governmental newspapers (*Izvestiia*, *Komsomol'skaia Pravda*, and *Argumenty i Fakty*). All of them have popular web sites as well.

Official statements and pro-governmental media represent the hegemonic discourse. While official statements express policies toward subaltern classes and influence their identities, pro-governmental media outlets extend the discourse of official statements and appeal to broader audience than presidential addresses to the Federal Assembly.

I focus on those official statements and media messages which deal with subaltern classes and their activities in relation to the regime. First, I discuss texts that portray subaltern classes in the context of major political events in Russia and abroad. These events include elections in Russia and other countries, protests, and various armed conflicts, such as in Syria and Ukraine. Second, I analyze texts that address relations between subaltern classes and governmental policies, such as mass media coverage of meetings between the officials and the representatives of subaltern classes or contribution of subaltern classes to Russia's economic development. Third, I pay special attention to texts that address trade unions and their activities. These texts demonstrate that some labor protests are tolerated and that the regime and trade unions collaborate in some ways. Finally, I engage texts that describe subaltern classes as such and their values and virtues, from the point of view of pro-governmental media. These texts both reflect and construct the subaltern classes identity. I cover the period from the end of 2011 to the end of 2018.

The sample includes 393 statements and messages highlighting relations between the regime and activities of subaltern classes. This sample mainly consists of messages from the TV channels *Pervyi* (198 units) and *Rossiia* (150 units). Statements from Russian officials, namely Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev, number 24 units. Texts from other sources number 21 units.

In terms of theory, this chapter illustrates the notion of dispersion elaborated by Foucault, Laclau, and Mouffe that I have discussed in the previous chapter of this dissertation. Since every discourse and every hegemonic formation is diverse and is a unity in dispersion, the Russian hegemonic discourse consists of different coexisting articulations that stand in various relations to each other. Antagonistic articulations constitute an exception because antagonism is a split of the hegemonic formation. For example, even if the Russian hegemonic discourse supports and promotes authoritarianism, it does not mean that this discourse cannot embrace other articulations which might be democratic ones and that it cannot promote grassroots activities.

The first section addresses representation of Russian subaltern classes and discusses their relations to figures of stability and sovereignty. These figures are important because they are nodal points of the hegemonic discourse, as it will be demonstrated in the section.

The second section analyzes positions of subaltern classes of foreign countries within the Russian hegemonic discourse. Since pro-Kremlin media outlets pay special attention to international affairs, the examination of the image of foreign subaltern classes is also important for this research of the hegemonic discourse; it clarifies discursive positions of subaltern classes in general.

The third section is a transition from discourses to organizations. Discourse analysis describes only one side of transformism. It is a preliminary phase of the research necessary for the analysis of organizational activities.

Subaltern classes in Russia

The inclusion of the subaltern classes in the hegemonic formation contributes to the sustainability of this formation. This inclusion is reflected and supported by the hegemonic discourse. I argue that the hegemonic discourse attaches subaltern classes to signifiers of stability and sovereignty which are nodal points of the discourse. This attachment assists to prevent potential antagonism between elites and masses. Moreover, this attachment allows to preempt transition from democratic protests to popular politics or, in other words, transition from local protests to political challenges.

The main characteristics of the Russian hegemonic discourse are extensively described and analyzed by scholars within various theoretical frameworks. This section begins with a brief discussion of the literature addressing these characteristics.

The Russian hegemonic discourse prioritizes sovereignty and internal stability (Morozov 2008). Stability and national sovereignty are interrelated and interdependent. In other words, internal stability is possible when the Russian state is sovereign and independent in its foreign and home affairs. At the same time, the state is sovereign and independent when it is stable from within. This discourse does not preclude diversity and allows the existence of different groups within the Russian nation. However, all these groups are supposed to cooperate with the state and contribute to the strengthening of sovereignty and stability.

The discursive turn to stability was marked by Vladimir Putin's texts, published in the end of 1999 before Boris Yeltsin's resignation and the start of the 2000 presidential campaign, and Putin's two Addresses to the Federal Assembly in 2000 and 2001. In the text entitled *Rossiia na rubezhe tysiacheletii* [*Russia at the Turn of the Millennium*], Putin, who at the time was the prime minister, wrote that Russia needed a strategy of the revival which was possible only under conditions of political stability. According to him, Russia had exhausted the limits of upheaval and radical transformations. In the 2000 address, Putin said that there would be neither revolutions nor counter-revolutions anymore. He specified: 'State stability built on a solid economic foundation is a blessing for Russia and for its people. It is high time to start living according to normal human logic' (Putin 2000). The hegemonic discourse contrasts stability to the turmoil and disruption of the 1990s. Against the background of the collapse of the Soviet

Union and social and economic crises, Putinism is viewed as ‘a return to normality’ (Prozorov 2008: 219). Sergei Prozorov notes that the 2000s brought depoliticization, the suspension of all political projects, and the decline of ideological parties (Prozorov 2008). Prozorov concludes Putinism was a pure maintenance of status quo. Stability and instability are empty signifiers for the hegemonic formation. They have no precise meaning and may relate, for example, to economic prosperity, independent foreign policy, absence of any acute political struggle, and so on. The impossibility of signification here makes stability and instability empty signifiers.

After the 2011–2012 election protests and after the annexation of Crimea in 2014, scholars question the fact that the Russian regime refrains from any political project and ideological mass mobilization (cf. Smyth, 2016). However, this maintenance of status quo, normalization, and stability remain important for the regime. In 2012–2014, the notions of stability and sovereignty were rearticulated within the hegemonic discourse. It means that the protection of stability and sovereignty required certain political engagement of subaltern classes. Besides, as Prozorov argues, passivity should not be interpreted in terms of ‘pure inactivity’. Rather, passivity is a ‘ceaseless activity that is deprived of any telos, whereby all sorts of things happen for no reason whatsoever and can never be incorporated into a determinate Project’ (Prozorov 2008: 214). According to Prozorov, the absence of telos, however, does not mean pure aimlessness. Social and labor protests have aims but these aims are parochial, while, in this context, telos would be a universal aim of political subject. In other words, subaltern classes are not supposed to be passive all the time. They are allowed and sometimes even encouraged to be active if their activities do not result in political subjectivation.

The hegemonic discourse is diverse, consists of various articulations, and includes also some democratic rhetoric. The Russian regime has never abandoned the democratic rhetoric completely and regularly appeals to the people as a bearer of ‘traditional values’ (Morozov and Pavlova 2018). The hegemonic discourse does not preclude the very possibility of grassroots activities and participation in decision-making. People are allowed to express their opinion within a specific set of limits. In fact, the hegemonic discourse has never abandoned democracy as a value. Rather, democracy has been subordinated to sovereignty and stability; it has been interpreted in technocratic and police terms. Russian leaders admit that democracy is necessary for economic development but warn that uncontrolled people’s activities can abuse civil rights and return Russia to turmoil of the 1990s (Morozov 2010).

This democratic rhetoric within the hegemonic discourse presupposes that people may be active when it comes to protection of sovereignty and stability. In December 2011, the official mass media attempted to represent workers as supporters of the present regime and as a counterweight to opposition rallies. During the annual *Direct Line* with Vladimir Putin on December 18, a manager from ‘Uralvagonzavod’, a machine building plant in Nizhny Tagil, Igor Kholmanskikh, promised to go to Moscow together with the workers, forcibly disband rallies, and disband the opposition (Vladimir Putin Otvetil 2011). Thus, ‘Uralvagonzavod’

became a symbol of the loyalty of subaltern classes and this *Direct Line* laid down the foundations of the subsequent discursive policy.

In January and February of 2012, there were numerous rallies in support of the incumbent during the presidential run-up. The official trade unions participated in the organization of them.

In 2012, Igor Kholmanskikh established a special social movement *In Defense of the People of Labor*. The declared goals of this movement were to maintain present political course and ‘stability’. ‘We have come to support our stability. We are for stability, for Russia... We do not want the 1990s, we should go forward’, said a worker at a rally in Yekaterinburg in February 2012 (Srazu Neskol’ko Partii I Obshchestvennykh Dvizhenii 2012).

During the 2012 presidential campaign, workers and public employees participated in numerous events to support Putin. Official mass media stated that Vladimir Putin was a candidate of ‘ordinary people’ and the opposition represented ‘richer’ social groups (Kalinin 2018). In this regard, *Komsomol’skaya Pravda* quoted conservative pundit Sergei Markov: ‘While anti-Putin rallies in the capital were conducted by rich middle classes and “white collar” individuals, laboring people and workers who are in the “real sector” [i.e. industry] of economy advocate the prime minister [Putin]. It is evident that the latter are the majority in the country; they are Putin’s core electorate’ (Rukavitsy za Putina 2012).

Laclau and Mouffe provide an example of the logic of difference by discussing policies of the nineteenth century British prime minister, Benjamin Disraeli. Disraeli observed a situation where European societies and the European political space were sundered by antagonism between poverty and wealth, and between ‘ancient regimes’ and the people. To change this situation Disraeli advanced a formula of ‘one nation’. He aimed his efforts at the rupture of equivalential chains creating popular subjectivity. Laclau and Mouffe describe Disraeli’s methods as ‘the differential absorption of demands, which segregated them from their chains of equivalence in the popular chain and transformed them into objective differences within the system’ (Laclau and Mouffe 2001: 130). Ultimately, Disraeli aimed to displace ‘the frontier of antagonism to the periphery of the social’ (Laclau and Mouffe 2001: 130). The 2011–2012 policies of the Russian regime also illustrate the logic of difference displacing antagonism to the periphery.

On May 6, the ‘All-Russian People’s Front’ organized a rally to celebrate Putin’s inauguration. The officials of the Front declared that this event brought together ‘true professionals’ including school and university teachers, entrepreneurs, workers, and so on (Na Poklonnoi Gore Otmetili 2012).

Workers and teachers are mentioned in one breath with entrepreneurs and all of them are enlisted as supporters of the regime. These social groups are different and official mass media do not insist that they are similar. Quite opposite, TV channels emphasize diversity of the regime’s supporters. Differences among them are considered to be objective and solid within the system. As previously mentioned, the logic of difference increases the complexity of political space and displaces antagonism to the periphery of the society. Disraeli’s and Putin’s formulas of ‘one nation’ presuppose the complexity and diversity of this nation.

May Day rallies provide another example of the logic of difference. After the collapse of the USSR, the former International Workers' Day was renamed The Day of Spring and Labor but on May 1st traditional demonstrations still take place in Russian cities. These events usually involve different political groups, including *United Russia*. Local authorities and members of the ruling party walk together with trade unions. One of my interviewees, who works for trade unions, said about May Day rallies: 'Once a year a governor might remember that most of the electorate are employees. It is possible to show some respect' (Interview 3). Pro-governmental media outlets usually report that 'engineers and construction workers, teachers and doctors, scientists and public servants, employees of industry and transportation, social sphere and culture, energy and communication, commerce and housing services, students and veterans' gather at a May Day rally (Pervomaiskii Torzhestva 2014). The long enumeration of different trades highlights the diversity of social groups which compose the entirety of the nation together with elites. The report above also mentions, Sergey Sobyenin, a mayor of Moscow, who posed with workers for pictures and shook their hands. This example demonstrates the work of transformism. The subaltern classes are not assembled into a people which could be antagonistic toward the regime. Quite the contrary, the subaltern classes are represented separately within the discourse and all of them are considered supportive of the regime. Laclau also provides an example of an interruption in an equivalential chain and mentions anti-communist rhetoric in the US of the 1950s: 'The opposition between "parasites" and "producers" had to lose its centrality, while the link between "people" and "workers" was replaced by an appeal to the average man' (Laclau 2005a: 135).

In the hegemonic discourse the subaltern classes are apolitical and concerned with private issues. At the same time, they share conservative values promoted by the regime and are ready to confront the opposition when it comes to the protection of stability (Van'ke and Kulaev 2015). Pro-governmental media outlets argue that the subaltern classes do not participate in politics independently but become involved in politics, if a threat to stability emerges. In the hegemonic discourse, the subaltern classes are usually portrayed as passive and reactive, they do not produce any new ideas but maintain the status quo.

The regime often appeals to subaltern classes when it needs popular approval for its political decisions. 'Uralvagonzavod' was the destination of the first Putin's visit after his inauguration in May 2012. He presented his plans to improve wages and social benefits in accordance with what later came to be called 'May Decrees' (V Nizhnem Tagile Vladimir Putin Proviol Soveshchanie 2012). In 2017, Vladimir Putin announced his decision to run for re-election at the ceremonial meeting with workers of 'GAZ', an automotive plant in Nizhny Novgorod.

It becomes clear that in this context the subaltern classes are portrayed by the hegemonic discourse in a positive way. For example, in 2010, more than a year before the 2011 protest rallies, President Dmitry Medvedev noted that mass media should have paid more attention to workers in constructing their positive image (Stenograficheskii Otchiot 2010). Medvedev made this remark at a meeting

of the State Council which discussed the professional education and the necessity to reinforce the prestige of industrial workers.

Before the 2012 presidential elections, Putin published several programmatic articles. One of them covered economic and social issues and was entitled 'Building of Justice'. In this article he called workers 'the backbone of every economy' and mentioned the possibility to increase the workers' participation in industry management (Putin 2012). At the 2014 annual press conference Putin called people of labor the true elite of Russia (News Conference 2014).

Official mass media follow the trend set by Russia's leaders. Pro-governmental TV channels issued series of documentaries titled *Heroes of Our Times* and praised and glorified workers of various enterprises. One of these documentaries told about Magnitogorsk Iron and Steel Works and portrayed local employees as hardworking and patriotic (Geroi Nashego Vremeni 2012). Alexander Vlasiuk, a journalist from Magnitogorsk who was interviewed for this episode, argued that metal workers are the 'backbone of the economy' and their creative capacities coincide with the political will of the state leadership. Another documentary of these series told about professional technical schools which train industrial workers (Geroi Nashego Vremeni 2013). The producers of the documentary described working class as a 'special category of people' who enable the success of industrial production. Hence, the documentaries stress the importance of industrial workers for the economic development of Russia. This development, however, is considered to be an outcome of the joint effort between the subaltern classes and the state.

A conservative writer and journalist Alexander Prokhanov also contributes to this ideology in his column of *Izvestiia*, one of the most circulated pro-governmental newspapers. For example, when he describes an aircraft building plant in Komsomol'sk-na-Amure, he portrays workers and engineers of this plant as unselfish people who are ready to work even for free if it is necessary for the national interest (Prokhanov 2014). Prokhanov argues that workers helped the state to survive in the 1990s and that they reinforce the state now, at the time of the confrontation with the West. Prokhanov also mentions managers of this state-owned enterprise who oversee the manufacturing processes. Thus, he creates an image of unity among workers, engineers, and the state, as the state and the employer are the same in this case.

In sum, the hegemonic discourse constructs an alliance between the subaltern classes and the regime. The former are portrayed in the positive way as hardworking and patriotic people who contribute to stability and economic prosperity of Russia. The regime, however, plays the leading role in this alliance. The existing hegemonic formation obtains an additional discursive pillar.

Within the hegemonic discourse, the trade unions play the role of an important mediator in the dialogue between the regime and the subaltern classes. Thus, Putin often stresses the importance of the dialogue with trade unions on issues of the labor market and industrial relations (Putin Posovetoval 2014). In 2015, he delivered a speech at the congress of the FNPR (Vazhnyie Zaiavleniia 2015). Putin spoke about international relations and called on trade unions to strengthen

Russia's sovereignty together with authorities. In addition, he said that the state, trade unions, and employers should cooperate to solve economic problems. Here, trade unions are chosen to be the audience of an important speech on international and home affairs. Speaking at the 2019 congress of the FNPR, Putin criticized those employers, who rejected dialogue with trade unions, and those representatives of the local authorities who did not pay attention to the cooperation with them (S'ezd Federatsii Nezavisimyykh Profsoiuzov 2019). Thus, within the hegemonic discourse, trade unions are considered to be an integral part of the wide alliance created by the authorities.

Pro-governmental media outlets often stress the role of trade unions in deliberation on issues of economic and social policies. According to official TV channels, the raise in the age of retirement in 2018 was discussed nationwide, and trade unions were involved in these debates. The government and the State Duma stressed the importance of trade unions in this deliberation (Vremia Peremen 2018). Public debates in general are also important for pro-governmental media outlets. Thus, public hearings about the pension reform, with participation of trade unions in the State Duma were covered extensively with the emphasis on the role of trade unions (Pensionnyi Vozrast Proshiol 2018).

In general, official mass media did not argue that the pension reform was supported unanimously (Profoiuzy – Vlastiam 2018). The hegemonic discourse allows the plurality of opinion. Trade unions considered allies of the regime were able to express their disagreement with the raise in the retirement age. Rallies against the pension reform were also highlighted by pro-governmental TV channels. The latter covered participation of trade unions in these rallies (Okolo 6500 Chelovek 2018).

Overall, official media outlets do not necessarily ignore social and labor protests, even when these activities are local and not massive. For example, in 2017, the economic department of *Vesti*, a news program of TV channel *Rossia*, published a ranking of Russian cities with the highest level of protest activity (Desiat' Samykh Besspokoinykh 2017).

Therefore, the hegemonic discourse presupposes a specific position for subaltern classes. They are not considered as ignorant or dangerous. Since they are supporters of the regime, stability, and sovereignty within the hegemonic discourse, subaltern classes are portrayed by pro-governmental media outlets as patriotic and conservative. Subaltern classes are supposed to be apolitical and concerned mostly with private life but they can participate in street actions to protect the status quo. Subaltern classes are also allowed to participate in social and labor protests if these protests do not threaten the regime.

Within the hegemonic discourse subaltern classes are not considered as absolutely passive and silent. According to official mass media, they just do their jobs and are satisfied with their lives under the regime,. However, the Russian regime does not exclude the possibility of people's mobilization. First of all, people should be politically active, when it comes to the protection of sovereignty and stability. Second, they can express their disagreement with some policies and local authorities if this disagreement does not undermine the order as a whole.

Plurality of opinions and deliberation are also possible within the hegemonic discourse.

In sum, the hegemonic discourse achieves its own sustainability through a certain articulation of subaltern classes' positions. They are portrayed as the regime's supporters which, when necessary, can protect Russia's sovereignty and stability. They are conservative but not absolutely passive. Sometimes they can criticize some governmental policies if it does not undermine the order as a whole. This articulation helps to preempt potential antagonism between elites and masses. My argument can be reinforced by exploring the representation of foreign countries' subaltern classes within the Russian hegemonic discourse.

Subaltern classes abroad

Official mass media pay special attention to international affairs. As widely recognized, the Kremlin propaganda projects an image of a fortress besieged by external enemies. The regime relies on the so called 'rally around the flag', which means that people appreciate the successes of the Russian foreign policy and support the existing political order. The discourse on foreign policy and international system should be examined within the framework for this research because it provides examples of positions of subaltern classes within the hegemonic discourse. Therefore, this section analyzes the representation of subaltern classes abroad. Subaltern classes of foreign countries demonstrate higher level of public engagement than Russian subaltern classes. Hence, representing subaltern classes abroad, the Russian hegemonic discourse specifies limits of permitted grassroots activities in general.

First of all, the importance of sovereignty for the hegemonic discourse becomes more obvious when it comes to the interpretation of international affairs. Sovereignty as a concept and as a discursive element attracted the highest attention after the wave of 'color revolutions' considered a threat to the regime. For example, the pro-Kremlin youth movement 'Nashi' established in 2005 proclaimed that their goal was to preserve Russia's sovereignty and territorial integrity and confront external and internal enemies (Finkel and Brudny 2012). In that period a notion of 'sovereign democracy' was elaborated. Pro-Kremlin pundits produced numerous texts on problems of national sovereignty and criticized the EU and US for undermining international stability. Richard Sakwa notes that '[t]he core of Putin's political identity is legitimism, support for sovereign constituted authorities' (Sakwa 2017: 95).

Sovereignty, as a discursive element, became even more important after the Arab spring and the 'Euromaidan'. The hegemonic discourse describes these events as turmoil provoked by the West in order to colonize or re-colonize Ukraine and the Middle East. Russian media and officials insist that the real leaders of these protests were the European and US politicians. They supposedly organized 'Euromaidan' using the old scenarios of 'color revolutions'. 'Color revolutions' that occurred in the post-communist countries are connected to the 'Arab spring'

which was also sponsored by the West (Rossiia v OON Rasskazala 2017). Sakwa mentions that, according to the Russian authorities, 'the US and its allies have repeatedly flouted international law in their various interventions' (Sakwa 2017: 93). According to Russian official media outlets, while the West organizes coups, people resist 'color revolutions' and try to protect stability.

The discourse on Ukrainian affairs is illustrative of how the Russian hegemonic discourse generally functions. From the very beginning of the protests in Kyiv in 2013, Russian mass media paid significant attention to the Ukrainian crisis.

When the Ukrainian crisis began in 2013, president Viktor Yanukovich tried to mobilize the workers from the Eastern region. He united them with loyal entrepreneurs and tried to demonstrate that Ukrainian subaltern classes supported the regime against the opposition. As noted above, the same tactics were used by the Kremlin in 2011–2012. Representatives of Ukrainian subaltern classes, such as miners and metal workers, participated in rallies organized by the Ukrainian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs (Posle Nochnykh Stolknovenii 2013). They showed their support of Yanukovich and his refusal to work with the European Union.

During November and December of 2013, Ukrainian workers were associated with conservatism and pursuit for order and stability. According to Russian media, Ukrainian workers did not want to be a part of the European community. They saw their future in close collaboration with Russia. 'People from the industrial East came to Kyiv. They support the decision of the government. Association with the EU would mean closures of enterprises and layoffs for public employees, miners, and metal workers. Russia and the CIS are their markets', said *Pervyi* (Posle Nochnykh Stolknovenii 2013).

After Yanukovich's downfall, the conflict moved to the Eastern regions of Ukraine. Then Russian official mass media presented workers of Eastern region as supporters of Russian foreign policy and opponents of the new Ukrainian regime and its nationalist ideology. Reconstructing the Russian hegemonic discourse, Gerard Toal summarizes that, according to the Russian officials, 'ordinary ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking people, concentrated particularly in the southeast, sought protection' (Toal 2017: 238).

Russian mass media presented Eastern Ukrainian miners as supporters of the Russian foreign policy and opponents of the new Ukrainian government. According to Russian TV channels, Donbass miners condemned the protests in Kiev and regime change. They said in interviews that participants of the 'Euro-maidan' went to the rallies, destroyed Kyiv, and did nothing useful while the miners worked. Here, Russian mass media demonstrate political virtues that have to belong to the subaltern social groups. These virtues include loyalty, social and political apathy. Political activity itself is condemned as idleness. Subaltern groups should perform their duties (work in mines, for example) and should not get involved into politics; however, when there is a threat to stability and order, they must drop their routines and defend the present regime. Donbass miners, who were dissatisfied with the new government and defined it as fascist, promised popular uprising (Novaia Zhizn' Donbassa 2014).

Democratic rhetoric of the Russian hegemonic discourse is clearly visible in the so called 'Crimean speech' delivered by Putin to announce the annexation of Crimea. First of all, he criticized the 'totalitarian state' which transferred Crimea to Ukraine without asking its citizens. Then, Putin confessed that he sympathized with the Ukrainian people who 'came out on Maidan' and that he advocated 'the right for peaceful protest'. However, according to Putin, this right was abused by nationalists and their 'foreign sponsors'. Finally, he outlined the official version of 'the reunification of Crimea with Russia'. In this version, 'the reunification' became possible due to joint efforts of Crimean people, local authorities, and the Russian state (Putin 2014). Therefore, this important speech discloses several features of the hegemonic discourse. It confirms that people's activities are allowed within certain limitations. Protests are tolerated if they are peaceful. Democracy is not abandoned but should be temperate, otherwise unrestrained grassroots movements can be hijacked by destructive forces and become harmful. According to the logic of the 'Crimean speech', cooperation with authorities makes people's activities fruitful and constructive. The ultimate example of such cooperation was 'the reunification of Crimea with Russia,' when, according to official propaganda, 'local self-defense units', people, local authorities, and, finally, the Russian state acted in concert.

Russian media argue that subaltern classes support the Russian foreign policy across the globe. Analyzing the presidential campaign in France, pro-Kremlin pundits argue that Marine Le Pen who is backed by Moscow can use 'Russophilia', sentiments shared by 'ordinary' French people (Le Pen Idiot Va-Bank 2017). The Russian operation in Syria was also supported in different countries and pro-governmental TV channels covered some rallies (V Rime Ustroili 2015). Here, Russian media outlets employed the distinction between 'true' Europe and 'false' Europe. While 'true' Europa is characterized by national sovereignty and 'peoplehood' and allied with Russia, 'false' Europe is characterized by the loss of sovereignty and anti-popular regimes and is hostile to Russia (Morozov 2009). According to this logic, the European subaltern classes are a part of 'true' Europe which does not confront Russia. Moreover, the high appreciation of activities of European subaltern classes within the Russian hegemonic discourse opens a space for the same appreciation of activities of Russian subaltern classes.

Therefore, the Russian hegemonic discourse combines Putin's support by Russian subaltern classes and support of pro-Russian political forces by subaltern classes in other countries (Ukraine and France, for instance).

Russia tries to simulate anti-Western counter-hegemony, preserve authoritarian regime inside and forge its sphere of influence. The West is presented as an imperialistic power, which strives to colonize Ukraine. Colonization leads to economic crises, unemployment, impoverishment and cultural oppression of the Ukrainians and the Russians in the eastern regions. Thus, according to Russian official media, Russian regime conducts anti-imperialistic foreign policy and protects the entire principle of national sovereignty.

Speaking at the plenary meeting of the UN General Assembly in September of 2015, Putin accused the West of exporting democratic revolutions and undermining the state sovereignty as such: ‘Aggressive interventions rashly destroyed government institutions and the local way of life... Power vacuum in some countries in the Middle East and Northern Africa obviously resulted in the emergence of anarchy’ (Putin 2015). Generalizing Putin’s approach toward revolutions and uprisings, Sakwa correctly notes: ‘A popular movement agitating for democracy and human rights overthrows a stagnant and kleptocratic dictatorship, only to find that the alternative is worse’ (Sakwa 2017: 96). According to Putin, this worse alternative is promoted by the US interventions.

However, this speech did not advocate authoritarianism and was not a manifestation of anti-democratic sentiments because Putin also employed the democratic dimension of the hegemonic discourse: ‘What is the meaning of state sovereignty? It basically means freedom, every person and every state being free to choose their future’ (Putin 2015). Therefore, the hegemonic discourse attaches sovereignty to citizens’ participation in the governing. It is another evidence that the hegemonic discourse does not exclude people’s grassroots activities.

At the same time, these activities are supposed to be ‘civilized’, ‘peaceful’, and ‘legal’. The representation of the Yellow Vests movement within the hegemonic discourse provides another example of how the Russian hegemonic discourse perceives protests abroad.

In December of 2018, while talking about human rights activism and freedom of assembly, Putin said: ‘We do not want to have here events like in Paris where they destroy paving stones and set everything on fire’ (Zasedaniie Soveta 2018). He meant Yellow Vests movement. According to Putin, these protests in France deteriorated into riots and became an example of uncivilized and dangerous activities.

In December of 2019, then prime minister Dmitry Medvedev mentioned the Yellow Vests during his conversation with mass media. He spoke about protests in general and said: ‘People can speak out – and it is absolutely normal. But speaking out should still be done in the manner prescribed by existing regulations’. Then, he argued that in Russia the Yellow Vests protests could ‘erupt into a revolt’ which ‘would be nonsensical and ruthless’ (In Conversation with 2019). Medvedev quoted here a well-known phrase from Alexander Pushkin’s *The Captain’s Daughter*, a novella depicting the 1773–1775 peasants’ rebellion led by Yemelyan Pugachev. Medvedev also added: ‘At the same time, any legally authorized activity, including any activity related to expressing one’s views, is acceptable and even necessary’ (In Conversation with 2019). Here, ‘protest’ figures as a floating signifier, as it can acquire a variety of meanings oscillating between ‘nonsensical revolt’ and expression of opinions within the framework of existing regulations. The hegemonic discourse establishes equivalence between “protest” and legally authorized expression of opinions.

Official media outlets extensively covered protests of the Yellow Vests. This coverage is varied and controversial. On the one hand, *Pervyi* and *Rossiia* recognize that these protests are not unfounded. On the other hand, mass media

criticize methods used by the protesters. This ambiguity illustrates positions of grassroots protests in the hegemonic discourse. Russian TV channels thoroughly enumerate demands of the Yellow Vests. For example, *Pervyi* reports: 'The Yellow Vests are against rising prices, doctors are against the reform of the emergency vehicles, farmers are against the solutions of the ministry of agriculture' (Parizh Gotovitsia 2018). *Rossiia* adds: 'People are demanding reforms in economy and social policy' (Aksii 'Zhioltykh Zholetov' 2019). Commentators also note dysfunctional liberal-democratic governments that fail to meet people's demands. In other words, media outlets argue that these protests were provoked by actual social and economic problems. At the same time, Russian TV channels criticize the Yellow Vests for radicalism and violent methods. *Pervyi* argues that the protests turned into marauding, robberies, and plain hooliganism (Uroki Neposlushaniia 2019). The TV channel also condemns 'populism' of the Yellow Vests which hinders a possible peaceful solution of social and economic problems (Analitycheskaia Programma 'Odnako' 2018). However, official media outlets admit that most protesters are peaceful, while the violent Yellow Vests discredit those civilized citizens. *Pervyi* reported that numerous peaceful protesters attended rallies because they wanted to express their disagreement with governmental policies and not because they wanted to fight police. The TV channel quotes one of the protesters: 'I am angry. What is happening now [clashes with police] is discrediting the Yellow Vests and playing into the hands of police' (Vo Frantsii Otmechaiut Godovshchinu 2019). *Pervyi* favorably mentions a women's rally which took place in Paris on January 6, 2019. According to the TV channel, it was a peaceful attempt to communicate ideas of the protests to the authorities: 'Participants complained that numerous violent episodes which accompany protests of the Yellow Vests eclipse the essence of the problem' (V Tsentre Parizha Sobralis' 2019).

Therefore, in the Russian hegemonic discourse the French protests oscillate between the reasonable and justified expression of disagreement and senseless and lawless riots fueled by populist sentiments. Official media outlets mention that the Yellow Vests involved people of various social groups and professions. There is a difference between the coverage of the 'Euromaidan' and the one of the Yellow Vests. In the case of the 'Euromaidan', Russian media outlets stripped the protesters' activities and goals of any justifiable motives. In the case of the Yellow Vests, protests were conceived of as an outcome of actual social and economic problems. Thus, the Russian hegemonic discourse can tolerate and justify grassroots protests. It is obvious that pro-Kremlin media discriminates between the 'Euromaidan' and 'yellow vests' because the former was harmful for Russian foreign policy unlike the latter. However, the TV channels criticize the Yellow Vests for crossing a certain line. Official media condemn protest actions which go beyond the legal frameworks and avoid peaceful solutions. According to *Pervyi*, populism of the Yellow Vests makes their demands impossible to satisfy.

The example of the Yellow Vests and their image in Russian official media also illustrate how the Russian hegemonic discourse positions grassroots protest

activities. Protesters are supposed to peacefully express their discontent and discuss it with the authorities in order to find an acceptable solution.

The hegemonic discourse is able to appropriate independent activities of subaltern classes. It means that the hegemonic discourse reserves a specific place for these activities and for their discussion and does not criticize them directly. However, it sets limits for grassroots activities and connects these activities with nodal points of the discourse. In other words, subaltern classes and their activities contribute to maintenance of stability and protection of sovereignty. The representation of grassroots activities within the hegemonic discourse indicates that these activities become a part of the current hegemonic formation. The alignment of subaltern classes' activities with nodal points of the discourse provides a discursive base for the domestication of these activities and, hence, the preemption of antagonism between the regime and subaltern classes.

The hegemonic discourse allows grassroots activities. It reflects the inclusion of subaltern classes into the hegemonic formation and the creation of their consent to the current rule. There is a democratic dimension of the hegemonic discourse which endorses even social and labor protests within certain limits, plurality of opinions, and moderate discontent.

From discourses to the hegemonic formation

Two previous sections address the hegemonic discourse on subaltern classes and grassroots activities. As previously mentioned, the Russian hegemonic discourse considers subaltern classes as supporters of the current regime. Grassroots activities are allowed if these activities do not challenge the regime. Social and labor protests are supposed to be peaceful and apolitical.

Even a quick glance at actual social and labor protests in Russia will show that they are peaceful and apolitical indeed. Therefore, one must explain the influence of official mass media on grassroots initiatives. Greene and Robertson (2018), for example, emphasize Vladimir Putin's popularity. Sociologist Sarah Ashwin, who studied Russian workers' 'patience' in the 1990s, tries to find origins of this patience in the culture of individual and collective dependence, which means that workers rely on their leader and abandon collective actions to solve problems at workplaces (Ashwin 1999). In other words, she explains the mildness of protests through certain cultural factors.

In the 1990s, however, when Ashwin conducted her research, workers were neither passive nor patient. Numerous labor protest, including, for example, miners' strikes and massive trade union rallies, took place in the 1990s. In fact, there are still plenty of social and labor protests and collective actions in Russia every year. The number of labor protests increases from year to year since the 2008 crisis (see: Bizyukov 2018). The average number of actions in 2008–2014 was 20.1 per month. In 2015 and 2016, this indicator was more than 34 per month due to the economic crisis. In 2017 it slightly decreased to 28.3 actions per month because the economic situation became more stable (Trudovye Protesty 2017). In 2018,

Russian trade unions were involved in nationwide protests against the pension reform. As Samuel Greene notes, 'Russian citizens are best understood not as passive, untrusting, and hide-bound individuals but as adept navigators of a shifting and uncertain sociopolitical landscape' (Greene 2014: 220). Indeed, Russian subaltern classes participate in protest actions and sometimes succeed solving specific problems. However, local successes neither improve labor conditions and living standards, nor promote democratization of Russia. In her research, Ashwin registers, rather, disbelief in significant social changes than age-old passivity and infinite patience. Hence, one should inquire into not why people are passive but why their activities do not result in significant political and social changes.

Gramsci's theory argues that the hegemonic formation is not reduced to the hegemonic discourse expressed through mass media and official statements. As previously mentioned, the concept of hegemonic formation derives from Gramsci's historical bloc reconsidered through discourse analysis. While historical bloc is a hierarchical alliance of different social groups and organizations, hegemonic formation is a hierarchical alliance of discourses. According to Gramsci, historical bloc relies on capillary power to obtain coherence. Capillary power also connects elites and masses. It enables to accommodate and satisfy demands from below. Moreover, capillary power facilitates the proliferation of the hegemonic discourse.

Relations between Russian authorities and grassroots activities are manifold and sophisticated because, from the Gramscian perspective, there is no strict divider between the state and civil society. Therefore, the state simply does not need to suppress all grassroots activities. Hence, even under the authoritarian regime, relations between authorities and civic associations can be productive for both sides. Scholars, who study the functioning of organizations of civil society in Russia, describe the impact of the state in different ways; however, they usually note that authorities may create new opportunities for civic associations, provide funding for these associations, discuss problems with these associations, and use the expertise provided from non-governmental organizations (cf. Aasland, Berg-Nordile and Bogdanova 2016, Chebankova 2012, Skokova, Pape and Krasnopolskaya 2018). Thus, the regime and citizens' initiatives may sometimes collaborate with mutual benefit. Catherine Owen (2020) notes that although authoritarian states may allow citizens' participation in local policy processes, this participation does not contribute to democratization.

In some cases authorities initiate citizens' activities and promote civic associations. Although many state-supported organizations only simulate grassroots activities, some of them provide the possibility to participate in social life (Brunarska 2018).

Relations between authorities and civic associations are far from being unequivocally antagonistic. The regime allows and sometimes even promotes numerous diverse organizations of civil society. Then, social and labor protests regularly occur in different regions. Hence, Russian subaltern classes are not passive and their protests are not necessarily suppressed or obstructed by coercion.

An informant who is a trade union consultant and has worked with the FNPR discloses: ‘The regime delineates a “field of friends” and a “field of enemies”... Many things are permitted within the field of trade unions defined as friends... Open opposition is being eradicated, but there will be a lot of activities within the field of friends including: strikes, serious demands, and even mass rallies’ (Interview 1). The regime tolerates social and labor protests, if they remain within a limited field. It means that there are specific zones where these protests are allowed and which often emerge around FNPR organizations. So called ‘enemies’ are mainly the non-systemic opposition. Some labor unions also face strict reactions from the state to their activities.

Recent cases of imprisonment of union leaders include criminal trials of dockers in Nakhodka (a Far Eastern port town) in 2014–2015 and pilots in Moscow in 2013–2016. Trade unions and human rights activists considered both cases to be political repressions against independent organizations (Podarki Dokeram 2014; Leonid Tikhonov 2015; Liderov ShPLS 2016). However, such criminal prosecutions do not form any systematic repressive policy against trade unions. The aforementioned trade unions of dockers and pilots, for example, could continue their usual activities after those trials.

It is not only the authorities who violate trade union rights. Another challenge comes from unlawful practices used by employers. Owners of enterprises often refuse to recognize trade unions and sometimes use intimidation tactics against their activists (Ostrovskaya 2018). State repressions against activists of trade unions appear as sporadic actions rather than a coherent strategy. In fact, the regime needs grassroots protests to calibrate its own policies.

As a rule, numerous labor and social protests start with spontaneous, unauthorized actions. The Russian legislation restricts the freedom of assembly. Rally organizers have to obtain approval from the local authorities to hold a street event. In 2012, a new law increased fines for the violation of the legislation on rallies. In 2014, the parliament adopted a law which criminalized repeat violations of the legislation on rallies (Federal’nyi Zakon 2014). In 2012, a law on so called ‘foreign agents’ was adopted. This law restricts foreign donations to non-profit organizations including trade unions (Federal’nyi Zakon 2012). The Labor Code adopted in 2001 tightened the rules for strike organizing. In order to organize a legal strike, workers have to start a collective labor dispute, call a meeting attended by more than 50% of workers, and achieve a majority of votes in favor of the strike (Trudovoi Kodeks 2001). Tomila Lankina and Alisa Voznaya stress that in 2007–2012, ‘on average, 26% of Russian protests met some kind of repression from the Russian authorities or pro-government associations’ (Lankina and Voznaya 2015: 338).

Restrictive laws and real possibility to be prosecuted can intimidate potential protesters. However, the percentage of spontaneous protests is relatively high. In 2013–2018, the share of spontaneous labor and social protests in the total number of protest actions grew from 35% to 63% (Trudovyie Protesty 2019). It does not mean that all spontaneous protests break Russian laws as petitions, for example, are among the most wide-spread means of protests (Bizyukov 2019b; Trudovyie

Protesty 2019). At the same time, spontaneity increases the probability of the action to be unauthorized as trade unions prefer to act within the legal framework (Bizyukov 2019b: 478). In 2008–2011, the rate of labor protests which followed prescriptions of the Labor Code declined. While in 2008 11% of labor protests used means prescribed by the Labor Code, in 2011 the share of this type of protests was amounted to only 8% (Bizyukov and Olimpieva 2014: 69). Although appeals to authorities do not break the law, they are not considered by the Labor Code as a regular form of labor protests. When it comes to rallies specifically, in 2017–2018, 16.5% of rallies were unauthorized (Rost Protestnoi Aktivnosti 2019).

The above suggests that spontaneous and unauthorized actions occur regularly as the effectiveness of legal means of protest has decreased. Repressions and restrictive laws do not eliminate open expressions of discontent. Dissatisfied workers see fewer possibilities of the legal expressions of their demands. Activities of trade unions, however, aim to channel popular discontent to legal frameworks.

As previously mentioned, protest movements strive to participate in deliberative processes. Their goal is to discuss social problems with the authorities. Despite censorship, lack of independent media outlets, and mostly fraudulent elections, Russia has an environment for public debates on certain issues of social life. Many protests start with submissions of complains and petitions to authorities (Gladarev 2011). Thus, protest groups usually try to establish the dialogue with the state. Although many protests occur spontaneously and protesters often experience problems with the organization of ‘civilized’ discussions, challenging groups are routinely involved in deliberative processes and cooperation with the state.

The hegemonic formation embraces various organizations and grassroots activities that are not necessarily suppressed by the state. Social and labor protests occur regularly and sometimes succeed. However, these activities take place within the existing hegemonic formation and consent to the current rule. In other words, grassroots activities can become a subset of the hegemonic formation. At the discursive level, discourses of the subaltern classes and their activities are articulations of the hegemonic discourse. In Laclau’s terms, these activities and discourses compose democratic politics which does not challenge the hegemonic formation but diversifies it and by these means makes it sustainable. While this chapter describes general characteristics of the hegemonic discourse and the hegemonic formation which manage and transform grassroots activities, the next chapter covers Russian trade unions proper. These unions usually engage in protest actions but avoid antagonizing the regime and the state.

CHAPTER 4.

The system of Russian trade unions

As has been stated in the theoretical part of this work, transformism requires not only specific policies, but also a certain type of activities from below and institutional sites where governmental policies and grassroots activities meet. I argue that Russian trade unions provide these institutional sites.. This chapter addresses the organizational structure and discourses of Russian trade unions and allied social movements.

Russian trade unions are not uniform. While some of them are quite active, others are not. They may criticize the government or refrain from such criticism. However, most of them are involved in social and labor protests. These protests occasionally result in democratic politics but popular politics has not emerged yet. Trade unions often go beyond workplace problems and address region-wide or even nation-wide issues. At the same time, mutual concessions between trade unions and the authorities fractionize the protest.

The position of trade unions within the hegemonic formation is ambiguous. On the one hand, trade unions organize protests and contribute to their successes. In this way, they often improve labor conditions and living standards. On the other hand, trade unions fulfill functions of capillary power. They connect the regime and subaltern classes and provide the organizational base for this connection.

The first section of this chapter introduces Russia's main trade unions. It provides a brief overview of the post-Soviet history of trade unions and describes organizational structures of trade unions, their general activities, and their relations to the state.

The second section addresses discourses of trade unions and demonstrates that they are subsumed within the hegemonic discourse. This subsumption also prevent the emergence of antagonism and popular subjectivation, although isolated social and labor protests may take advantage of being in alignment with the hegemonic discourse. I analyze texts produced by trade unions. I focus on programmatic documents and statements of trade unions' leaders. I pay specific attention to those texts that address protest activities and major political events, mainly elections.

The third section discusses how trade unions and their discourses contribute to transformism.

Organizations of trade unions

Russia has a developed and diversified system of trade unions which 'form by far the largest component of an organized civil society' (Traub-Merz and Gerasimova 2018: 184). Organizations of trade unions vary by their relations with authorities and repertoires of actions. Scholars usually distinguish trade unions, which are members of the FNPR, and other trade unions which do not belong to the Federation. The former are called 'traditional' or 'official' and the latter are called

‘alternative’ or ‘free’ (Olimpieva 2010). ‘Traditional’ trade unions tend to cooperate with authorities and act within the framework of ‘social partnership’ which means the collaboration of authorities, employers, and trade unions and requires the solution of industrial conflicts through collective bargaining. ‘Alternative’ trade unions rely on protest actions, such as rallies and strikes, and sometimes operate as uninstitutionalized social movements (Olimpieva and Bizyukov 2014). However, this division is not absolutely clear in all situations. In some cases FNPR organizations appear to be active and involved in protest activities within and out of workplaces. ‘Alternative’ trade unions, vice versa, also cooperate with authorities and follow principles of social partnership.

The FNPR was founded in 1990, while the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions (*Vsesoiuznyi Tsentral’nyi Sovet Professional’nykh Soiuzov*, VTsSPS), the old Soviet trade union federation, still existed. The word ‘independent’ in the name of the FNPR meant the independence of this new organization from the Soviet bureaucracy. The FNPR manifested a break with the history of the Soviet trade unions which were under total control of the state. This new and independent worker movement played a significant role during perestroika. Labor protests were an important part of anti-Soviet movements. However, after the dissolution of the VtsSPS in October 1990 and the collapse of the USSR, the new federation gradually turned into a pro-government structure. The FNPR became a successor of the VtsSPS and inherited its property and large membership base, which was significantly shrinking during the 1990s. Nowadays, the FNPR has approximately 20 million members.

Relations between the Kremlin and leaders of the largest trade union organization were defined in the beginning of the 1990s. At first, the FNPR stood in opposition to the Kremlin and supported the Supreme Soviet in the 1993 constitutional crisis (Ashwin and Clarke 2002). Leaders of the Federation called for strikes and people’s mobilization against President Boris Yeltsin. As a consequence, government froze the FNPR bank accounts. Then, the FNPR congress set course for the de-escalation of the conflict with the Kremlin and elected a new chair, Mikhail Schmakov, still in the office. According to the official FNPR report, in 1993, trade unions were in a critical situation, because the leadership failed to estimate the situation correctly and dragged trade unions into the political conflict (Profsoiuzy Rossii 2005).

After 1993, the FNPR decided to support President Yeltsin and refused to create a coalition with his opponents, the Communist Party of the Russian Federation. In exchange, the Kremlin allowed the FNPR to secure ownership of the Soviet trade unions’ property and become the leading labor representative in the bargaining processes. Yeltsin’s administration, for its part, prevented the formation of a potentially strong opposition backed by trade unions (Olimpieva and Orttung 2013).

Despite the alliance between the FNPR and the Kremlin, the Federation was deeply involved in social and labor protests of the 1990s. The FNPR organized numerous all-Russian ‘days of actions’ to criticize economic reforms of Yeltsin’s governments, defend worker rights, and protect wages and social benefits. These

‘days of actions’ included rallies and strikes and were well attended across the country. However, Sarah Ashwin and Simon Clarke note that the FNPR demonstrated its adherence to social peace. The attachment to principles of social partnership allowed to avoid the escalation of conflicts during the period of economic crises (Ashwin and Clarke 2002).

The FNPR did not stay away from miners’ protests, which proved to be significant events in social and political life of Russia in the 1990s. They began at the end of the 1980s and contributed to the final collapse of the USSR. The post-Soviet movement of miners was heterogeneous. Firstly, there was the Independent Trade Union of Miners (*Nezavisimyi Profsoiuz Gornikov*, NPG). Secondly, there was *Rosugleprof*, a trade union of miners within the FNPR. Both of these unions organized numerous rallies and strikes in different regions, but some actions were spontaneous. The NPG could be considered a more radical union than the FNPR, since the former relied more on street action than on negotiations with the authorities. However, during the presidential election of 1996, both the NPG and the FNPR officially supported Yeltsin (Solovenko 2016). This case demonstrates that trade unions, which did not belong to the FNPR, also avoided political confrontation with the government and strove for mutual concessions.

In 1998, labor and social protests in Russia peaked. Besides miners, public employees, who were mostly members of FNPR unions, went on strike and took part in mass rallies across the country. For example, on October 7, the FNPR organized another all-Russian protest day which was one of the most massive actions in the post-Soviet history of Russia (Profsoiuzy Rossii 2005). However, trade unions preferred not to radicalize the protest movement, refrained from a direct political confrontation with the government, and became involved in dialogues with the Kremlin and regional authorities. The FNPR and authorities worked together to reduce the level of social unrest and keep protests ‘civilized’ (Katsva 1999).

In the 1990s, trade unions already faced the pressure from the authorities. It would be an exaggeration to say that the authoritarian turn of the 2000s significantly strengthened this pressure as sporadic attacks on trade unions took place already under Yeltsin. As previously mentioned, when the FNPR tried to support the Supreme Council during the 1993 crisis, its bank accounts were frozen and the chair had to resign. In 1998, some participants of miners’ protests were prosecuted for railroad blockades. However, there were no large-scale repressions against trade unions and actual prison sentences for participants (Solovenko 2016).

In the 2000s and 2010s, the number of protests decreased due to the economic growth and the improving standard of living. Moreover, the new labor legislation restricted strikes. The window of opportunity for action shrank with the consolidation of the authoritarian regime.

As previously mentioned, the Labor Code, which was adopted in 2001, complicated procedure for collective disputes and made legal strikes almost impossible. Experts and human right activists often criticize the Russian legislation on strikes

(Bizyukov 2015; Liutov 2012). In 2007, for example, a group of Russian sociologists signed a collective letter calling for revision of the Labor Code (Trudvoye Spory 2007). The authors argue that the overwhelming majority of strikes in Russia are illegal because of the complexity of the bureaucratic procedures.

Then, in 2004, the new law on assemblies, rallies, and demonstrations was adopted; after the 2011–2012 mass protests, it became significantly stricter. Finally, laws on non-governmental organizations and foreign agents restricted the freedom of associations. Thus, trade unions lost some opportunities for legal action. At the same time, actual strikes, not registered by the authorities and employers as ‘legal strikes’, also occur regularly. For example, in 2014–2018, some 35% of labor protests include work stoppages that do not meet legal requirements (Trudovye Protesty 2019).

Transformation of the party system in Russia also affected the FNPR. The Federation uses parliamentary elections to achieve its goals. During the 1990s, when there was no hegemonic pro-presidential party, the FNPR cooperated with different political forces and established its own electoral blocs. In the late 1990s, the Federation formed a tactical alliance with the mayor of Moscow Yury Luzhkov and his movement *Otechestvo*, which was supposed to be a frontrunner of the 1999 parliamentary elections. This move canceled the creation of a trade union parliamentary party which could have become a political wing of the FNPR. As Ashwin and Clarke mention, by the end of the 1990s the FNPR realized that trade unions ‘had to work with whoever held the power’ (Ashwin and Clarke 2002: 57). Therefore, when *United Russia* took the State Duma and regional legislatures, the FNPR turned into a strategic ally of the leading party.

The cooperation with *United Russia* appears fruitful for the FNPR. The Federation finally obtained the opportunity to regularly delegate its representatives to the State Duma and regional legislatures. In general, the FNPR is involved in parliamentary procedures and participates in numerous debates on legislative issues and social problems.

As previously mentioned, besides the FNPR, there are alternative trade unions in Russia. The largest federation of alternative unions is the Confederation of Labor of Russia (*Konfederatsiia Truda Rossii*, KTR). The KTR was established in 1995 but soon split into two organizations: the KTR and the All-Russian Confederation of Labor (*Vserossiyskaia Konfederatsiia Truda*, VKT). These two confederations reunited in 2011 and the KTR exists now as a unified organization.

The KTR is much smaller than the FNPR and has 2 million members. The KTR structure differs from that of the FNPR and does not have territorial units. The absence of regional branches allows the KTR ‘to handle plant union affairs directly’ (Traub-Merz and Gerasimova 2018: 170).

In the 2000s, alternative trade unions received a new impetus. The economic revival and opening of new foreign-owned enterprises created opportunities for the development of trade unions. The relative flexibility of non-FNPR labor organizations allowed them to take advantage of the economic growth of the 2000s. In 2011, the KTR had local unions at several automotive plants including

Ford, General Motors, Nissan, Volkswagen, and AutoVAZ, in food industry, among teachers and doctors, and so on.

While the FNPR cooperates with *United Russia*, the KTR delegates its representatives to the State Duma and local legislatures thanks to its alliance with *Just Russia*, a party which belongs to the so called 'systemic opposition'. It supports the Kremlin's policies in general but sometimes criticizes *United Russia*. The KTR is also involved in existing deliberative mechanisms. Boris Kravchenko, chair of the KTR, is a member of the Presidential Council for Civil Society and Human Rights (Chleny Soveta 2019). The KTR is represented in the Public Council at the Ministry of Labor.

After 2014, the recession and stagnation of the Russian economy undermined the development of alternative unions. While some enterprises were shut down, other enterprises went through massive lay offs. KTR unions were not able to organize significant protests. Hence, their influence has declined.

The difference between traditional and alternative trade unions has developed historically. Because the FNPR became a successor of the Soviet trade unions, the Kremlin recognized the FNPR as the main representative of the working classes. In the late 1980s, however, labor movements were heterogeneous. For example, trade unions of miners, which neither were a part of the VTsSPS, nor joined the FNPR, organized massive strikes in several regions of the Soviet Union. These strikes contributed to the ultimate collapse of the USSR (Clarke, Fairbrother and Borisov 1995). Although, in the early 1990s, independent miners' unions supported Yeltsin and reforms of his administration, the economic crisis evolved into the 1998 'railroad wars' organized by miners. In 1998, for example, protesting miners demanded the resignation of Yeltsin (Bizyukov 2001). Piotr Bizyukov (2001) notes that alternative trade unions emerged from spontaneous strike movements. These origins made them not only less bureaucratic and more militant, but also less numerous and less capable of routine everyday work in comparison with traditional trade unions.

The Soviet legacy also affects the difference between traditional and alternative trade unions. One of the roles played by trade unions since the Soviet era is the distribution of benefits. Ashwin and Clarke note that the provision of benefits and 'administering the social and welfare facilities of the enterprise' were 'the most important role of [Soviet] unions for their members, absorbed the bulk of union resources and took up the overwhelming part of the time of union officers' (Ashwin and Clarke 2003: 21). In the post-Soviet period, trade unions attempted to maintain these functions. Members of trade unions still expect certain benefits and even 'services' from trade unions. Legal advice and assistance are among the most popular services provided by trade unions. At the same time, some trade unions are able to provide welfare benefits, such as vouchers for accommodation at sanatoriums (Il'in 2001). Only FNPR unions inherited the property of Soviet unions. Hence, 'traditional' unions have more possibilities to provide benefits than 'alternative' trade unions. The latter can rely mainly on benefits provided by the collective agreement at a specific enterprise. Therefore, alternative trade unions have to be more militant and assertive than traditional trade unions.

In terms of politics, the main difference between the FNPR and alternative unions is their attitudes to presidential elections. The FNPR usually sides with Kremlin candidates. In 2012, the General Council of FNPR decided to support Putin in the presidential election. The FNPR participated in canvassing together with Putin's electoral headquarters and in Putinite rallies (Postanovleniye Gensoveta FNPR 2012). FNPR unions organized these rallies in numerous Russian cities across the country (Mnogotysiachnyie Mitingi Profsoiuzov 2012). In Moscow, trade unions mobilized teachers to support Putin (Uchitelei Vyzyvaiut na Miting 2012). In December 2017, FNPR participated in gatherings which formally endorsed Putin as a candidate for the 2018 election (Vybor Rossii 2017). In accordance with the Russian legislation, if candidates do not represent any party, they must be supported by 'initiative groups'. Independent candidates have to organize a group of at least 500 citizens. The meeting of such a group has the right to nominate an independent candidate (Federal'nyi Zakon o Vyborakh 2020; although the very recent amendment to this law was adopted in 2020, the provisions on initiative groups have been introduced earlier). Since Putin was not a candidate of *United Russia*, he had to be nominated by such a group. The FNPR organized a meeting of this group to nominate Putin. Members of this group were members of the FNPR. Unlike the FNPR, the KTR distances itself from the support of any presidential candidate and never involves in presidential campaigns.

However, the sharp distinction between the FNPR and alternative trade unions is an exaggeration. When Green and Robertson call the FNPR 'a virtual or ersatz union' (Green and Robertson 2010: 89), they are not correct, as the situation with traditional trade unions is more complex than they depict. The FNPR regularly organizes rallies and strikes. For example, the FNPR is represented by an active union of miners in Kachkanar, a small town near Yekaterinburg. This union has a long tradition of protests activities and utilizes various types of collective actions (Rabotniki Kachkanarskogo GOKa 2007; Pravil'nyie Rasklady 2016). These activities can often be successful. In 2018, for example, the union achieved a wage increase (Profkom 'Kachkanar-Vanadii' 2018). Another FNPR union organized protests to prevent lay offs at the Chelyabinsk Tractor Plant (Terpenie Konchilos' 2014). It is important to know that this plant is affiliated with 'Uralvagonzavod'. This is an additional evidence of the complexity of relations between the regime and the subaltern classes. Even workers of an enterprise which is important from the propagandist point of view can protest independently.

FNPR unions have been involved in protests of bus drivers across the country (Na Poroze Avtokollapsa 2017). On March 29, 2017, the most attended action was a rally of bus drivers in Yekaterinburg. A FNPR local union organized this rally (Ostanovka Yekaterinburg 2017). The reason of the protests was a poor situation in the system of public transportation in Russian regions and especially wage arrears.

In February 2019, workers of a carriage building plant in Chelyabinsk Oblast went on a spontaneous rally and were supported by a FNPR local union (Rabotniki Ust'-Katavskogo Vagonostroitel'nogo 2019). This action was provoked by a

reduction in wages. Although the local authorities did not authorize this rally, the FNPR did not stay away from this action.

In other words, the FNPR is involved in regular protest actions. Some of these actions begin spontaneously and the FNPR guides them through legal channels.

An interviewee, member of a FNPR organization in Saint Petersburg and Leningrad Oblast, said: 'It is difficult to get our trade union somewhere, except for a holiday base' (Interview 2). However, he discloses that, despite passivity, this union organized a protest action once: 'It was a situation recently. For some reason, our chairwoman got offended by employers who changed something in the collective agreement... The union brought people to a rally' (Interview 2). This example demonstrates that even passive FNPR unions can sometimes organize protest actions when their interests are challenged. In short, the FNPR participates in numerous protests which employ various repertoires of actions and can act independently.

Local organizations of the FNPR are diverse. Some of these organizations are passive and involved only in various 'team building' and cultural activities such as New Year celebrations and the distribution of free tickets to theaters and guided tours. Others are quite active and focused on problems in their regions and cities rather than on issues of 'high' politics such as presidential elections. At the same time, demands of trade unions are an example of demands which, in Laclau's terms, do not tend to become parts of equivalential chains. Demands of trade unions remain either requests within institutions or claims to institutions.

As previously mentioned, trade unions often have to deal with spontaneous expressions of discontent. Trade unions do not ignore or stay away from spontaneous protests. Numerous protests which start as spontaneous ones become a part of trade union activities.

Trade unions actually decrease the number of spontaneous protests in those sectors of the economy where the union density is higher than in other sectors. By contrast, absence of trade unions leads to radicalization of protests (Bizyukov 2018). De-escalation of social and labor conflicts improves and supports positive relations between trade unions and the authorities.

Irina Olimpieva and Robert Orttung (2013) argue that Russian trade unions are underrepresented in various governmental agencies and cannot influence labor and social policies. Trying to increase this influence, trade unions offer 'social peace' in exchange for the access to processes of decision-making (Olimpieva and Orttung 2013: 7). Trade unions aim to secure their positions within the framework of relations among employers, the authorities, and labor organizations. These strategies presuppose concessions among them, employers, and the authorities.

In the 1990s, there were attempts to establish a system of social partnership based on what might be described as corporatist principles – an 'institutional arrangement for linking the associationally organized interests of civil society with the decisional structures of the state' (Schmitter 1974: 86). Hence, the aforementioned strategies of trade unions might be justified within the system of social partnership. In the 1990s, the Russian tripartite commission and regional

tripartite commissions were established. These commissions were supposed to facilitate deliberations among the state, employers, and trade unions. The effectiveness of these bodies have always been questioned (Mikhailova 1999). Agreements signed by commissions are often vague and, in fact, employers do not adhere to them. However, trade unions pay special attention to the work of these commissions. The participation in the commissions is a tool for trade unions to communicate their problems to the authorities. Another part of the social partnership system is collective agreements at the enterprise level. Collective agreements are the ultimate goal for many trade unions and most of their activities are aimed at signing a more favorable document.

Ashwin and Clarke conclude that corporatism in Russia is ultimately dysfunctional and trade unions usually fail to 'achieve results through bureaucratic channels', which leads to 'growing frustration among workforce' and 'outbreaks of extreme militancy' (Ashwin and Clarke 2002: 270). Irina Olimpieva argues that the imperfect system of social partnership results in the growing political involvement of trade unions. Since the system of social partnership is ineffective, trade unions have to be politically active in order to influence the authorities and employers (Olimpieva 2016). Vadim Borisov notes that the Russian system of social partnership is ineffective and appears as a 'virtual space' (Borisov 2001: 56). Although tripartite commissions exist at federal and regional levels, these commissions usually fail to balance the interests of employees, employers, and the state. At the same time, he adds, trade unions are able to pressure the authorities (Borisov 2001: 66). In other words, Russian version of social partnership is mostly of declaratory character. Trade unions have to compensate for the inefficiency of social partnership by engaging in protest activities as a tool of gaining leverage over the authorities.

Trade unions provide examples of capillary power. While the FNPR in general does not belong to the authorities at any level or branch of the state power, the Federation supports the regime and the hegemonic ideology. This support does not preclude protests activities of the local trade unions in regions. However, the close cooperation with the authorities and ideological subordination affect protests, organized by the FNPR, and make these protests less challenging for the regime. While the state apparatus may be ineffective and deinstitutionalized (Greene 2014), the local trade unions compensate for this deinstitutionalization, at least in the sphere of industrial relations. Thus, the extensive and diversified structure of the trade unions allowed them to become an important actor of the local political and social life. From this point of view, KTR unions are less significant than the FNPR because the KTR has less members than the FNPR while a feature of capillary power is its presence in most regions and economic branches.

Aswhin and Clarke highlight 'the fragmentation of trade union interests that is a product of their integration into the branch and regional structures of social partnership' (Ashwin and Clarke 2002: 58). An informant who currently works at an FNPR organization in Leningrad Oblast confirms that local unions are autonomous from the pro-Kremlin central apparatus: 'The FNPR does not impede small initiatives... It is possible to launch a movement and achieve something in

small trade unions' (Interview 3). An expert and consultant of trade unions mentioned the financial independence of local FNPR organizations: 'During the Soviet times all financial streams [within trade unions] were centralized, but in the beginning of the 1990s it was decided to leave money in primary organizations' (Interview 10). The central apparatus does not try to eliminate the autonomy of local organizations because possible attempts of the unification might undermine the sustainability of the whole federation: 'Nobody needs to create additional tensions within the structure [of trade unions]' (Interview 11). These autonomy and involvement in various social protests, besides usual industrial relations, enable capillarity. As previously discussed in the theoretical chapter, it means that trade unions are possible to penetrate the whole society, respond to the wide range of issues, and control grassroots activities.

In sum, Russian trade unions are a diversified system of various organizations. Their positions within the hegemonic formation are ambiguous. Trade unions are often involved in protests or even lead protests sometimes. Both 'traditional' and 'alternative' trade unions participate in social and labor protests. Decentralized structures of the federations allow local organizations to operate autonomously and respond to local social and labor conflicts. In Russian regions trade unions often address the wide range of social problems, besides industrial relations. At the same time, protest activities of trade unions coincide with cooperation with the regime. Sometimes this cooperation is a prerequisite of a successful protest but imposes limitations on activities in general.

Analyzing relations between trade unions and the state in Latin America, Ruth Berins Collier and David Collier (2002) note that the goal of the state incorporation of labor movements is 'to create a legalized and institutionalized labor movement that [is] depoliticized, controlled, and penetrated by the state' (Collier and Collier 2002: 163). In the Russian case, the state incorporation of labor movements is an ambiguous process. On the one hand, the FNPR leadership supports the regime and is associated with the state apparatus. The FNPR cooperates with *United Russia* and backs Vladimir Putin at presidential elections. On the other hand, the system of Russian trade unions is diversified and the regime does not eliminate this diversity. Alternative trade unions are not aligned with the regime. They neither support *United Russia*, nor participate in Putin's campaigns. Also, alternative trade unions can cooperate with other parties to run for seats in the State Duma and regional legislatures. Moreover, local FNPR unions can often be active and involved in protest activities. Deficiencies of the Russian system of social partnership also make the possible incorporation more complicated. Therefore, it cannot be suggested that the state completely incorporates Russian trade unions.

For example, Tatiana Vodopianova, the chair of Tatarstan a FNPR regional branch in Tatarstan, reports that 95% of labor conflicts end are resolved with by meeting the satisfying of the workers' demands (Vodopianova 2014). Hence, FNPR unions can often succeed protecting labor and social rights. However, particular successes turn into general failure and contribute to the sustainability

of the regime because trade unions tend to cooperate with the regime and seek give for concessions to its representatives.

The cooperation between trade unions and the regime is also and especially evident at the discursive level. The next section addresses discourses of trade unions and their intersections with the hegemonic discourse.

Discourses of trade unions

Discourse analysis of trade union texts can disclose ways of thinking, norms, and values affecting their repertoire of actions. Discourses of trade unions generally receive less attention than institutional arrangements from scholars. However, as Dimitris Tsarouhas notes, balancing of institutional approaches with ‘attention to agency’ and use of such concepts as ‘union identity helps to refine the insights of the institutional tradition’ (Tsarouhas. 2011: 422). While discourses of European and US trade unions sometimes become subject to scrutiny (cf. Cornfield and Fletcher, 1998; Jansson and Uba, 2019), discourses of Russian trade unions remain understudied. Most texts focus on repertoires of actions, organizational structures, and violations of trade union rights. I argue that the application of discourse analysis to studies of trade unions provides a fresh perspective on labor organizations, their activities, and their positions within the Russian political system. Discourses of trade unions combine the pursuit of cooperation with the authorities and the involvement in social protests. Since discourses of trade unions remain underexplored, investigation into these discourses can shed more light on relations between the regime and protest movements.

As previously established, the Russian hegemonic discourse has three important features. First, it prioritizes stability and sovereignty. The hegemonic discourse is structured around signs of stability and sovereignty. Second, subaltern classes are portrayed as conservative and supportive of the regime. Third, the hegemonic discourse includes democratic rhetoric. Hence, subaltern classes are permitted to act independently if their activities do not challenge sovereignty and stability. Trade unions are considered legitimate mediators between the state and subaltern classes. Grassroots activities are allowed within certain limits. This section demonstrates that the hegemonic discourse and discourses of trade unions intersect. In other words, trade unions and the regime are allied at the discursive level. Social and labor protests cannot produce any independent discourse which could challenge the hegemonic one.

When trade unions protest, they adjust their rhetoric to the hegemonic discourse: ‘They [protesting unions] may use this kind of rhetoric: “The employer rocks the boat. We are standing against sanctions and the hostile international community. We need unity, which is undermined by the employer”’ (Interview 1).

On the one hand, this discursive adjustment may be a rational strategy which is used to make protest actions more effective. The authorities often become a powerful ally of trade unions in labor conflicts. This alliance requires discursive compatibility. As previously established, the hegemonic discourse appeals to

subaltern classes and their legitimate protests. The hegemonic discourse admits that subaltern classes and trade unions as their representatives have the right to protests. Consequently, the hegemonic formation contains reserved zones for the expression of discontent where this expression can be effective.

On the other hand, many union activists genuinely share the state-oriented ideology. The worldview of trade union leaders presupposes that the state is the ultimate value: 'It does not matter what they [trade union leaders] say about human rights, for example. All of them have one in common: they stand for the state. They serve the state' (Interview 10). Genuine beliefs and rational strategies produce situations where trade unions disseminate the official ideology and embed it in grassroots activities. As the second chapter of this dissertation demonstrates, the hegemonic discourse is able to reconcile the prioritization of sovereignty and stability, state-centrism, and grassroots activities. Discourses of trade unions become possible and legitimate vis-a-vis the hegemonic discourse due to this reconciliation. It can be suggested that this state-centrism is a part of Russian common sense. In the late 1990s, the weakening of the central government was widely blamed for turmoil of that period. Analyzing the Russian identity in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Ted Hopf concludes: 'There was a great deal of discursive consensus on Russia's need to reestablish a Federal Center as the single authorized legal embodiment of the Russian state' (Hopf 2002: 207). Since 'good sense' which enables protests is based on common sense, protest practices and discourses also appear to be state-centric.

State-centrism of trade union discourse has a material foundation as the state is the main counterpart of trade unions. 'FNPR unions operate within an industrial framework that is largely state-dominated' (Traub-Merz and Gerasimova 2018: 184). Sergeyus Glovackas, a representative of the International Labor Organization (ILO) in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, argues that the state remains the largest employer in post-Soviet space and, therefore, employees often bring their claims against the authorities (Glovackas 2015). However, it comes mainly about confrontation with the local authorities. It can be suggested that potential protesters who are employed by state-owned enterprises lack economic autonomy, which hinders protest activities (McMann 2006). Yet relations between protesters and the authorities are complex and ambiguous. Protest groups often bring claims against the local authorities and simultaneously seek support of high-ranking officials at the same time. Intense relations with the state at all levels of activities affect discourses of trade unions.

To analyze discourses of trade unions, I have chosen the FNPR and the KTR programmatic documents and their leaders' statements from 2011 on. I focus on those statements that address general issues of trade union strategies and major events, namely elections and mass protests.

The analysis of the FNPR and the KTR programmatic documents shows that both organizations advocate democracy and human rights, especially social and labor ones. According to the programs, the main task of the FNPR and the KTR is to improve living standards of employees and protect their rights and interests.

This is a standard set of goals and principles which are common for most of trade unions.

After 2011, the FNPR adopted two programs in 2015 and 2019 respectively.

The 2015 FNPR program classifies ‘threats to social stability and sovereignty’ as the ‘main challenges’ of our time. First of all, social stability and sovereignty are connected and even conceived as interrelated to each other. Then, the FNPR declares that the sources of these threats to stability and sovereignty are business, its political advocates, and the ‘neoliberal model of capitalism’ (Programma FNPR 2015). In the framework of this ideology the main mission of trade union is to preserve the stability, a notion which occupies a privileged position in the FNPR discourse and serves as a nodal point. Trade unions follow the hegemonic discourse’s prioritization of sovereignty and internal stability.

The 2015 FNPR program declares that the Federation participates in ‘the political life of society’ to effectively fulfill the social role of trade unions. This political participation should result in ‘the civilized social and labor relations’ and improved ‘institutes of credibility, consent, and cooperation’ (Programma FNPR 2015).

The 2019 FNPR program (Programma FNPR 2019) does not significantly differ from the previous one. Although the new program does not mention sovereignty, it still considers ‘geopolitical instability’ as a threat for working people. The FNPR confirms its adherence to dialogue with the state entities. It is important that the 2019 program mentions ‘dialogue’ in a context of relations between the trade unions and the state. In other words, ‘dialogue’ is mentioned in a political context. Although the term ‘neoliberalism’ is not used anymore, the FNPR still criticizes contemporary ‘financial system’ and business which strives only for profit.

The FNPR’s official worldview is generally hostile toward political changes as such. The book *Ideology of Trade Unions* issued by the publishing house of the FNPR’s newspaper *Solidarnost* argues: ‘Russian history of the twentieth century shows clearly that every destruction of political mechanism costs at least a decade of social devastation for workers’ (Shershukov 2012: 37). Yet, the book does not condemn labor protests or the participation of trade unions in parliamentary activity within the limits set by the existing legislation.

Social and labor protests are also interpreted through their relations to stability. For example, in one of his speeches Shmakov says: ‘Let us work together to reduce tensions in monocities and vulnerable branches of the economy; let us form together the civilized practice of social conflicts’ (Shmakov, 2015: 16). Vladimir Derbin, the chair of the FNPR regional branch in Saint Petersburg and Leningrad Oblast, notes: ‘Today there are no acute social and labor conflicts in our regions’ (Derbin, 2015: 36). He argues that stability in Saint Petersburg and Leningrad Oblast is impossible without ‘productive dialogue’ and that it is maintained due to ‘the effective system of social partnership’ (Derbin, 2015: 35).

As previously mentioned, official mass media extensively cover protests of the Yellow Vests. Putin also spoke about these protests and criticized actions of protesters for their violent methods. The FNPR echoes Putin’s statement but does

not directly criticize the Yellow Vests movement. Thus, Shmakov said: 'The culture of protests is different in different countries. But this slogan, which are raised by the French now and means that rich and hardworking France does not want to live in poverty, sounds in the same way in Russia' (Priamaia Liniia Mikhaila Shmakova 2019). The FNPR certainly does not advocate methods of the Yellow Vests movement but shares some of their slogans. This interpretation of the Yellow Vests does not necessarily contradict with the hegemonic discourse. The previous chapter demonstrates that official mass media emphasize that the protests are not unfounded and the protesters have reason to be unsatisfied with governmental policies in France. Both the FNPR and official mass media criticize the repertoire of actions.

In 2017, Pavel Fel'dman and Eduard Avetisov, researchers from the Academy of Labor and Social Relations established by Soviet trade unions in 1919 and now officially affiliated with the FNPR (Svedeniia 2018), published a paper titled *Trade Unions in the System of Ensuing Political Stability of Modern Russia* (Fel'dman and Avetisov 2017). Although this text does not belong to official statements of FNPR leaders, it also represents discourses of trade unions. The authors argue that trade unions can contribute to the prevention of a 'color revolution' and contribute to the maintenance of political and social stability in Russia. The paper emphasizes that the decline of 'institutionalized trade unions' can be a reason of political instability because this decline creates a 'vacuum' in industrial relations which may be filled by 'radical' forces aiming at destructive goals (Fel'dman and Avetisov 2017: 56). According to the authors, 'building of a culture of civilized political participation' and 'reducing of social and political tensions' should be among tasks of trade unions (Fel'dman and Avetisov 2017: 57).

Thus, according to the FNPR discourse, social and labor protests are allowed but they should be civilized and should not challenge stability. Hence, the task of trade unions is the collaboration with authorities to reduce social tensions and de-escalate conflicts by channeling workers' discontent into peaceful activities and dialogue.

The chair of the FNPR, Mikhail Shmakov, said in 2012: 'Nowadays there are attempts to unleash a political crisis which may cause ... new social disasters for people of labor... Trade unions were and are right because the vector of their strategic interests corresponds to the vector of the strategic interests of our state' (Shmakov 2012). In other words, the FNPR supports Putin and condemns the 2011–2012 protests, which, in the view of its leadership, could have caused a political crisis and social instability. According to Shmakov, while the 'liberal opposition' advocates the interests of entrepreneurial class, Putin protects social welfare and workers' interests.

In March 2014, FNPR unions unanimously supported the Russian foreign policy toward Ukraine. On March 18, the FNPR official web site reported numerous trade unions rallies in support of this policy and listed main slogans of these rallies: 'Putin is right', 'Crimea, welcome back', 'We believe Putin', 'Ukraine and Russia are one family', and so on (Krym, My s Toboi 2014).

On March 19, 2014, *Solidarnost*’ quoted Mikhail Shmakov’s speech at a conference *Labor Market and Social Investments*. Shmakov mentioned the Ukrainian events as well. *Solidarnost*’ reported: ‘Of course, he did not threaten power and business with the Maidan because the FNPR always stands for peaceful dialogue which is the only acceptable way to resolve conflicts’ (Shmakov Napomnil Rabotodateliyam 2014). However, Shmakov addressed the Euromaidan in an original way. He said: ‘The Maidan began on a wave of legal demands of the majority of the Ukrainian people’. Thus, he admitted that the Euromaidan was not unfounded. Although this point of view does not coincide with the official perception of the Euromaidan, it resonates with the democratic rhetoric of the hegemonic discourse which allows legal addressing of grievances. Then, Shmakov argued that ‘stupidity’ of Ukrainian leaders led to the ‘collapse of the country’ (Shmakov Napomnil Rabotodateliyam 2014). According to him, social partnership can prevent such acute conflicts in Russia.

In October 2017, before the start of the most recent presidential campaign, Shmakov argued that trade unions should insist on Putin’s nomination (Profsoiuzy Nataivaiut 2017). The FNPR chair believed that it was Putin who made the system of social partnership work. However, in accordance with the democratic rhetoric of the hegemonic discourse, trade unions gave the incumbent president his orders (*nakaz*). These orders addressed social and economic problems which had to be resolved by Putin during his new term. First and foremost, Shmakov mentioned the poverty and low wages of working people. Then, he suggested to improve employees’ participation in the management of enterprises. This measure would strengthen the system of social partnership and increase economic efficiency.

In November 2017, the FNPR chair stated that trade unions had become ‘points of support’ for Putin: ‘We believe that he [Putin] can lead Russia to a qualitatively new stage of development, increase the standards of living of the Russian citizens, and protect the rights and interests of employees’ (On Spravitsa 2017).

Although the ideology of social partnership, which is shared by the FNPR, means a distance from the non-systemic political opposition and constructive relations with the state, it does not require this extent of the engagement with the ideological and organizational support of the regime demonstrated by the FNPR, when the Federation, for example, participates in presidential campaigns, as it was mentioned.

United Russia and the FNPR proclaimed Putin’s first decrees issued after his inauguration in May 2018 as ‘absolutely pro-trade-union’ (V Gosdume Nazvali 2018). Therefore, the alliance between the regime and the official trade unions was confirmed once again.

Scholars usually come to the conclusion that the FNPR ‘always raised the banner for social dialogue with the ruling power’ (Traub-Merz and Gerasimova 2018: 185). However, alternative trade unions often raise the same banner. The KTR official web site declares that the Confederation is oriented at cooperation with authorities and employers in the framework of social partnership (Organizatsiia 2013). President of the KTR, Boris Kravchenko, argues: ‘Labor protests should not be marginalized... Otherwise, we will face the uncontrolled

increase in unemployment, drastic and unjustifiable decrease in wages, and absolute power of employers. Then major social protests will start' (Boris Kravchenko: *Nel'zia Zagoniat'* 2015). Here too, social and labor protests are expected to be civilized. According to Kravchenko, the only means to avoid unrest is to establish a dialogue between employers and trade unions.

The KTR believes cooperation with the state important. Kravchenko said: 'Of course, we do not avoid the dialogue with the government. We work within the Russian tripartite commission to regulate social and labor relations and cooperate with different state bodies' (*Profsoiuzy ne Dadut* 2015). Other KTR leaders followed this discourse on civilized protests and warned of dangers of possible unrest which could be caused by prohibitive state policies and employers' selfishness: 'Ongoing restrictions of employees' basic rights and abuse of trade unions' capacities to represent their interests can lead to uncontrolled spontaneous protest actions and strikes' (*Predsdatel' 'Novoprofa'* 2015).

Obviously, the KTR does not consider social unrest and spontaneous actions as a possible option for trade unions in social and labor conflicts. Quite opposite, the KTR presents itself as a force which could prevent the aggravation of conflicts. For example, Igor' Stepanov, chair of the Council of the KTR, argues: 'Neither the government, nor trade unions, nor working people need a "Russian revolt, nonsensical and ruthless" which Dmitry Medvedev and Maksim Topilin [then minister of labor] are afraid of' (*V Evrope Bastuiut* 2019). He responds to Medvedev's conversation with journalists discussed in the previous chapter and agrees that 'Russian revolt' should be avoided. Stepanov emphasizes that the Russian legislation deprives the trade unions and working people of a 'civilized weapon'. By this 'civilized weapon', he means legal strikes and collective bargaining. Here, once again, the KTR confirms its adherence to 'civilized' protests.

Trade unions define politics through 'dialogue'. According to the KTR program (*Demokratiia, Organaizing, Grazdanskie Prava* 2011), politics is associated with wide and open discussions. The KTR criticizes elites because they 'need no open public discussion'. Although alternative trade unions state that they should combine parliamentary and non-parliamentary activities in politics, their ultimate political goal is an independent trade union faction in the parliament. This faction is supposed to be a result of the "open discussion" among trade unions and social movements. The sign 'politics' acquires its meaning through relations with the sign 'dialogue'.

Discussing methods of trade union political engagement, the KTR program emphasizes that the Confederation does not 'stand against the dialogue with the authorities and employers' and considers 'negotiations as the most important and necessary element' of trade union activities. The KTR program speaks about the value of dialogue and deliberation in sections covering politics and methods. Thus, politics is based on dialogue and deliberation. Activities of trade unions inherently include negotiations and discussions.

It is worth to compare programs of the KTR and the FNPR. Both organizations see the 'neoliberal model of capitalism', contemporary 'financial structure' and

‘self-seeking business’ as their rivals. Logically the KTR and the FNPR advocate state regulation of economy and protectionism. Alternative trade unions do not consider the regime an unconditional ally in this struggle against ‘neoliberalism’. This is the main difference between programs of the KTR and the FNPR. However, alternative trade unions, if possible, also seek for the dialogue with authorities (Demokratiia, Organaizing, Grazdanskie Prava 2011). The operating in the state-dominated environment certainly affects trade unions’ discourses. Besides, the KTR program criticizes traditional trade unions for passivity.

The repetition of the sign ‘dialogue’ within trade union texts indicates that ‘dialogue’ has become a value for trade unions. Discussing goals and means of protest activities in their texts, trade unions mention the cooperation with the authorities and the avoidance of social unrest. Trade unions offer ‘social peace’ not only because they deliberately pressure the state and employers but also because ‘dialogue’ is important in discourses of trade unions.

Trade unions mention ‘stability’ and ‘sovereignty’ in their texts. Besides, trade unions also emphasize that labor and social protests should be ‘civilized’. In discourses of trade unions, the sign of ‘civilized protests’, which can also be found in the hegemonic discourse, obtains its meaning through the sign ‘dialogue’. These facts demonstrate the connection between the hegemonic discourse and discourses of trade unions.

Therefore, discourses of trade unions intersect with the hegemonic discourse. Both prioritize stability. However, since the hegemonic discourse does not preclude protests and grassroots activities, the discourse of trade unions has some space to ‘maneuver’. Trade unions employ the democratic rhetoric of the hegemonic discourse and use the sign ‘civilized protests’ which do not threaten stability. Protests are ‘civilized’ when they strive for dialogue. Official trade unions often pretend to be protectors of stability and seek for the alliance with authorities on this basis. In other words, according to trade unions’ discourse, employers generate threats for stability and the common responsibility of the FNPR and the state is to prevent or remove these threats. Alternative trade unions, however, also adhere to ‘civilized protests’ and criticize employers, bureaucrats, and ‘neoliberalism’ which all together impede the civilized addressing of employees’ grievances. The KTR discourse, which sometimes can be critical toward the regime, does not break with the hegemonic discourse.

Organizational and discursive transformism

Two previous sections address organizations and discourses of Russian trade unions. This section summarizes previous findings and puts them into theoretical context.

Although trade unions emerged independently and were not established by the state, they have gradually become associated with the regimes. However, the system of trade unions is diverse and fragmented. While the FNPR is considered as a pro-Kremlin organization, the KTR seems to be genuinely independent. At

the same time, the FNPR has a fragmented structure, which includes relatively autonomous local organizations, and the KTR also tends to cooperate with the authorities. Therefore, trade unions occupy an ambiguous position within the hegemonic formation in general. This ambiguity is evident at the discursive level. Discourses of trade unions prioritize 'civilized protests' and 'dialogue' which makes protests 'civilized'. Properly organized 'dialogue' is supposed to prevent social unrest. Trade unions follow the hegemonic discourse in this sense because the hegemonic discourse also accepts 'civilized' expression of opinions from below as a necessary communication between the authorities and citizens.

Trade unions should not be considered absolutely passive and obedient to the regime. FNPR and KTR organizations are often involved in social and labor protests. Although some of these protests succeed, all of them remain particularistic. In terms of Laclau's theory, it means that requests communicated by trade unions are often satisfied and do not turn into claims in that case. Even when claims emerge, they remain claims to institutions and not against institutions.

According to Laclau, when claims addressed to institutions become claims against institutions and overflow the institutional apparatus, 'we start having the people of populism' (Laclau 2006: 655). In the case of trade unions and their demands, protests remain within the institutional order and the hegemonic formation.

As previously mentioned, trade unions proclaim their adherence to peaceful protests, dialogue values, and cooperation with the authorities. It is not only a rhetorical maneuver which is supposed to protect trade unions from possible repressions. Trade unions actually deescalate conflicts in which they are involved. It is not only rhetorical maneuvers under conditions of authoritarianism, but also the way trade unions actually think of politics and protests. According to official documents and leaders' statements, trade unions prefer methods which literature on social movements calls 'polite protests' (Johnston 2011: 69). It means that trade unions usually try to attract attention of the authorities and mass media to labor and social problems. Problems are supposed to be solved through dialogue between trade unions and the authorities. Due to this dialogue, grassroots demands stay within the hegemonic formation. Gramsci would use a metaphor of 'domestication' here. Potentially dangerous protest groups and demands are kept within the hegemonic formation and reach compromise with the regime. These processes form the basis of transformism.

While transformism preserves the hegemonic formation, it binds together different elements of this formation. Trade unions provide the organizational basis for this binding. Trade unions, mainly the FNPR which is the largest federation of trade unions, facilitate the dialogue between authorities and protest groups and, hence, contribute to the blurring of the possible antagonistic frontier between elites and people. Of significance is the fact that documents of trade unions and leaders' statements define politics and protests through exchange of opinions. As found in the theoretical chapters, the equation of politics with deliberative procedures is incompatible with antagonism which is necessary for creation of the people. Trade unions have capacity to organize the dialogue between the protesting

citizens and the authorities. Due to fragmented and decentralized organization of the trade union federations, they are able to respond to various social and labor problems. At the same time, trade unions tend to cooperate with the regime. This contradiction leads to situations wherein local protests succeed but a broader movement, which can be possible, according to Laclau, does not emerge.

This chapter has addressed general characteristics of trade unions and their discourses. However, the examination of transformism requires a closer look at specific relations among the authorities, protest groups, and employers in Russian regions because transformism manifests itself in small and regular, day-to-day interactions at the grassroots level. Therefore, the next chapter provides examples of the transformist processes.

CHAPTER 5.

Transformism in Russian regions

This chapter covers examples and variations of transformism. Transformistic processes and manifestations of democratic politics are multidimensional and can be understood through examination of numerous details regarding grassroots activities, responses of the authorities, and general situation in the hegemonic formation.

In this chapter, I analyze four cases which provide an indication of transformistic processes. Three of these cases address social and labor protests and the functioning of official trade unions in Russian regions, namely Leningrad Oblast, Pskov Oblast, and the Republic of Karelia.

To demonstrate how transformism works in Russia, I analyze the activities of the FNPR in three regions of North-Western Russia – Leningrad Oblast, Republic of Karelia, and Pskov Oblast. The trade unions there are relatively active and usually involved in numerous protests, whose agenda is not limited to industrial relations. FNPR organizations in these regions also address social problems, such as poor infrastructure and environmental issues. Furthermore, trade unions have sustainable relations with other protest groups. These cases demonstrate varying patterns of protest and cooperation with the authorities. In Karelia, trade unions participate in labor and social protests but also in the All-Russia People's Front (ONF, *Obshcherossiiskii Narodnyi Front*), an organization which was established in 2011 to support Vladimir Putin in the 2012 presidential election and then to facilitate the implementation of his policies. Trade unions in Pskov were especially active during the campaign against the 2018 pension reform to raise the retirement age. The situation in Leningrad Oblast has been developing in the long shadow of the high-profile conflict in Pikalyovo in 2009 (see below), in which the trade unions won but improve the social and economic conditions in the region.

Although regional branches of trade unions unify Saint Petersburg and Leningrad Oblast that are separate federal subjects, I focus on Leningrad Oblast as my analysis excludes cases of larger cities. I chose cases from peripheral regions because in big cities trade unions are integrated into other civil society structures and rarely play a key role in social conflicts extending beyond industrial relations. In the selected cases, on the contrary, trade unions function independently and thus can be studied on their own. Accordingly, even though there is a single regional branch of trade unions in two separate federal subjects – Saint Petersburg and Leningrad Oblast – I do not consider the unions' activity in Saint Petersburg. The comparison of the 'periphery' and the 'center' is a possible avenue for further investigations.

The selected regions have similarities and differences at the same time. First of all, they differ economically. Leningrad Oblast is a relatively developed industrial region which, however, has always been vulnerable during crises.

Hence, the case of Pikalyovo in Leningrad Oblast is important because it demonstrates how popular dissent emerged and, then, was domesticated. Pskov Oblast is an economically backward region without any significant industrial enterprises. The Republic of Karelia is an economically average region with a diversified industry. Leningrad Oblast is a more populated region than Karelia and Pskov Oblast. The population of Leningrad Oblast is about 1.8 million inhabitants while the population of Karelia and Pskov Oblast stand at some 600 thousands each.

All cases support and illustrate one main argument. Trade unions, which often lead social and labor protests, tend to cooperate with the regime. This cooperation allows to achieve localized successes but turns into acquiescence of protesters to refrain from further development of protests and political subjectivation. In general, institutionalization of the protest impedes its development and postpones democratization of Russia.

The case of Leningrad Oblast

Leningrad Oblast has always been one of the most important centers of trade unions in post-Soviet Russia. In the 2000s, the economic growth and foreign investment inflows resulted in launching of numerous automotive enterprises such as *Ford*, *Nissan*, *GM*, and so on. Independent labor organizations were established at these factories and joined confederations of alternative unions which were united within the KTR. The history of these trade unions was extensively described by several scholars (cf. Clement, Demidov and Miryasova 2010; Olimpieva 2010; Robertson 2011). The most important event for alternative trade unions was the 2007 strike at *Ford*, in Vsevolozhsk, a small town next to Saint Petersburg. This strike encouraged the development of alternative trade unions in the region and the organization at *Ford* had obtained a central position within the regional structure of alternative trade unions.

The labor union at *Ford* initially belonged to the FNPR. However, members of the union were dissatisfied with the lack of support they received from the FNPR leadership. In 2006, the union at *Ford* left the FNPR and then formed the Interregional Trade Union of Automotive Workers, which was officially registered in 2007. This trade union united local organizations of automotive workers not only in Leningrad Oblast but also in other regions. Later, the Interregional Trade Union of Automotive Workers joined the VKT and subsequently the KTR (Mandel 2013).

KTR unions participated actively in social and political life in general. In 2011, for example, they delegated their representative to the regional legislature (Lidery Profsoiuzov KTR 2011). In the late 2010s, however, KTR unions declined gradually in the region. In 2019, *Ford* closed its factory in Leningrad Oblast and the local union virtually ceased to exist (Zavod Ford vo Vsevolozhske 2019).

The FNPR has also had strong positions in the region and has always been more influential than alternative unions. The regional organization of the FNPR

has 500 thousand members in Leningrad Oblast and Saint Petersburg (Sovremennost' 2019). In this section, I focus on a labor and social conflict in Pikalyovo, a small town 280 km east of Saint Petersburg. These events were one of the most important labor protests in Putin's Russia and constituted a pattern of conflict management in Russia. However, what is more important for my analysis is not this conflict itself but its consequences, which still have an impact on social life in the region.

Pikalyovo is a so called monotown (*monogorod*), where the whole economy of the city is based on three closely related industrial enterprises. All of these enterprises are private and owned predominantly by Russian owners. The 2008–2009 recession heavily affected the city. During this crisis, enterprises found themselves at the edge of bankruptcy and employees faced large-scale lay-offs. Locals organized massive protest actions, blocking a highway and storming the city hall. Finally, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin had to visit Pikalyovo personally, force owners to reopen the enterprises and allocate additional financial resources from the state budget to the city economy. To prevent further crises in other monotowns, the government elaborated and launched an economic support program for all monotowns of the country (Pravitel'stvo Nachinaet 2009; Soveshchaniie po Voprosam 2014).

In his analysis of Pikalyovo and other monotowns, Stephen Crowley (2015) argues that, although Russian monotowns may produce protest activity due to economic reasons, the regime is still able to prevent possible unrest by subsidizing uncompetitive enterprises. He downplays the factor of labor organizations: in his view, 'Putin has succeeded in marginalizing independent labor union activity' and 'workers [are] left with few institutional channels through which to express their grievances' (Crowley 2015: 17). Generally this might be true, but a noteworthy fact is that the protest in Pikalyovo was led by the local FNPR unions.

In 2008 and 2009, Pikalyovo citizens used various avenues of protest. They organized several officially sanctioned rallies, which were well-attended and attracted due attention of regional media outlets. However, the most effective tools were those which were not authorized by local authorities. On May 20, 2009, when the city administration did not invite people's representatives to a meeting where the shutdown of the enterprises and lay-offs were to be discussed, citizens stormed the city hall (Zhiteli Pikalyovo Prorvalis' 2009). Although the Pikalyovo enterprises are private, the protesters posed their demands on the local authorities as well. The shutdown caused not only lay-offs but also the collapse of the local infrastructure. For example, hot water was cut off as boilers stopped working. The workers expected the authorities to intervene and wanted to participated in debates on the crisis.

On June 2, protesters blocked a federal road near Pikalyovo, causing congestion stretching hundreds of kilometers (Bizyukov and Olimpieva 2014: 78). This strategy was successful and the enterprises were saved after Putin had visited Pikalyovo. Hence, this success relied on intervention of higher-ranking officials. Although the protest repertoire went beyond the legal frameworks, protesters did

not face repressions and were not prosecuted. The authorities proposed concessions instead of repressions.

The FNPR did not stay away from this conflict. Central bodies supported legal rallies but leaders of primary organizations at the factories were involved in the blockade of highway and the storming of the city hall. Therefore, the protest was not absolutely spontaneous and uninstitutionalized, although it was not under full control of trade unions. At the same time, local KTR unions were not involved in the conflict at any stage. There have never been any significant cooperation between 'traditional' and 'alternative' unions.

The Pikalyovo case is remarkable because the FNPR unions' activity was not limited to raising industrial issues. They formed the core of a local initiative group, which remains influential to this day. From the perspective of literature on social movements, the protest has expanded the public sphere and improved the deliberative mechanisms in the city. In 2017, one leader of local unions said: 'They [the local authorities] track our moods and our claims. They invite us [the trade unions] to meetings. There was a meeting with the committee of the Oblast administration. I was invited. There are meetings with the mayor and with the administration of the Boksitogorsky district. They show and make us understand that our opinion matters' (Interview 5). In other words, the protest gave birth to a mechanism of consultation and relatively open discussion. The subaltern classes gained the opportunity to participate in city governance. 'When some problem occurs, trade unions, authorities, and employers are called together. They try to solve it immediately... Now a committee of the trade unions, the administration, and the employer has been established. We discuss issues concerning the city' (Interview 5). Therefore, the protest created a space for public debates. These debates do not occur within only elites' circles but affect the city decision-making process.

However, the involvement of the Pikalyovo protest groups in the deliberative procedures also hinders further political subjectivation. The authoritarian regime is responsive to demands from below and partially satisfies them. Laclau noted: 'The more particularized a demand, the easier it is to satisfy it and integrate it into the system' (Laclau 2000b: 209). Thus, the deliberation and accommodation of demands destabilize the antagonistic frontier between the regime and subaltern classes, and prevent any potential for popular subjectivity. The hegemonic formation integrates activist groups into itself and thereby expands. In Gramscian terms, the development of deliberative processes results in the expansion of the hegemonic formation and a reservation of zones for grassroots activities, where these activities are allowed, thereby localizing them.

While the 2009 protest in Pikalyovo was initially neutralized by Putin's direct intervention and the provision of subsidies, the local authorities later arranged mechanisms to prevent any repetition of social unrest. The trade unions provide the city and regional administrations with feedback which assists in controlling the situation and preventing possible protests. The local authorities satisfy some grassroots demands while obstructing the potential emergence of popular politics.

The expansion of “public spheres” and the relative successes of local trade unions did not lay a firm foundation for further activities. The informants from Pikalyovo emphasized the apathy and passivity of local inhabitants in 2017: ‘It is every man for himself... It is impossible to organize people for something. It is very difficult to talk to people’ (Interview 5). The documentary *Three sides [Tri Storony]* (2011), filmed by Nikolay Vylegzhanin in Pikalyovo in 2011, also highlights this apathy. The movie, which contains interviews with local citizens, argues that although some problems have been solved in the city (for example, the enterprises have been reopened and received a financial support), the overall economic and social situation remains difficult. The inhabitants speak about poor infrastructure, environmental problems, and low wages.

‘Apathy’ and ‘passivity’ is understood here not through psychological and emotional conditions of citizens but as reduced organizational capacity for protest actions. It became visible, for example, in 2016, when the discharge by one of the Pikalyovo enterprises of about 200 employees did not lead to any significant protests (V Pikalyovo na Tsementnom Zavode 2016). In other words, Pikalyovo is still vulnerable socially and economically but the possibility and capacity of protests in this town became lower. The economically and socially vulnerable monotown, despite formidable labor organizations, has been controlled by including the workers in the hegemonic formation.

Jeremy Morris (2016) calls Russian working-class people ‘silent majority’. He stresses on severe economic and social conditions influencing workers’ everyday life. However, everyday problems did not prevent the initial protest wave in Pikalyovo and, hence, passivity cannot be assumed as a constant. The return to apathy indicates that protests were neutralized. The relative success of the protest did not enable popular politics. At the same time, the emergence of democratic politics can be recognized in this case as protesters addressed problems beyond their workplaces and confronted the local authorities.

Informants from FNPR unions in Leningrad Oblast confirm that solution of parochial social and labor problems stabilizes the overall situation in the region but does not significantly improve the living standards of local citizens: ‘You can help people but only at some certain level and not at the level of the economic branch or region’ (Interview 3). Protest activities do not go beyond local and particular issues. ‘We do not have such tools as massive strikes like in France. It does not work here... Every small trade union can achieve something but it [the achievement] disappears at the next level’ (Interview 3). The interviewee adds that Leningrad Oblast has several active FNPR organizations which, however, do not contribute to any development of popular politics. It is also remarkable that Tikhvin, a city 42 km to Pikalyovo, is a home for two significant FNPR unions, which are active at local a IKEA factory and a railroad car plant, but there is no consequential cooperation between organization in Tikhvin and Pikalyovo. In fact, Leningrad Oblast is a region of numerous and important grassroots activities which cooperate mostly with authorities but not with each other.

As previously mentioned, transformism prevents unification of particularistic demands and suppresses the emergence of antagonism between the regime and

subaltern classes. In case of the Pikalyovo protest, the local unions consciously decided to limit themselves to particular problems of the city and avoid any confrontation with the central government. Informants insist that their activity is not political and does not challenge the regime. One former chair of a local union says: 'We are not suicidal enough to go out and shake up politics' (Interview 6). It does not mean that they were afraid of potential prosecution for political actions. It rather means that politics may cause social disaster. Moreover, this interviewee, who was one of the protest leaders, explicitly supports Putin and was a member of *United Russia*: 'Until spring 2016, I was a member of *United Russia*... When Putin became [president], I began to treat him seriously, as a serious person and a defender of the country... Yes, we support him here. Who else can we support?' (Interview 6). Another informant thinks that workers are rather apolitical and do not support the regime: 'People are very closed and infantile... They do not participate in elections, they are passive... Many people say here that nothing can be changed... Nobody believes that there will be any justice' (Interview 5). These remarks suggest that, firstly, the protesters did not consider themselves as antagonists of the regime and, secondly, the new opportunities to discuss problems with the authorities has not made local citizens more politically active.

Combination of pro-regime views and apolitical sentiments suggests that protesters did not have any consistent dominant ideology. It is rather an expression of the state-centered common sense. This common sense consists not in allegiance to a national leader but rather in reliance on cooperation with the authorities and pursuit for properly organized dialogue with them.

The Pikalyovo protest can be considered a social movement organization because, unlike typical trade unions which rely mostly on bargaining, the protesters used uninstitutionalized forms of action such as the highway blockade and storming of the city hall. They formed a group to achieve their specific goals. From the perspective of literature on social movements, the Pikalyovo protest was successful because the enterprises were reopened and local problems were discussed publicly. However, the Gramscian approach proposes another interpretation. Grassroots activities were absorbed in the hegemonic formation. The remaining apathy and difficult economic situation demonstrate that the protest was neutralized due to transformism. Absorption and inclusion mean that the protesting groups turned into a channel for the communication between the authorities and people. The local unions were used as an additional tool for domestication. The cooperation with the authorities and participation in institutionalized debates do not co-exist with a political project which requires antagonism.

The relations between the FNPR unions and the local authorities are complicated. According to interviewees, the incompetent city administration aggravated the unrest in Pikalyovo: 'Their [the authorities'] wrong policy cause people to storm the city hall. What is it about authorities? [The authorities said:] "We are meeting here and you are disturbing". This was a trigger for people' (Interview 5). The city administration tried to balance between the workers and the employers: 'They [the authorities] were neutral. If we stand for truth, we are the masses. But

the employer has money, it is another power. And they are neither here, nor there' (Interview 6).

As previously mentioned, one of the Pikalyovo protest leaders used to be a member of *United Russia*. She was also an acting member of the local municipal council during the 2008–2009 protests. None of that, however, prevented her from taking part in the protest actions in 2009. Later, she unsuccessfully ran for a seat in the Leningrad Oblast parliament and lost her seat in the local municipal council in 2014. Even though protest leaders are not represented in legislatures nowadays, this absence of representatives in legislatures does not escalate protest activities in Pikalyovo. Reuter and Robertson (2015) argue that cooptation of protesters into legislatures decreases the level of activism. In the case of Pikalyovo this hypothesis is not proven.

Balancing between workers and employers is a typical strategy of local authorities. Alliance with the authorities seems to be both inevitable and desirable for a trade union which confront employers but not the state machinery. One informant from the FNPR regional branch in Leningrad Oblast discloses: 'I can say that the authorities are not on the side of the employer, but keep a distance. When we point at some violation [of the labor legislation], they react. We cannot complain about the authorities. We work, seek, try. We collaborate' (Interview 4).

In the Leningrad Oblast, the protests against the 2018 pension reform were not well-attended. FNPR unions either collected signatures and sent petitions, or organized small rallies (cf. *Rabotniki ZhKKh Trebuiut* 2018; *Sviazisty Regiona Protiv* 2018). For example, a rally in Pikalyovo brought together only 150 participants (*Mitingi protiv* 2018). Therefore, the 2018 campaign against the pension reform demonstrated that protest capacities remained low.

In 2009, the FNPR unions achieved a notable success in Pikalyovo. However, this success did not become a stepping stone for the further development of the local movement. The trade unions turned to cooperation with the local government. This strategy mollifies social and labor conflicts occurring in the region.

Thus, despite numerous and often successful protests in Leningrad Oblast, these protests have not significantly changed the situation in the region. Trade unions contribute to development of deliberative processes and public spheres. In Pikalyovo, for example, they created an institutional site to discuss local problems with authorities. Trade unions participate in decision-making procedures. However, isolated grassroots activities do not turn into popular politics, although democratic politics emerges from time to time. Social and labor protests do not accumulate in order to take the next level. Quite the opposite, they dissolve within various deliberative procedures.

The case of the Republic of Karelia

Collaboration of the FNPR unions and the local authorities takes various forms depending on the region. In the Republic of Karelia, the FNPR is connected with the All-Russia People's Front (ONF), which is an important structure in many

regions. According to my interviews, the Karelian FNPR has some 50 thousand members.

An interviewee from Petrozavodsk, the capital of Karelia, who is simultaneously a member of the FNPR and the ONF, reports: 'The ONF was formed in quite a democratic way. The regional elites did not participate in the process. Social activists, bloggers, and experts were counted on' (Interview 7). He says that support for labor protests do not contradict the ONF's mission, because the Front focuses on the 'federal agenda', while the unions are involved with local problems. From this perspective, a pro-Kremlin organization may be an ally for the activists: 'The ONF may listen to the demands of the unions... Regional authorities are afraid of both the ONF and the unions' (Interview 7). Trade unions also use the ONF as an additional channel to balance the interests of employees, employers, and the local authorities.

The ONF does not control the Karelian unions directly. The Karelian FNPR organizations have been involved in numerous labor conflicts as an independent force. According to another interview from Petrozavodsk, 'labor conflicts emerge quite often. Bursts are regular' (Interview 8). The ONF and the FNPR interact in order to achieve their own particular purposes: the unions need an outlet to discuss their problems and demands, while the ONF has an instrument to monitor the situation in the republic.

The interviewees testify that members of Karelian trade unions are mainly moderate or neutral in ideological terms. Most of them do not see any alternative to the current political system.

At the same time, the regional organization of the FNPR cooperates not only with the ONF. In 2016, the Karelian trade unions supported the Communist Party at the regional legislative elections (KPRF i Profsoiuzy Karelii 2016). The trade unions stated that this alliance was a response to inequality and economic problems in Karelia. However, the chair of the Karelian FNPR, who also ran on the CPRF ticket, was removed from the ballot by the regional electoral commission (V TsK KPRF 2016). This decision did not provoke any protest. Besides, the temporary alliance with the CPRF did not affect the cooperation between the Karelian FNPR and the ONF.

The regional authorities also try to reach out to the unions: 'The acting governor attends [May Day rallies] and interacts with the unions. When there was a conflict in Medvezhyegorsk, he came and put the city attorney's office on high alert' (Interview 7). In other words, the governor took the workers' side in the conflict. According to the Karelian informants, the regional government usually admits the importance of a dialogue with trade unions. There are mechanisms which enable deliberation and accommodation of demands posed by labor unions in Karelia.

The conflict at a milk plant in Medvezhyegorsk, mentioned by the interviewee, was one of the most significant labor conflicts in Karelia in the recent past. Medvezhyegorsk is a small town 150 km north of Petrozavodsk. It is not a monotown and, besides this private owned milk plant, is home to some wood-working industries. The conflict at the milk plant erupted in 2016, when the owner

of the enterprise stopped wage payments and the enterprise found itself on the brink of closure. As the first reaction, employees asked the head of the republic to intervene. The authorities responded by sending inspections to the plant. However, as no improvement followed, the workers decided to go on a short-term strike. The FNPR supported the strike and tried to de-escalate the conflict (Medvezhyegorskii Molokozavod 2016). According to the trade unions' representatives' the objectives of the protest were: 'First, to make authorities intervene. Second, to correct the owners of the enterprise so that they become more socially responsible in their business. Third, to make the enterprise more sustainable so that wages are paid on time' (Ballada o Karel'skom Molokozavode 2016). Hence, the FNPR sees the resolution of labor and social conflicts through the lens of cooperation with the authorities. Trade unions connected protesting workers and the government and organized deliberations on the conflict. As previously mentioned, the head of Karelia visited Medvezhyegorsk and supported workers. Although some problems of the enterprise have been solved and it is not anymore on the edge of bankruptcy, wage arrears are still common.

Therefore, typically protests result in mutual concessions between authorities and protest groups. These concessions barely improve the overall situation in the region, although they can solve particular problems. Besides, an interviewee adds: 'There are no preconditions for transition from economic demands to political ones' (Interview 7). Labor conflicts emerge from time to time and mechanisms of public discussions exist in Karelia but protests do not result in popular politics and remain parochial. Recalling his participation in students protests, Laclau wrote: "[A] mobilization which attained its immediate aims should finish there, while for those of us who were more militant, the question was how to keep the mobilization going, which was possible only in so far as we had historical aims – aims that we knew systems could not satisfy" (Laclau 2000b: 209). A satisfied demand drops out from a new potential unity which might be an antagonistic one to the existing hegemonic formation.

Numerous protest actions, which are organized by the FNPR, do not challenge the regime: rather, they help the regional authorities accommodate grassroots demands. Moreover, deliberation on the demands mollifies them.

In Karelia the KTR is represented by the union of healthcare workers. The main success of this union was a pay increase for paramedics in 2019 (Italianskaia Zabastovka 2019). This success was achieved through so called 'Italian strike' or 'work-to-rule', a type of protest actions in which employees literally follow all existing rules while working. In fact, it decreases productivity. This action of Karelian paramedics attracted attention of the local authorities which satisfied requests of the union. At the same time, the union does not expand its activities beyond workplaces. The KTR and the FNPR do not cooperate in Karelia. My interviewee from the FNPR argues that two federations do not have any sufficient common ground to cooperate in Karelia and the KTR union of healthcare worker is too small to be a significant ally (Interview 8).

FNPR unions in Karelia participated in protests against the pension reform. For example, on July 5, 2018, the FNPR organized a well-attended rally in

Petrozavodsk (Na Mitinge v Karelii 2018). Protesters appealed to the Karelian government and legislature with the demand not to give their consent to the reform. They also demanded the resignation of Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev.

However, this demand did not contribute to the emergence of political antagonism. The Karelian case demonstrates that trade unions preferred getting involved in parliamentary discussions on the reform to any more radical action. In July 2018, after the first wave of protests, trade unions decided to send to the State Duma their amendments to the pension bill. FNPR unions in Karelia supported this decision (Profsoiuzy Gotoviat Popravki 2018). However, the Duma chose to ignore the proposals. At the end of August, the Karelian union of cultural workers petitioned the president to reconsider the pension reform (Rossiiskii Profsoiuz Rabotnikov Kul'tury 2018).

Trade unions usually complain that the authorities ignore opinions of labor organizations. Despite this dissatisfaction, trade unions did not abandon parliamentary procedures. For example, the Karelian FNPR organization mentioned that *United Russia* did not take into account trade unions' arguments against the pension reform in July 2018 (Ilya Kosenkov 2018). It was before the trade unions sent their amendments. Although the trade unions criticized the authorities and the ruling party, the FNPR still decided to rely on parliamentary debates.

Despite criticism of the government during the protests against the pension reform, the Karelian trade unions continue to cooperate with the authorities. In 2019, the local FNPR organization and the Karelian legislature signed the agreement on cooperation (Podpisano Soglashenie 2019). During the wave of protests against the pension reform, trade unions posed general demands such as the resignation of the government, but later abandoned those and refocused on particular amendments to the pension bill. The Karelian trade unions reaffirmed their alliance with local authorities by signing the agreement with the legislature.

Numerous protest actions, which are organized by the FNPR, do not challenge the regime, rather, they assist local authorities in accommodating grassroots demands. Moreover, the strive to discuss these demands with the authorities de-escalates protests. During the wave of protests against the pension reform, trade unions did not insist on general demands such as the resignation of the government. Instead, they focused on particular amendments to the pension bill. Then, Karelian trade unions reaffirmed their alliance with local authorities by signing the agreement with the legislature. Successful neutralization of the protests ensure their parochial nature.

The case of Pskov Oblast

Pskov Oblast is one of the poorest Russian regions. It does not have any developed industries. A significant part of the local population works in agriculture. However, trade unions have adapted to these conditions and are relatively active. The FNPR organization in Pskov Oblast addresses a range of social, environmental, and infrastructural issues. Hence, the trade union operates in a manner of social

movements. The Pskov FNPR has connections with other grassroots civic initiatives. The regional organization includes, for example, the Union of Gardeners, which formally does not operate in the sphere of industrial relations. According to interviews which I took with members of the labor unions in Pskov, local trade unions have some 55 thousand members.

In Pskov Oblast, protest actions of the FNPR tend to succeed when ‘demands are adequate’ (Interview 9). It means that demands and protests should be moderate and narrow: ‘Where we pose smaller demands such as payment of wages at one given enterprise, repair of one given part of a road, specific actions are always successful’ (Interview 9). Thus, trade unions consciously avoid general demands and prefer to focus on particular issues.

At the same time, the local organization of the FNPR contributes to the expansion of the public sphere. Representatives of the union often participate in meetings with the local authorities and discuss relevant social problems of the region. These meetings are used by the union to solve specific problems and, moreover, to connect other grassroots initiatives with the authorities. Protests often succeed and enable civic participation in the regional decision-making processes: ‘Our people got used to the situation when the executive power is obliged to talk to them directly’ (Interview 11).

In the context of the protests against the pension reform the case of a FNPR organization in Pskov is significant. The increase of the age of retirement was especially painful for this region because life expectancy there is one of the lowest in Russia. It is not surprising that the protests in Pskov and the Oblast occurred on a mass scale.

Massive protest actions were organized by trade unions not only in Pskov but also in smaller towns across the Oblast. On June 28, a rally in Pskov was attended by about 700 people. Trade unions called the pension reform ‘anti-popular’ and demanded the government to resign. Participants of the rally claimed that the government represented ‘oligarchs’, not people (Okolo 700 Chelovek Priniialy Uchastiye 2018).

In July 2018, trade unions organized “a marathon of pickets” in the Oblast (Piketnyi Marafon protiv Povysheniia Pensionnogo Vozrasta 2018). Two significant actions took place in Velikiye Luki on July 5 and July 18. These actions were attended by 120 and more than 700 people respectively (V Velikikh Lukakh Proshiol Piket 2018, Bolee 700 Chelovek Priniialy Uchastiye 2018). On July 5, protesters used slogan ‘Let us force authorities to respect us’. It is remarkable that the trade unions posed demands which can be considered as political. The FNPR organization criticized the government and raised a number of issues relevant for Russia as a whole. At the same time, trade unions collected signatures against the pension reform and sent them to the president, thus demonstrating their willingness to engage in a dialogue with the regime. On September 13, when another rally was organized in Pskov, trade unions declared their adherence to the combination of ‘protests and negotiations’ (Uchastniki Profsoiuznogo Mitinga 2018).

Attempts to prevent the increase of the age of retirement failed, and protests eventually subsided. Isolated and narrow protest actions, despite their success, did not result in a campaign against the pension reform or initiate any political movement. The informants in Pskov admit that ‘strategic actions, when we try to improve the situation in general, do not succeed’ (Interview 9). Localized achievements do not prepare the ground for a broader campaign, such as the one against the pension reform.

The Pskov FNPR is present in most regions and can impose its strategy because people do not see any other organizations with the same influence and capacity to channel their dissatisfaction. In many regions, participation in FNPR rallies is almost the only means for citizens to express the discontent about the pension reform. The case of Pskov Oblast demonstrates that trade unions can become the main operator of protests activities. Hence, these activities are organized in accordance with usual FNPR practices, remain particularistic, and result in concessions to the authorities.

The FNPR in Pskov Oblast returned to usual activities. For example, trade unions organized a rally to support a local state-owned transport company *Pskovpassazhiravtotrans*, which faced closure, and an anti-landfill protest in Porkhov, a town 75 km east of Pskov. In the case of the transport company, trade unions relied on the assistance of the authorities: ‘We want to find allies from state power structures who will see the value of *Pskovpassazhiravtotrans*’ (Pskovskikh Senatorov i Deputatov 2019). In March 2019, the FNPR invited *United Russia* to join upcoming events (Pskovskii Oblsovprom Predlozhitel 2019).

The informants in Pskov reveal that members of local trade unions mostly share ‘statist worldviews’ and advocate ‘statesmanship’ (Interview 9). This means that the strong state is a value for trade unions and they try to avoid and prevent political instability. The state in general and higher-ranking officials are considered as allies against employers and some representatives of the local authorities. Following this logic, trade unions try to attract attention of higher-ranking officials to social problems. Hence, ‘statist worldviews’ of the rank-and-file members reflect and simultaneously reinforce the leadership’s strategy of cooperating with the regime.

The Pskov trade unions cooperate with *United Russia*. In 2011 and 2016, the chair of the Pskov FNPR was elected on the list of the ruling party to the regional legislature (Deputaty 2019). However, trade unions are not completely integrated into the “power vertical”, and conflicts between labor organizations and the authorities sometimes do occur. In July 2019, it was reported that The FNPR organization in Pskov was suspected by the police of engaging in ‘illegal commercial activities’. The trade unions claimed that this suspicion had political reasons. At the same, none of members was suspected or charged personally. However, this conflict between the FNPR organization and the authorities does not undermine the willingness of the trade unions to cooperate with the state in general. Relations between trade unions and the regional administration stay the same. The FNPR organization relies on the intensification of the dialogue with the Pskov governor and notes that several local unions discuss wages and social

benefits with the authorities in a 'constructive way' (Uliana Mikhailova: *My Budem Borot'sia* 2019).

Addressing a wide range of social problems allows to establish networks which are used to involve people from different towns in trade unions' activities. Alternative channels for mobilization are almost absent. The informants mention passivity of local citizens, which have not been eradicated by particular achievements of the trade union and the relative development of the regional public sphere. Although this passivity does not preclude citizens' participation in protests, participants of protests follow the trade unions and do not try to create any alternative.

Activities of the Pskov FNPR provides an example of transformistic processes. These activities often succeed and solve local social problems. However, the trade unions prefer to stay within democratic politics and address claim to institutions and not against institutions. This strategy, which presupposes cooperation with the local authorities, enables small successes and creates an obstacle for popular politics.

From the regional to the national

Big things have small beginnings. The cases addressed in this chapter are of regional significance and regional interest. However, these local cases indicate broader processes being an obstacle for political subjectivation.

Social and labor protests regularly occur in Russian regions, including the North-West. Some of these protests succeed and solve local problems. Sometimes protesters go beyond issues of their enterprise or neighborhood and make demands related to social life of the whole region or even country. Thus, the Pikalyovo unions address various problems of their town and affect decision-making processes there. Trade unions in Pskov are not limited to industrial relations and respond to a wide range of issues. During protests against the pension reform, trade unions heavily criticized the government. In general, social and labor protests can be politicized from time to time and to some extent. At least, protesters regularly discuss governmental policies and overall situation in the country.

Trade unions have a developed network of organizations in the North-Western regions. Protests in these regions are usually well organized. However, trade unions channel protest activities to consultations with the authorities. Regional cases of Leningrad Oblast, Pskov Oblast, Karelia and the case of protests against the pension reform demonstrate that, getting involved in political activities, trade unions and institutionalized social movements often refrain from further development of protests and try to strengthen their positions within the hegemonic formation. It is noteworthy that trade unions do not rely on institutions of social partnership. They try to hold regular meetings with bureaucrats of different levels, run for seats in councils and legislatures, and even use the ONF to affect decision-making processes. It can be suggested that, being dysfunctional, the system of social partnership is not able to institutionalize protest groups.

The interviews with representatives of trade unions and analysis of their discourse demonstrate that trade unions consider cooperation with the authorities as the main tool to achieve protesters' goals and the main strategy in general. As previously mentioned, trade union leaders declare their commitment to 'statesmanship'. Strategies aimed at the properly organized dialogue between protesters and the authorities, are consistent with this ideological state-centrism. At the same time, this commitment to 'statesmanship' does not necessarily mean support for authoritarianism. Trade unions strive for effective bureaucracy which could protect labor rights and hear demands from below.

Protesters of Pikalyovo established a platform to discuss local problems with the authorities and to address their grievances. Some of unions' leaders were elected to municipal councils. The dialogue between trade unions and the authorities exists not only in Pikalyovo but in Leningrad Oblast in general. This dialogue does not improve the protest capacities of trade unions, regardless of the economic and social situation in the region, which remains difficult. In 2016, local enterprises suffered lay-offs, which did not provoke any protests. It can be suggested that protesters are not able to influence economic processes which make their enterprises unprofitable. The incapability to address major issues demonstrates shortcomings of democratic protests. Although numerous monotowns face similar problems, protests which occur in monotowns are isolated and do not influence each other. Coordination among protest groups in monotowns could be a first step towards popular politics. However, protesters are unable to collaborate even within a single region. Even though the FNPR has its organizations in several monotowns, this formal unity within the federation does not contribute to potential coordination among protest groups.

In Karelia and Pskov Oblast trade unions often criticize governmental policies but always confirm allied relations with the authorities. Occasional conflicts between trade unions and the authorities do not hinder these 'constructive' relations. Trade unions address a wide range of problems. Labor and social protests are often successful, but this leads to mutual concessions between trade unions and the authorities. Protesters deliberately keep their demands isolated to facilitate these mutual concessions.

The analysis of these three cases suggests several typical features shared by most regional trade unions. Firstly, protests organized by the FNPR often succeed, meaning that their demands are satisfied by the authorities. Secondly, the interviewees acknowledge limitations of their protest activities but do not try to find any new forms: instead, they prefer to discuss problems with the authorities and intensify contacts with the state apparatus. These contacts appear at different levels. Representatives of trade unions can be elected in city councils and sometimes in regional legislatures. Also, trade unions have frequent contacts with the executive bodies. For example, the labor organization in Pikalyovo participates in meetings and consultations with the city administration and representatives of the Leningrad Oblast administration. The Karelian unions use the ONF to affect the regional administration. The Pskov unions regularly discuss social problems with the local governor and other officials. Maintaining of the

regular consultations with officials is an important task of the trade unions. At the same time, the involvement of trade unions in electoral processes and deliberative procedures do not affect political situation and electoral mechanisms in the regions. Thirdly, protests remain isolated and end with an accommodation between the authorities and protest groups. From the viewpoint of conventional approaches, it is difficult to provide an unambiguous interpretation of the outcomes of unions' protest activities, as they do not correspond to the expectations. Although unions' actions contribute to the development of the public sphere and ensure some degree of representation of protesters in the existing political systems of Russian regions, these protests do not serve as a stepping stone towards any large-scale activities.

During the 2018 protests over the pension reform, activities of the regional trade unions were another example of shortcomings of democratic politics. Previous successes did not increase effectiveness of the 2018 campaign. Quite the opposite, usual protest practices were inadequate for the nation-wide campaign and mass discontent. Trade unions could abandon parliamentary procedures to make a step towards popular politics. However, anti-governmental demands from below were transformed into amendments submitted to and rejected by the State Duma.

Trade unions are often able to find a solution to labor conflicts through tripartite negotiations with employers and the authorities (Bizyukov 2018). Even as finding a solution to a specific problem may be considered a success of a protesting group, it disrupts any further mobilization. Trade unions and social movements are able to solve particular problems at the cost of addressing broader issues.

Russian trade unions are not completely integrated into the 'power vertical'. They can operate independently and organize protest activities which are not necessarily suppressed by the authorities. Trade unions often consider the state as an ally in conflicts with employers. If trade unions do clash with the local authorities, they usually try to gain the support of higher-ranking officials. Consequently, trade unions prefer to avoid any direct and open confrontation with the regime, even where such a confrontation might be justified. During the 2018 campaign against the pension reform, for example, local trade unions channeled mass discontent into petitioning and parliamentary procedures and did not try to escalate the protests.

The relations between trade unions and the state are controversial. FNPR leaders always support Vladimir Putin's electoral campaigns and the regime's policies (except for the pension reform). Their leaders are represented in the State Duma and some regional legislatures. At the same time, the system of social partnership is dysfunctional, and the state is reluctant to intervene in labor conflicts. This is especially visible at the regional level. Trade unions, however, strive to bring the local authorities into workplace disputes. Frequently, this is one of the key goals of protest actions. Trade unions also use additional channels of influence on the state such as the ONF or meetings with mayors and governors. In other words, protest actions of trade unions compensate for the inadequacy of social partnership. At the same time, this strategy requires the avoidance of open

conflict between trade unions and the regime. Since institutions of social partnership are ineffective, trade unions use protest activities as a substitute.

In sum, protest strategies of trade unions presuppose that they cooperate with the state and seek contacts and accommodation with the local authorities. These strategies ultimately channel grassroots discontent into dialogue between the protesters and the authorities.

These cases illustrate Laclau's theory. Protesters neither expand equivalential chains among their demands, nor try to construct antagonism. According to Laclau, grassroots movements can either expand chains of demands and try to employ populist strategies or remain within the institutional order and bargain with the authorities. It is worth to remind that Laclau pays attention to strategies of grassroots movements rather than policies of governments. Thus, protesters prefer to abstain from antagonism and keep their claims within existing institutions. Organizations which lead the protests channel citizens' discontent toward accommodation with the authorities.

Regional trade unions are routinely involved in local conflicts. However, the 2018 pension reform provoked protests in numerous regions of Russia, and trade unions did not stay away. The ultimate failure of protests against the reform revealed once again strategies which hinder the emergence of popular politics. While this chapter addresses transformistic processes at the local level, the next chapter covers these processes at the nation-wide level.

CHAPTER 6.

Protests against the pension reform in Russia

This chapter addresses protests against the pension reform in 2018. As previously mentioned, this reform provoked mass discontent and protest actions in numerous Russian regions. The FNPR and the KTR became the main organizers of protests.

The 2018 pension reform, which increased the retirement age, was extremely unpopular. According to different polls, almost 90% of Russian citizens opposed the reform (Pensionnaia Reforma 2018; Povyshenie Pensionnogo Vozrasta: Reaktsiia 2018). Due to this unanimous rejection of the raise in the age of retirement, protests against the reform had a chance to construct the opposition between the people and elites. In other words, a ground for popular politics emerged.

Protests started in June of 2018, after the Russian Cabinet submitted a bill on the pension reform to the State Duma on June 16, 2018. According to this bill, the retirement age was supposed to be raised from 60 to 65 for men and from 55 to 63 for women. The submission was announced on June 14, right before the opening match of the Football World Cup, which took place in Russia in June and July of 2018. This specific date is important because a Presidential decree restricted freedom of assembly for the duration of the tournament (Ukaz Prezidenta 2017).

Although the Russian Cabinet elaborated the reform, traditional, ‘pro-Kremlin’, trade unions did not back this reform. The raise in the retirement age caused mass discontent which the FNPR could not disregard. In June 2018, the Federation criticized the pension reform proposed by the Russian government and decided to organize a campaign (Press-Konferentsiia Mikhaila Shmakova 2018). Alternative trade unions also called for protests (KTR Ob’iavlialo o Zapuske 2018).

The campaign against the pension reform went beyond industrial relations; trade unions cooperated with other protest groups and even political parties. The kinds of action taken mainly consisted of symbolic actions and the campaign in general was unassertive and ineffective. Trade unions channeled mass discontent to consultations with the authorities therefore protests ultimately failed. One can argue that trade unions constrained the potential of mass discontent and created an illusion of protest activities in 2018 (Bizyukov 2019a).

At the same time, protests against the pension reform grew into an important and controversial event. They were not confined to a specific territory, but took place in numerous regions across the country. However, the campaign addressed only one problem, namely the pension reform, and remained particularistic in terms of its demands. Compared to protests against the monetization of social benefits in 2005, the 2018 protests are less radical in terms of protest actions and less effective in terms of results and further influence. It is worth to compare. The 2005 protests were the most significant outburst of social discontent in Putin’s Russia and fueled social movements in the 2000s.

In order to understand strategies of protests against the pension reform, I analyzed texts published on official web sites of the FNPR, the KTR, and *Solidarnost*, a newspaper affiliated with the FNPR. I focused on a period between June 1 and October 1 of 2018, when people discussed the pension reform and held protests. On May 8, 2018, Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev declared the necessity of the pension reform, and on June 1 the KTR launched the campaign against the raise of the retirement age. Putin signed The bill on the pension reform on October 3, 2018. Thus, the protests and debates continued for the period of four months.

I have analyzed 184 documents related to protests against the pension reform. This includes also interviews of their leaders with media outlets and other statements of these leaders. I have selected those interviews and statements that disclose goals and intentions of the trade unions.

The first section briefly discusses protest actions organized by the trade unions. The second section covers discourses of the trade unions during the campaign against the pension reform. The third section compares the 2018 protests with the 2005 protests and discusses the main findings of the chapter.

The protest repertoire of trade unions during the 2018 campaign against the pension reform

This section discusses means used by the trade unions during the protest campaign against the raise in the retirement age in 2018. The KTR and the FNPR initiated this campaign and the discussion of their protest repertoire in 2018 provide a context which is necessary for understanding of trade union discourses and influence of these discourse on practices.

As previously mentioned, on May 8, 2018, the Russian Prime Minister Medvedev made a statement about the necessity of the reform. On June 1, the KTR launched the campaign against the raise of the retirement age (KTR Ob'iavliaet o Zapuske 2018).

On June 18, 2018, the FNPR called its local organizations for collective actions (Profsoiuznaia Kampaniia 2018). Alternative trade unions started with an online petition and the accumulation of signatures against the reform. Pavel Kudiukin, member of the council of the KTR, described the strategy of trade unions: 'First of all, we are planning street actions, the creation of a broad coalition, and the involvement of allies, such as other trade unions, political parties, and public associations' (Pavel Kudiukin: Ostanovit' Zakonoporekt 2018). The mentioned broad coalition was called *Narod protiv* (*The people is against*) (Konfederatsiia Truda Rossii Prizyvaet 2018). This coalition included not only alternative trade unions, but also representatives of diverse social movements, civic initiatives, and small political, mainly leftist, groups. Besides, the KTR forged an alliance with the *Just Russia* party.

Alternative and traditional unions conducted almost similar protest campaigns. The government prohibited any actions in the cities where the World Cup games took place. Therefore, trade unions demonstrated their adherence to the Russian legislation and refrained from rallies in the largest cities. The KTR also excluded the possibility of a strike because the Labor Code made the strike procedure difficult (Pavel Kudiukin: Ostanovit' Zakonoporekt 2018). In other words, alternative trade unions that were supposed to be more radical than the FNPR, did not differ from traditional trade unions.

Trade unions declared that 'protests against the pension reform consolidated Russian citizens' (V Permi Tysiachi Aktivistov 2018). Indeed, opposition parties and regional civic initiatives supported the trade union rallies. Protests against the pension reform seemed to unite various protest groups into one broad coalition.

Although local organizations of the FNPR criticized the Russian government for the pension reform and sometimes demanded that the prime minister resigned, trade unions quickly turned to parliamentary procedures. On July 24, the FNPR called its regional organizations to send their amendments to the bill of the pension reform to the State Duma (Informatsionnoie Pis'mo 2018). In September, the Russian parliament rejected all these amendments. (Deputaty Otklonili 2018).

In the beginning of July, the KTR also organized several actions in Russian regions (V Rossii Proshlo 2018). These actions were supported by the systemic opposition. On July 5, representatives of the KTR and *Just Russia* brought to the State Duma boxes with 2.5 million signatures of those, who signed the online petition against the raise in the retirement age (Profsoiuznye Lidery Peredali 2018). On July 29, the Libertarian Party of Russia, which is not represented in the parliament, organized a rally in Moscow. The KTR also participated in this rally (Bizyukov 2019).

The first allowed rally in Moscow took place as late as July 18, after the World Cup ended (Aktsiia protiv Povysheniia 2018). Further, on July 28, alternative trade unions joined in another rally organized by the Communist Party also in Moscow (50 Tysiach Chelovek Vyshli 2018).

In August, protests against the pension reform took a break. Trade unions did not try to organize new actions during the end of summer. However, the FNPR unions elaborated amendments to the bill on the raise of retirement age. On August 21, the parliamentary hearing took place in the State Duma. Both the FNPR and the KTR participated in the debates (Povysheniie Pensionnogo Vozrasta: Parlamentsko-Obshchestvennyie 2018). Trade unions criticized the government and mentioned productive public discussion which occurred in the Russian society.

On August 29, Putin addressed to the Russian people, asked to support the pension reform and softened it. He announced that the age of retirement for women would be raised only to 60. He also pledged several social benefits for persons of the pre-retirement age.

In August of 2018, the FNPR intensified negotiations with authorities and representatives of *United Russia* in the parliament. The Executive Committee of

the Federation noted that, in fact, Putin supported the FNPR opinion on the 'continuation of the social dialogue' (Postanovleniie Ispolkoma 2018).

The KTR and the FNPR organized the last round of protests in the beginning of September. On September 2, *Just Russia* and alternative trade unions held a rally in Moscow (Na Suvorovskoi Ploshchadi 2018).

On September 9, Alexei Navalny, a prominent leader of non-systemic opposition, and his supporters organized series of street actions in numerous cities across the country. The most significant rallies, which took place in Moscow and Saint Petersburg, had not been authorized by the local authorities, and more than one thousand participants were detained by the police (Bizyukov 2019; Rost Protestnoi Aktivnosti 2019). These actions coincided with the 2018 single voting day when gubernatorial and legislative elections were held in several subjects of the Russian Federation. On September 9, trade unions did not participate in the rallies.

Some separate actions took place even in the second half of September and in October (cf. Miting protiv Povysheniia 2018; V Pskovskoi Obasti 2018). Moreover, the latest protest took place in the regions outside Moscow and were organized by local trade unions. To some extent, regional organizations were more persistent than the central trade union bodies.

The campaign against the pension reform enjoyed a wide public support and engagement, yet it did not turn into any efficient campaign. The KTR did not propose any strategy, other than legal rallies. Unauthorized actions were rare. Here, it becomes evident that even alternative unions use strategies that have much in common with those of the FNPR. The KTR also relies on authorized rallies, cooperates with parliamentary parties, and does not avoid negotiations with the regime's representatives. Although alternative unions do not support the Russian authoritarianism explicitly and are less integrated in deliberative systems of the regime, alternative unions and FNPR organizations often act in the same way. Ideological differences between central apparatuses of these two federations do not necessarily affect their actions.

Consequently, on September 27, the State Duma adopted the bill on the raise of the retirement age. On October 3, Putin signed it. The parliament ignored amendments submitted by trade unions. Mass discontent with the reform has remained for a long time but in terms of protest action nothing significant happened after the adoption of the bill.

Discourses during protests against the pension reform

Protests against the raise of the retirement age provide extensive data to study the discourse of trade unions. The FNPR and the KTR made several statements on these protests and widely comment their own actions and responses of the state. This campaign addressed a national problem and trade unions covered a wide range of issues in their publications. The 2018 protests were inefficient and did not repeal the pension reform. Trade unions preferred 'symbolic actions' such as

peaceful rallies and petitioning. These practices found their reflection and fell under the influence of related trade union publications.

Initially slogans proclaimed at trade union rallies were quite radical. This radicalism was especially tangible in regions outside Moscow. Protesters in Perm, for example, argued that the pension reform was ‘anti-popular’ one or even ‘genocidal’ (V Permi Tysiachi Aktivistov 2018). They demanded resignation of the government. Protesters in the Republic of Karelia, for example, demanded to dismiss Dmitry Medvedev and all officials who were responsible for the pension reform (Na Mitinge v Karelii 2018). Some FNPR organizations claimed that the reform worked in favor of ‘oligarchs’ which were contrasted to the Russian people (Pskovskii Profsoiuzy Nachali 2018). Even *Solidatnost*’ called the pension reform a ‘war against pensioners’ (Voina protiv Pensionerov 2018). Here, some protesters tried to break with the hegemonic formation by using metaphors of ‘war’ and ‘genocide’ which are incompatible with peaceful co-existence of the protesters and the regime.

However, trade union leaders still insisted that they intended to enter into a dialogue with the authorities. Representatives of the KTR focused on the dialogue in several of their statements. On June 21, at a press conference, the KTR leaders reported on the status of the campaign against the pension reform. They mentioned lack of mutual understanding? between the authorities and the people and asked the parliament and the president to organize a ‘wide discussion’ of the reform. Representatives of the KTR also emphasized that all their protests were going to be peaceful (Press-Konferentsiia o Khode 2018).

On July 23, the KTR published an address to Putin, called for ‘professional deliberation’ on the pension reform, and offered to avoid ‘populist slogans’ (Konfederatsiia Truda Rossii Obrashchaetsia 2018). Two days later, representatives of the KTR emphasized once again that trade unions tried to discuss the pension reform and needed a counterpart for this discussion: ‘The State Duma is not a site for negotiations... The only site for negotiations we still have is the Presidential administration. President said that he was up for listening to all points of view personally’ (Kliuchevyie Protesty 2018). Thus, trade unions made a special effort to find a counterpart for the dialogue with the authorities. The KTR also explained the August break in the campaign through the need of a dialogue: ‘August is a slow time, when there is no one with whom to have a dialogue’ (Kliuchevyie Protesty 2018). Trade unions also threatened that they could force the government to ‘hear people’ (Konfederatsiia Truda Rossii Prizyvaet 2018). The campaign was supposed to achieve the correctly organized dialogue with the authorities. Here, the trade union leaders defined the goals of the rally through the sign ‘dialogue’. In the discourse of trade unions, ‘discussions’ and ‘negotiations’ are considered as a rationale for protest actions.

Even though regional labor unions posed radical demands, such as resignation of the government and criticized the Russian political and social system in general, and underscored the opposition between ‘oligarchs’ and the people, this radical criticism resulted in moderate actions. Trade unions collected signatures – one of the protesters’ main tools (Profsoiuzy Yakutii 2018; Pikety i Podpisi 2018;

Tul'skiie Profsoiuzy Sobiraiut 2018; V Gosdume Otkazyvaiutsia 2018). Since the trade union leaders criticized “populist slogans”, the opposition between “oligarchs” and the people had to be banished to the margins of the discourse because this opposition could be interpreted as a manifestation of populism. Petitions and collection of signatures corresponded to the prioritization of the dialogue within the trade union discourse.

Some FNPR organizations asked the president to veto the bill. In Novosibirsk, for example, protesters requesting the presidential veto argued that the pension reform could ‘sunder the authorities from the people’ (Pravo Veto 2018). Here, the discursive opposition between ‘oligarchs’ and the people was replaced with the desired unity of the authorities and the people.

Pavel Kudiukin from the KTR signaled that alternative trade unions also relied on the presidential intervention in the debates on the reform: ‘He [Putin] might also come up and say: the government went too far’ (Pavel Kudioukin: Ostanovit' Zakonopoeht 2018). Andrey Konoval, member of the KTR Council, said in July 2018 that Putin ‘suspended the situation’: ‘It means that the final decision has not been made yet... If protests intensify and result in some public actions, I am sure that the Head of State will exercise his right and reject the bill’ (Esli Pensionnaia Reforma 2018). Thus, the cooperation between trade unions and the regime is desirable within the trade union discourse.

Both the KTR and the FNPR started protest campaigns slowly and hesitantly. Alternative and traditional trade unions operated in accordance with their discourse on civilized protests. Despite massive discontent with the pension reform, the KTR and the FNPR channeled this discontent to authorized rallies and online petitions. Trade unions preferred to discuss the reform with the authorities. Because the trade union discourse defines politics through the dialogue, interactions between trade unions and the regime also take the form of discussions and negotiations. Rhetoric of the KTR and the FNPR presents this form as favorable.

Pro-governmental media outlets often stress the role of trade unions in deliberation on issues of economic and social policies. According to official TV channels, the raise in the age of retirement in 2018 was discussed nation wide and trade unions were involved in this debate. The government and the State Duma stressed the importance of trade unions in this deliberation (Vremia Peremen 2018). Public debates as such were also important for pro-governmental media outlets. Thus, public hearings about the pension reform and with the participation of trade unions in the State Duma were covered and the role of trade unions was mentioned (Pensionnyi Vozrast Proshiol 2018).

In general, official mass media did not claim that the pension reform was supported unanimously (Profsoyuzy – Vlastiam 2018). Plurality of opinions are allowed within the hegemonic discourse. Trade unions which are considered allies of the regime were able to express their disagreement with the raise in the age of retirement. Pro-governmental TV channels also covered rallies against the pension reform. They did not ignore trade union participation in these rallies (Okolo 6500 Chelovek 2018). The coverage of protests against the pension

reform corresponds to the image of ‘simple ordinary people’ within the hegemonic discourse (Kalinin 2018). Since ‘simple people’ are considered to be supporters of regimes, official mass media does not tag their activities as dangerous, as long as these activities remain within specific limits. The 2018 campaign met the requirements of the ‘civilized protests’. In other words, the trade union discourse intersects here with the hegemonic discourse. If the sign ‘protest’ is attached to the sign ‘dialogue’, the hegemonic discourse and the trade union discourse consider protest actions to be legitimate.

In 2018, the prioritization of the dialogue prevailed over other discursive articulations and strategies. Although some protesters made political claims, the campaign against the pension reform was not political in general. Trade unions abstained from open confrontation with the regime and preferred to deescalate the protests.

Unsuccessful protests against the pension reform highlighted the prioritization of dialogue within the trade union discourse. Trade unions tried to find a site for negotiations with the authorities and to organize public deliberations over the reform. This strategy, understandably, resulted in legalism. In their statements, trade unions emphasized the adherence to legal actions and parliamentary procedures. Despite several unauthorized actions, the campaign remained within the framework of restrictive legislation.

In 2018, trade unions deliberately refused direct actions and focused on symbolic actions. The discursive prioritization of dialogue reflects and solidifies this adherence to authorized rallies and petitions. Collected signatures might involve authorities in a discussion, while direct actions could damage deliberative procedures.

Samuel Greene and Graeme Robertson (2019) note that Putin remains popular in Russia. They argue that many people support Putin unquestionably, trust him, and consider his power as something natural and inevitable. Speaking on Putin’s popularity, Greene and Robertson mention mainly ‘ordinary Russians’. Hence, one can speculate that trade union leaders have expected Putin’s intervention because they represent people’s confidence in the president. However, it is not absolutely true and rank-and-file trade union members sometimes were more radical than their leaders.

Indeed, restrictive laws, which impede the freedom of assembly and associations, obviously hindered protests against the pension reform and the trade union leaders recognized this obstacle in their statements. Again, Pavel Kudiukin said that the Russian legislation did not allow to organize strikes against the reform. Despite these facts, trade unions did not demand to amend the laws on rallies and strikes during the 2018 campaign. Thus, the leaders of the 2018 protests did not try to expand equivalential chains of demands.

During the campaign against the pension reform, the FNPR central committee and the KTR central council did not run the protests directly. The trade union leaders did not authorize the slogans of these actions. Citizens widely supported the campaign, and discontented people who did not belong to any organization attended the rallies. Grassroots slogans and demands were more radical than the

official trade union statements. Thus, the discourse on dialogue and cooperation with the authorities was challenged by other articulations. Protesters utilized near-populist rhetoric referring to an ‘anti-popular reform’, the ‘pension genocide’ and other slogans regarding the opposition between oligarchs and the people. This rhetoric had coexisted and was gradually displaced by the usual statements about the dialogue with the regime. Indeed, the KTR even advocated for more dialogue and cooperation with the authorities. Since the FNPR and the KTR did not coordinate their actions and statements, it was not only a rational strategy, but also the manifestation of common norms and values. This shows how key elements of the hegemonic formation affect protest actions.

Although coalitions against the reform included various initiatives and protest groups, none of these groups questioned the prioritization of dialogue. Protests against the pension reform contributed to the development of public sphere and deliberative procedures. At the same time, the mass discontent did not result in a significant challenge to the regime.

The campaign against the pension reform demonstrated that rhetoric of trade unions focused on the establishing of a site for public debates. This rhetoric displayed the prioritization of dialogue and reflected the strategy of the campaign. At the same time, a ‘properly’ organized dialogue needs ‘constructive’ relations between protesters and authorities and deescalates social conflicts.

Popular politics versus democratic politics

Protests against the pension reform are often compared to the 2005 protests against the ‘monetization’ reform. Participants of the 2018 protests also calibrated their actions with the 2005 protests. The KTR noted that the campaign against the pension reform was the largest protest since 2005 (Kliuchevyie Protesty 2018). Pavel Kudiukin argued that protests against the pension reform might be as massive as the 2005 actions. He added: ‘However, there is a hope now that these [2018] protests will be more organized’ (Pavel Kudiukin: Ostanovit’ Zakonoproekt 2018).

Indeed, the 2005 protests were nearly the most important ones in history of Putin’s Russia. The law on ‘monetization’ reform was adopted in 2004 and entered into force in January 2005. The goal of the reform was to replace in kind social benefits with direct payments. This measure was supposed to ‘delineate federal and regional social protection mandates, cash-out some of them, and make funding these mandates more transparent’ (Alexandrova and Struyk 2007: 153).

The reform became unpopular from the very beginning. According to polls, more than 50% of citizens opposed ‘monetization’ in 2004 and 2005. People thought that the government was trying to relinquish its social responsibility (Klimov 2006).

The first protest actions occurred as early as 2004. In July, rallies took place in dozens of cities across the country. The 2004 actions were organized mainly by trade unions, including the FNPR, parties of the parliamentary opposition, and

initiative groups representing recipients of social benefits. These first rallies failed to attract big crowds. On July 1, 2004, for example, a rally in Moscow was attended only by 3000 people (Clement, Demidov, and Miryasova 2010). In addition, non-parliamentary organizations held 'direct actions'. In August of 2004, activists of the National Bolshevik Party occupied the building of the Ministry of Health to protest the reform (Kak Natsboly Vziali 2004).

In January of 2005, the protests peaked. After the reform process began, thousands of people took to the street in numerous Russian cities. Many of the protest actions were spontaneous and unsanctioned by the local authorities. Protesters blocked highways and stormed city councils. Participants of these actions demanded not only the abolition of the reform, but also the resignation of the president and the cabinet. At the same time, parliamentary parties asked protesters to avoid social unrest and be 'peaceful' (Clement, Demidov, and Miryasova 2010).

The 2005 protests were partly successful. The government restored some in-kind benefits and withdrew plans to expand the reform (Monetizatsii L'got of Rossii 2014). However, what was more important is that the 2005 protests influenced the further development of social movements. 'The country was confronted with a broad movement that was evidently not controlled by parties or other organizations' (Gabowitsch 2017: 198). The 2005 splash also reignited social protests after the lull of the early 2000s and gave birth to several coordinating councils which united social movements and civic initiatives (Clement, Demidov and Miryasova 2010).

The campaign against the pension reform was more institutionalized but less successful, less massive, and less influential than the 2005 protests. My interviewees from Pskov, who participated in both protest campaigns, mention the degradation of protest activities from 2005 to 2018. They admit that the 2005 protest actions were better attended and more radical than the rallies in 2018.

Unlike the 2005 protest wave, the 2018 campaign did not include spontaneous actions. In 2018, almost all rallies were held with the permission from the authorities. As previously mentioned, the protests against the 'monetization' reform had two stages. In the summer of 2004, trade unions and parliamentary parties organized regular rallies which were not well-attended. The summer of 2018 reminded that situation. In January 2005, however, numerous spontaneous and unauthorized actions occurred. Later, trade unions and parliamentary parties restored control over the protest wave and deescalated the conflict. Concessions by the regime also contributed to this de-escalation. In the case of the 2018 protests, trade unions always controlled the activities and channeled them to 'dialogue' with the authorities. This can be explained through the difference between the two reforms. While the 'monetization' reform affected citizens immediately after it had entered into force, the pension reform will have a delayed effect. Moreover, trade unions and parliamentary parties had protested against the 'monetization' reform before its adoption, while spontaneous actions occurred after its implementation. Thus, mass discontent and organized rallies lacked synchronization in 2004 and 2005. It meant that trade unions and parliamentary

parties had fewer opportunities to manage mass discontent in 2004 and 2005 than they had in 2018.

Robertson (2013) argues that after 2007 the protests turned from direct actions to symbolic actions. While ‘anti-monetization’ protests included a significant amount of ‘direct actions,’ such as road blocks, the protests against the pension reform relied mostly on ‘symbolic actions’ and ‘polite protests,’ which were supposed to attract attention of the public and organize a ‘proper’ dialogue between protesters and the authorities. In theoretical framework of the current dissertation, development of transformistic processes has enhanced deliberative procedures and expanded the hegemonic formation. The values of dialogue and ‘civilized protest’ have become predominant within discourses and strategies of the trade unions.

These values were also imposed on rank-and-file participants of the 2018 protests. In the beginning of the campaign, protesters in the regions employed anti-regime slogans, demanded the resignation of the cabinet, and juxtaposed the people and the ‘oligarchs’. Later, this rhetoric, which can be considered populist and directed against established institutions, was replaced with usual trade union rhetoric demanding dialogue between protesters and the authorities. Claims against institutions were superseded by claims to institutions and within the institutional order.

Although trade unions used the slogan ‘The people is against’, this alone did not signify a transition to popular politics. While some protesters demanded the resignation of the cabinet, trade unions did not expand the chain of demands and restricted the protest to the particular issue of the pension reform. Nor did trade unions try to criticize existing laws on rallies and strikes, though these laws constrained the protest in general. The protest repertoire contained mostly ‘symbolic actions’, which complied with the existing legislation.

Although trade unions initiated the campaign against the pension reform, they were not the only organizers of the protests and did not play a decisive role during the campaign. As previously mentioned, the parliamentary opposition, the non-systemic opposition, various social movements and civic initiatives participated in the protests. Hence, the 2018 campaign provides evidence regarding not only trade unions but also other protest groups. Strategies and tactics of other organizations which participated in the 2018 protests did not significantly differ from those of trade unions. While some parties and social movements coordinated their actions with trade unions, other protest groups acted independently of trade unions. Therefore, trade unions were not able to impose their understanding of the campaign on all protesters. Yet protesters adhered mainly to ‘symbolic actions’. Unauthorized rallies organized by Navalny’s supporters coincided with the voting day to affect regional elections. In other words, these activities also focused on parliamentarianism. The non-systemic opposition was relatively passive during first months of the campaign but intensified its actions before the voting day. Thus, even when the situation required actions in June and July, non-systemic opposition postponed rallies until the voting day in September. It demonstrates that parliamentary procedures have an intrinsic values for non-

systemic opposition. In a sense, trade unions and non-systemic opposition share this focus on parliamentarianism. In sum, trade unions and other organizations which participated in protests against the pension reform did not significantly differ in their activities.

The population widely supported the 2018 campaign. The growth of protests against the pension reform provided an opportunity for the popular politics. Protesters could make a step towards popular politics by posing demands which could go beyond the issues of the pension reform. For example, the restrictive legislation on strikes and rallies certainly hindered the development of the campaign but the protest leaders did not criticize this legislation. Some demands from below used anti-governmental and antagonizing rhetoric but they were not supported by the protest leaders. Strategies and discourses of the protest leaders channeled mass discontent into parliamentary procedures and petitioning. While the usual trade union activities may be effective for solving local problems, these strategies failed during the nation-wide campaign. The 2018 protests remained within the institutional order and within the framework of democratic politics.

This type of politics coexists with the current hegemonic formation and derives from social processes. Democratic politics carries a residue of particularism inherent in social and labor protests. Yet, both democratic and populist politics have their own logics and are not mere representations of social conflicts. Hence, politics cannot be understood through sociologism. In other words, the accumulation of social protests and the rise of people's discontent in regard to particular problems does not result in popular subjectivity. The potential transition from democratic politics to popular politics does not depend on the intensity of social and labor protests. Moreover, even this kind of a transition is not a gradual or natural process.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation examined the relations between protest movements and the regime in Russia and proposed a new perspective on this issue. Despite frequent splashes of social and labor conflicts, they fall short of initiating any major political change. This research demonstrates that protest movements often tend to cooperate with the regime, avoid antagonism and remain isolated. They also prefer to rely on deliberative procedures and strive for a dialogue with the authorities.

This dissertation examined the relations between protest movements and the regime in Russia and proposed a new perspective on this issue. Despite frequent waves of social and labor conflicts, they fall short of initiating any major political change. This research demonstrates that protest movements often tend to cooperate with the regime, avoid antagonism and remain isolated. They also prefer to rely on deliberative procedures and strive for a dialogue with the authorities. Protest groups are often successful in voicing grievances, as the authorities satisfy isolated demands from below. However, local successes are achieved at the expense of potential political development of the protest. In other words, local successes sometimes block the way toward the emergence of a political subject which could challenge the regime. These phenomena contribute to the survival of authoritarianism.

Transformism is to be understood within the dichotomy of popular politics and democratic politics. While popular politics establishes antagonistic frontier between masses and elites, democratic politics is a type of politics which operates within the current hegemonic formation. When protest groups go beyond the limits of individual workplaces and neighborhoods to problems of the region as a whole or even the entire country, they enter the political realm. However, such politicization still represents only one type of politics. As long as political activities of protest groups remain non-antagonistic toward the regime, these activities stay within the limits of democratic politics.

According to Ernesto Laclau, democratic politics has its own internal logic, often neglected by other approaches. The examination of this logic helps to understand political implications of social and labor protests. Laclau highlights that democratic politics requires institutionalization of grassroots movements, which makes them prefer cooperation with the state.

Furthermore, a comparison of Laclau's, Badiou's, and Lazarus's theories shows that democratic politics presupposes a search for deliberative procedures. Non-antagonistic politics relies on the exchange of opinions and comes close to parliamentarianism. Agents of democratic politics usually strive to enter into dialogue with the authorities or initiate public debates. These activities blur the potential antagonistic frontier between the regime and the masses.

In the Russian case, trade unions can be classified as agents of democratic politics whose activity enables transformism. My analysis of the Russian hegemonic discourse demonstrates that independent activities of subaltern classes

in general are tolerated by the regime. The Russian hegemonic formation relies on democratic rhetoric. Although stability and sovereignty are prioritized within this discourse, grassroots activities can also be seen as legitimate. People are allowed to take to the streets in support of such loyalist slogans as the defense of stability and the principle of national sovereignty. Social and labor protests are in this view also legitimate, but under certain conditions. For example, protests against the pension reform were presented by official mass media as reasonable, even though they opposed an officially declared policy. Trade unions are considered rightful and proper mediators between the authorities, the employers and the subaltern classes.

Graeme Robertson (2011) argues that labor organizations have been integrated into the regime's power vertical. This is not absolutely correct. Although the central apparatus of the FNPR usually supports the president and the ruling party, local organizations operate autonomously. Besides, the KTR, another federation of trade unions, criticizes both the president and *United Russia*. At the grassroots level, labor organizations often organize independent protest activities. These organizations frequently operate as social movements addressing a wide range of issues. Sometimes trade unions confront local authorities and affect decision-making processes in separate regions and cities. Most scholars distinguish 'traditional' trade unions (the FNPR) and 'free' or 'alternative' trade unions (the KTR and other smaller federations). 'Alternative' trade unions are supposed to be independent from the regime and more radical than 'traditional' ones. However, on a wide spectrum of issues beyond federal elections, 'alternative' and 'traditional' trade unions have much in common. 'Traditional' trade unions often participate in social and labor conflicts. While it is true that many FNPR local organizations are passive, there is also a large number of active traditional unions.

Discourses of trade unions have much in common with the hegemonic discourse. Even though the hegemonic discourse prioritizes stability, protests, as previously mentioned, are sometimes vindicated by the official mass media. Yet, according to both the hegemonic discourse and the discourses of trade unions, protests should be 'civilized', and trade unions declare that they strive for a dialogue with the authorities and employers. This dialogue is presented as contributing to overall stability. Trade unions often explicitly argue that their 'civilized' activities prevent potential social unrest.

Both the FNPR and the KTR stand against so called 'neoliberalism' and the 'contemporary financial system'. Trade unions are concerned with the alleged retreat of the state from the economy. In fact, it means that labor organizations solicit the support of the state apparatus in industrial conflicts. Moreover, most of trade union leaders share statist ideologies, which affect strategies of other protest groups. These strategies presuppose cooperation with the authorities whenever possible. When protesters confront the local authorities, trade unions often appeal to superior officials. These appeals de-escalate social conflicts, hinder popular subjectivation, and contribute to the survival of the regime.

In the Russian regions, trade unions are active and social and labor protests occur regularly. Empirical examination of regional protest movements contributes to the understanding of processes preventing popular subjectivation, as described above. In Leningrad Oblast, Karelia, and Pskov Oblast trade unions are often involved in grassroots activities and organize local protests.

For example, the 2008–2009 mass protests in Pikalyovo have had a lasting impact on the social and political life in Leningrad Oblast. Yet, this impact is also contradictory. The protesters contributed to the development of deliberative procedures in the region, but social and economic situation in the city remains deplorable. Even more importantly, isolated successes and achievements did not lay any foundation for further protest activities. Representatives of the Pikalyovo trade unions often meet with the local authorities and discuss problems of the city and the region. From this perspective, the grassroots protest has been institutionalized. It proves Laclau's suggestion that the adherence to institutions replaces politics with administration (Laclau 2012). Protest groups in Russia often seek institutionalization. They establish numerous commissions, committees, and other sites where they can meet representatives of the regime and discuss local issues. Trade unions have an advantage in this search for institutionalization. They have already obtained certain mechanisms for consultations with the authorities such as tripartite commissions. Sometimes they sign agreements on cooperation with regional legislatures and other state bodies. FNPR organizations are included in the pro-Kremlin All-Russia People's Front (ONF). Other protest groups often try to follow this way toward institutionalization.

Institutionalization of grassroots activities in Russia is a sign of transformism. The hegemonic formation incorporates protest groups which seem critical toward the regime. By partially satisfying demands of these groups, the regime neutralizes and domesticates them. The responsiveness of the authorities is ensured by the establishment of various platforms where disgruntled people meet with representatives of the regime and discuss their demands and requests.

Pikalyovo is not the only center of protests in the region. The regional organization of the FNPR in Leningrad Oblast is active and regularly involved in labor and social conflicts. Trade unions of the KTR were influential in the region, but their influence decreased after several enterprises were closed due to economic reasons.

The FNPR is also active in Republic of Karelia. Here, trade unions cooperate with the ONF. Local FNPR organizations participate in independent protest activities and sometimes support political slogans criticizing the government. Protest groups enjoy large autonomy and FNPR officials do not dictate or impose methods and strategies. At the same time, trade unions strive to establish what they call constructive relations with the authorities.

In Pskov Oblast, trade unions address a wide range of issues, including infrastructural and environmental ones. In fact, local trade unions come close to promoting politicization, because they go beyond the narrow sphere of industrial relations and have an influence over decision-making processes in the region.

In sum, trade unions contribute to the development of deliberative procedures and the public sphere. In Laclau's terms, trade unions promote democratic politics. They contribute to the improvement of workers' living standards locally, at the level of individual enterprises and municipalities. Yet, none of their achievements present a serious challenge to the regime.

It is obvious that protests and their failures in a single region cannot significantly affect the situation in the whole country. However, regularities and patterns of grassroots activities are similar in different regions. Occurring in numerous cities, protests jointly compose a general tendency preventing the emergence of a popular political subject.

The whole picture of social and labor movements can be grasped by examining the protests against the pension reform. The campaign was organized and led mostly by trade unions. Although protests against the unpopular reform inspired a remarkable amount of public engagement, the campaign failed to produce mass mobilization and did not achieve its key goals. Protests against the pension reform highlighted several characteristics of social and labor movements as well as democratic politics as a form of politics promoted by these movements.

Trade unions demonstrated their adherence to the discourse of 'civilized protests'. They declared the aspiration for the dialogue with the authorities and did not want to risk their 'constructive' relations with the regime. However, even 'traditional' trade unions were allowed to criticize the government and sometimes went as far as to call on Dmitry Medvedev's cabinet to resign. The official mass media paid attention to the protests. Protesters did not face any significant police obstruction or repressions, although some rallies were banned. The regime, again, responded to claims from below, as President Putin amended and softened the reform.

In fact, trade unions pursued an additional goal, besides the prevention of the reform. They aimed to improve their positions within the existing hegemonic formation. On the whole, the strengthening of trade unions as part of the hegemonic formation leads to its diversification by the development of deliberative procedures. The diversification in turn contributes to the sustainability of the formation. Aspiring for dialogue, trade unions deescalated the protests and avoided antagonism.

Lazarus highlights the connection between social movements and parliamentarianism. It should not be understood as a mere cooptation of protesters into legislatures. It means that social and labor protests result in an accommodation between grassroots movements and the regime.

My study of trade unions and their activities in Russia suggests the need to reconsider theories used to explain protest movements. The application of the notions of transformism and democratic politics to empirical evidence from Russia uncovers a highly significant logic of grassroots movements' operation under authoritarianism. Even if these movements are led by independent organizations, they coexist with the regime and cooperate with the authorities. By encouraging such cooperation, the regime reinforces its own sustainability by providing zones where independent protests can exist within the hegemonic formation.

Since trade unions prefer to cooperate with the authorities, expansion of protests led by trade unions may result in democratic politics. Democratic politics is characterized not only by posing particular and isolated demands. What is also important is the avoidance of antagonism and prioritization of dialogue and public debate. Democratic politics does not break with, but settles into the existing hegemonic formation.

Therefore, transformistic processes contribute to the survival of the existing regime in Russia. Regularly occurring social and labor protests do not lead to the emergence of a political subject. Contrarywise, they are channeled to discussions and mutual concessions between the protesters and the authorities. Trade unions play an important role in the functioning of transformism. Although they organize successful social and labor protests, trade unions facilitate the ongoing accommodation between the state and dissatisfied groups. This results in the expansion and strengthening of the existing hegemonic formation.

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SUMMARY IN ESTONIAN

Ametiühingud, transformism ja Vene autoritarismi püsimine

Väitekirj uurib Venemaal toimuvate sotsiaalsete ja tööprotestide ohjeldamise ja neutraliseerimise mehhanisme. Kuigi majandusraskused ja valitsuse poliitika põhjustavad rohujuuretasandil regulaarselt rahulolematust ja sütitavad konflikte, ei kujuta need endast režiimile mingit poliitilist katsumust. Nendest arvukatest protestidest mõned saavutavad formaalse võidu, kui võimud rahuldavad altpoolt esitatud nõudmisi. Samal ajal jääb see edu lokaalseks, mis aitab kaasa valitseva režiimi elujõulisusele ega tõsta protestijate mobiliseerimise suutlikkust. Käesolev doktoritöö põhineb transformismi kontseptsioonil, mille pakkus välja Antonio Gramsci ja mille poststrukturealistliku tõlgenduse esitas Ernesto Laclau. Transformism viitab protsessidele, mille käigus protestijate nõudmisi rahuldatakse valitseva poliitilise ja ühiskondliku korra raames. Transformismi kasutatakse olemasoleva hegemoonilise formatsiooni ehk sotsiaalsete rühmade ja diskursuste hierarhilise bloki säilitamiseks. Lokaalsete nõudmiste rahuldamine transformistlike protsesside kaudu võimaldab hegemoonilisel formatsioonil tulla toime potentsiaalselt vaenulike jõududega ja deescaleerida sotsiaalseid konflikte.

Nende mõistete kaasnab demokraatliku ja populistliku poliitika eristamine. Demokraatlik poliitika areneb olemasoleva valitsussüsteemi piires, populistlik poliitika on aga valitseva korra suhtes antagonistlik. Transformistliku paradigma lõksu jäädes tekitavad rohujuuretasandi protestid demokraatlikku poliitikat, kuna väldivad režiimi vastu astumist ega tegele populistliku poliitikaga. Väitekirj uurib transformismi toimimist Vene ametiühingute näitel. Ametiühingute tegevus on populistliku poliitika tekkimist takistavate transformistlike protsesside kõige silmatorkavam näide.

Väitekirj tugineb poststrukturealistliku diskursusanalüüsi metoodikale, mille töötasid välja Ernesto Laclau ja Chantal Mouffe. Nende käsitlus eeldab, et diskursuse elementidel pole püsivaid tähendusi. Laclau ja Mouffe'i järgi on diskursused üles ehitatud nn sõlmpunktide ehk privilegeeritud diskursiivsete elementide peale. Teiste elementide tähendus diskursuses määratakse sõltuvalt nende seosest sõlmpunktidega. Sellest vaatenurgast lähtudes on diskursusanalüüsi eesmärgiks tuvastada sõlmpunktid ja uurida nende semantilist suhet teiste elementidega.

Väitekirj uurib Venemaa hegemoonilist diskursust ning alamklasside ja ametiühingute positsioone hegemoonilises formatsioonis. Hegemooniline diskursus kujutab alamklasse poliitilise stabiilsuse pooldajadena. Hegemooniline formatsioon ei välista rohujuuretasandi proteste täielikult, vaid hõlmab konkreetseid tsoone, kus proteste lubatakse ja talutakse. Hegemoonilises diskursuses on näha ka demokraatliku retoorika elemente, mis soodustavad rohujuure tasandi aktivismi juhul, kui need tegevused ei kahjusta stabiilsust.

Hegemoonilist diskursust analüüsitakse kahte tüüpi allikate põhjal, mis seda diskursust iseloomustavad. Esimesse kuuluvad ametlikud tekstid, näiteks presidendi sõnavõtted ja presidendi ning peaministri avaldused. Teise allikate grupi

moodustavad peamiste valitsusmeelsete meediaväljaannete materjalid. Valim sisaldab artikleid, mis käsitlevad Venemaa režiimi ja alamklasside vahelisi suhteid.

Väitekiri analüüsib kõigepealt ametiühingute struktuuri, toimimist ja diskursusi ning keskendub seejärel konkreetsetele juhtumitele, mis iseloomustavad ametiühingute tegevust Venemaa loodeosa kolmes regioonis. Samuti käsitletakse 2018. aasta pensionireformi vastast üleriigilist kampaaniat. Ametiühingud osalevad regulaarselt sotsiaalsetes ja töökonfliktides, korraldades kohalikke proteste, mille käigus saavutatakse sageli järeleandmisi nii tööandjatelt kui ka võimudelt. Väitekiri näitab, et Venemaa režiim ja riik lubavad ning sallivad sotsiaalseid ja tööproteste, kui need protestid jäävad rohujuuretasandi nõuete legitiimseks väljendamiseks aktsepteeritud piiridesse. Ametiühingud püüdleval tavaliselt dialoogi ja koostöö poole riigi ja eriti kohalike omavalitsustega. Nad püüavad töökonfliktide käigus saada harilikult kohalike omavalitsuste toetust. Kui ametiühingud lähevad kohaliku omavalitsusega vastuollu, püüavad töölisorganisatsioonid saavutada kõrgete ametnike soosimist. Üldiselt peab riik ametiühinguid töötajate legitiimseteks esindajateks.

Uuringu empiiriline osa keskendub Venemaa kahele suurimale ametiühingute liidule. Nendeks on 20 miljoni liikmega Venemaa Sõltumatute Ametiühingute Föderatsioon ja kahe miljoni liikmega Venemaa Tööjõu Keskkliit. Ametiühingute diskursuste uurimise käigus analüüsitakse väitekirjas nende organisatsioonide programmilisi dokumente ja juhtide avaldusi oluliste poliitiliste küsimuste kohta. Uuring viitab mitmele kattuvale aspektile ametiühingute ja võimude diskursuste vahel, ühe olulisena seisukohana saab välja tuua, et valitseb üksmeel selles, et sotsiaalsed või tööprotestid ei tohiks õõnestada poliitilist stabiilsust.

Lisaks diskursusanalüüsile tugineb empiiriline uurimus 11 süvaintervjuele ametiühingute aktivistidega kolmest Loode-Venemaa piirkonnast: Leningradi oblastist, Karjala Vabariigist ja Pihkva oblastist. Nende piirkondade ametiühingud osalevad arvukatel meeleväljendustel ja teevad samal ajal koostööd kohalike omavalitsustega. Intervjuud võimaldavad mõista ametiühingute tegevust osalejate endi perspektiivist. Ühelt poolt saavad ametiühingud riigivõimude ja omavalitsustega koostööd tehes kohalikke probleeme edukalt lahendada, teisalt aga on selle tegevuse tulemuseks protestide potentsiaali neutraliseerimine ja alamklasside depolitiseerimine.

Ametiühingute valik keskenduda dialoogile ametivõimudega mõjutab sotsiaal- ja tööprotestide arengut Venemaal. Ametiühingud suunavad spontaanse rohujuuretasandi rahulolematuse erinevatesse aruteluformaatidesse, nagu näiteks ametiühingute ja ametivõimude vahelised konsultatsioonid ja parlamentaarsed menetlused. Ametiühingute tegevuse eesmärgiks on pidada tõsiseltvõetavat dialoogi meeleväljendajate ja võimude vahel. See strateegia eeldab, et dialoogil on oma väärtus, ja see võib olla mõistlik kohalike konfliktide kontekstis. 2018. aasta üleriigiline pensionireformi vastane kampaania näitas aga selle strateegia ebaefektiivsust. Pensionireform põhjustas massilist rahulolematust ja proteste, mis kogusid rahva seas laialdast toetust. Reformivastase kampaania korraldamises osalenud ametiühingud eelistasid aga petitsioonide esitamist ja hakkasid peagi konflikti deescaleerima. Spontaanne rohujuuretasandi rahulolematust suunati

protestide asemel parlamentaarsetesse menetlustesse ja avalikesse aruteludesse ning lõpuks viidi reform läbi vaid väheoluliste muudatustega.

Üldiselt omavad ametiühingud Venemaa protestiliikumises olulist tähtsust. Nad tekitavad sotsiaalseid ja töökonflikte ja mängivad nendes aktiivset rolli. Mõned ametiühingute eestvedamisel toimunud protestid on edukad ja nende poolt esitatud ning toetatud rohujuuretasandi nõudmised rahuldatakse. Protestidega seotud läbirääkimiste kaudu suunatakse aga sotsiaalsed ja tööjõukonfliktid kohalikesse kokkulepetesse võimude ja töötajate vahel. Seega neutraliseerib transformism protestiliikumisi ja aitab kaasa autoritaarse režiimi püsima-jäämisele.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Name: Maksim Kulaev
Date of birth: 06.12.1988
E-mail: maksim.kulaev@ut.ee

Education

2016–... University of Tartu, PhD studies in Political Science
2011– Saint Petersburg State University, MA in International Relations
2009– Saint Petersburg State University, BA in International Relations

Language skills

Russian (native), English, German, Estonian

Professional experience:

2016–2017 Researcher in “Russian National Identity in a Comparative Context: Towards an Intersubjective Identity Database”, supported by the Estonian Research Council (grant PUT1138).
2016–2017 Teaching assistant for “Russian Economy” and “Political Systems in Post-Soviet Space”
2013–2015 Researcher in “Discourse on Workers in Russian Mass Media”, supported by the Russian Humanitarian Scientific Foundation.
2013–2016 Interregional Trade Union ‘Workers’ Association’, organizer
2011–2013 Interregional Trade Union ‘Novoprof’, organizer

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Kulaev, Maksim. 2020. ‘Russian Trade Unions and the De-escalation of Protests in Russian Regions’. *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* doi.org/10.1007/s10767-020-09369-1
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ELULOOKIRJELDUS

Nimi: Maksim Kulaev
Sünniaeg: 06.12.1988
E-mail: maksim.kulaev@ut.ee

Hariduskäik

2016–... Tartu Ülikool, Johan Skytte poliitikauuringute instituut, doktorant (politoloogia)
2011– Peterburi Riiklik Ülikool, magistrikraad rahvusvahelistes suhetes
2009– Peterburi Riiklik Ülikool, bakalaureusekraad rahvusvahelistes suhetes

Keelteoskus

Vene (emakeel), Inglise, Saksa, Eesti

Töökogemus

2016–2017 Teadur projektis „Venemaa rahvuslik identiteet võrdlevas kontekstis: intersubjektiivse identiteedi andmebaasi loomine.“ Rahastaja: Eesti Teadusagentuur (PUT1138)
2016–2017 Õppeassistent loengukursuste „Venemaa majandus“ ja „Endise Nõukogude Liidu ruumi poliitilised süsteemid“ juures
2013–2015 Teadur projektis „Töötajate diskursus Vene meedias.“ Rahastaja: Venemaa Humanitaarteaduslik Fond.
2013–2016 Piirkondadevaheline ametiühing „Töötajate ühing“, organisator
2011–2013 Piirkondadevaheline ametiühing „Novoprof“, organisator

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