

September 9, 2014

Joan Rivers gets a good send off from Peggy Noonan.

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She was completely open and immediately accessible. She had the warmth of a person who found others keenly and genuinely interesting. It was also the warmth of a person with no boundaries: She wanted to know everything about you and would tell you a great deal about herself, right away. She had no edit function, which in part allowed her gift. She would tell you what she thought. She loved to shock, not only an audience but a friend. I think from the beginning life startled her, and she enjoyed startling you. You only asked her advice or opinion if you wanted an honest reply.

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We met and became friends in 1992, but the story I always remember when I think of her took place in June 2004. Ronald Reagan had just died, and his remains were being flown from California to Washington, where he would lay in state at the U.S. Capitol. A group of his friends were invited to the Capitol to take part in the formal receiving of his remains, and to say goodbye. Joan was there, as a great friend and supporter of the Reagans. ...

... She was a Republican, always a surprising thing in show business, and in a New Yorker, but she was one because, as she would tell you, she worked hard, made her money with great effort, and didn't feel her profits should be unduly taxed. She once said in an interview that if you have 19 children she will pay for the first four but no more. Mostly she just couldn't tolerate cant and didn't respond well to political manipulation. She believed in a strong defense because she was a grown-up and understood the world to be a tough house. She loved Margaret Thatcher, who said what Joan believed: The facts of life are conservative. She didn't do a lot of politics in her shows—politics divides an audience—but she thought a lot about it and talked about it. She was socially liberal in the sense she wanted everyone to find as many available paths to happiness as possible. ...

... It was Joan who explained to me 15 or 20 years ago a new dimension in modern fame—that it isn't like the old days when you'd down a city street and people would recognize you. Fame had suddenly and in some new way gone universal. Joan and a friend had just come back from a safari in Africa. One day they were walking along a path when they saw some local tribesmen. As the two groups passed, a tribesman exclaimed, "Joan Rivers, what are you doing here?!" ...

We have been remiss in ignoring the story of abuse of young girls in Rotherham, England. A good piece in The Weekly Standard lets us correct that.

Two weeks ago, the British press broke the news contained in Professor Alexis Jay's "Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham." Between 1997 and 2013, Jay estimated, 1,400 young girls in that Yorkshire town were exploited: gang-raped, trafficked to

other cities, threatened, beaten, and forced to bring other girls into the network. The police did not respond to emergency calls from the girls and their families; fathers reported being threatened and even arrested for complaining. The victims and the authorities knew that “by far the majority of perpetrators” were “Asian,” meaning Pakistani/Kashmiri Muslims, who constitute about 3.7 percent of Rotherham’s population of 260,000. Members of this group dominate the town’s taxi industry, and therefore had easy access to victims. The perpetrators were not merely pimps: They also dealt drugs and sold guns. Yet during the 17-year period she studied, Jay found, “councillors did not engage directly with the Pakistani-heritage community to discuss how best they could jointly address the issue.”

Jay’s report proved that virtually everyone in any position of authority from the late ’90s until today must have known the scale of the sexual exploitation. Internal documents show that they heard reports on the situation several times, most notably in 2005. Town councillors have been accused of having business interests in the taxi companies—one of the companies that was accused of rounding up and grooming girls also had a contract with the city to ferry children between social services locations.

The story of such grooming rings in the north of England had been broached by many newspaper reports over the past decade, particularly by Andrew Norfolk of the Times. But the impact of the Jay report overwhelmed the usual attempts to say it was being exaggerated out of racism and Islamophobia. “This scale of criminality and victimhood is vast for a country that has traditionally regarded itself as law-abiding,” the British journalist John O’Sullivan wrote last week. And the size and scope of the tragedy has made it safe not only for columnists but for cabinet members to say that “institutionalized political correctness” is responsible for the tragic fate of the girls of Rotherham. From 1997 to 2013 it was imprudent to say anything like this, or even to mention the ethnicity and religion of the perpetrators: A Home Office researcher who tried to tell police and superiors what was going on was sent on a diversity training course instead. (The influential 1999 Macpherson Report said any policeman who has not been given formal diversity training must be assumed to be racist.) ...

NY Review of Books writes on the dying Russians.

... In the seventeen years between 1992 and 2009, the Russian population declined by almost seven million people, or nearly 5 percent—a rate of loss unheard of in Europe since World War II. Moreover, much of this appears to be caused by rising mortality. By the mid-1990s, the average St. Petersburg man lived for seven fewer years than he did at the end of the Communist period; in Moscow, the dip was even greater, with death coming nearly eight years sooner.

In 2006 and 2007, Michelle Parsons, an anthropologist who teaches at Emory University and had lived in Russia during the height of the population decline in the early 1990s, set out to explore what she calls “the cultural context of the Russian mortality crisis.” Her method was a series of long unstructured interviews with average Muscovites—what amounted to immersing herself in a months-long conversation about what made life, for so many, no longer worth living. The explanation that Parsons believes she has found is in the title of her new book, Dying Unneeded.

Parsons chose as her subjects people who were middle-aged in the early 1990s. Since she conducted her interviews in Moscow over a decade later, the study has an obvious structural

handicap: her subjects are the survivors, not the victims, of the mortality crisis—they didn't die—and their memories have been transformed by the intervening years of social and economic upheaval. Still, what emerges is a story that is surely representative of the experience of a fair number of Russians. ...

... In fact, if we zoom out from the early 1990s, where Parsons has located the Russian "mortality crisis," we will see something astounding: it is not a crisis—unless, of course, a crisis can last decades. "While the end of the USSR marked one [of] the most momentous political changes of the twentieth century, that transition has been attended by a gruesome continuity in adverse health trends for the Russian population," writes Nicholas Eberstadt in [Russia's Peacetime Demographic Crisis: Dimensions, Causes, Implications](#), an exhaustive study published by the National Bureau of Asian Research in 2010. Eberstadt is an economist who has been writing about Soviet and Russian demographics for many years. In this book-length study, he has painted a picture as grim as it is mystifying—in part because he is reluctant to offer an explanation for which he lacks hard data.

Eberstadt is interested in the larger phenomenon of depopulation, including falling birth rates as well as rising death rates. He observes that this is not the first such trend in recent Russian history. There was the decline of 1917–1923—the years of the revolution and the Russian Civil War when, Eberstadt writes, "depopulation was attributable to the collapse of birth rates, the upsurge in death rates, and the exodus of émigrés that resulted from these upheavals." There was 1933–1934, when the Soviet population fell by nearly two million as a result of murderous forced collectivization and a man-made famine that decimated rural Ukraine and, to a lesser extent, Russia. Then, from 1941 to 1946, the Soviet Union lost an estimated 27 million people in the war and suffered a two-thirds drop in birth rate. But the two-and-a-half decades since the collapse of the Soviet Union are the longest period of depopulation, and also the first to occur, on such a scale, in peacetime, anywhere in the world. "There is no obvious external application of state force to relieve, no obvious fateful and unnatural misfortune to weather, in the hopes of reversing this particular population decline," writes Eberstadt. "Consequently, it is impossible to predict when (or even whether) Russia's present, ongoing depopulation will finally come to an end." ...

... For Eberstadt, who is seeking an explanation for Russia's half-century-long period of demographic regress rather than simply the mortality crisis of the 1990s, the issue of mental health also furnishes a kind of answer. While he suggests that more research is needed to prove the link, he finds that "a relationship does exist" between the mortality mystery and the psychological well-being of Russians:

"Suffice it to say we would never expect to find premature mortality on the Russian scale in a society with Russia's present income and educational profiles and typically Western readings on trust, happiness, radius of voluntary association, and other factors adduced to represent social capital."

Another major clue to the psychological nature of the Russian disease is the fact that the two brief breaks in the downward spiral coincided not with periods of greater prosperity but with periods, for lack of a more data-driven description, of greater hope. The Khrushchev era, with its post-Stalin political liberalization and intensive housing construction, inspired Russians to go on

living. The Gorbachev period of glasnost and revival inspired them to have babies as well. The hope might have persisted after the Soviet Union collapsed—for a brief moment it seemed that this was when the truly glorious future would materialize—but the upheaval of the 1990s dashed it so quickly and so decisively that death and birth statistics appear to reflect nothing but despair during that decade.

*If this is true—if Russians are dying for lack of hope, as they seem to be—then the question that is still looking for its researcher is, Why haven't Russians experienced hope in the last quarter century? Or, more precisely in light of the grim continuity of Russian death, What happened to Russians over the course of the Soviet century that has rendered them incapable of hope? In *The Origins of Totalitarianism* Hannah Arendt argues that totalitarian rule is truly possible only in countries that are large enough to be able to afford depopulation. The Soviet Union proved itself to be just such a country on at least three occasions in the twentieth century—teaching its citizens in the process that their lives are worthless. Is it possible that this knowledge has been passed from generation to generation enough times that most Russians are now born with it and this is why they are born with a Bangladesh-level life expectancy? Is it also possible that other post-Soviet states, by breaking off from Moscow, have reclaimed some of their ability to hope, and this is why even Russia's closest cultural and geographic cousins, such as Belarus and Ukraine, aren't dying off as fast? If so, Russia is dying of a broken heart—also known as cardiovascular disease.*

WSJ

Joan Rivers: The Entertainer

by Peggy Noonan

There was nobody like her. Some people are knockoffs or imitations of other, stronger, more vivid figures, but there was never another Joan Rivers before her or while she lived. She was a seriously wonderful, self-invented woman.

She was completely open and immediately accessible. She had the warmth of a person who found others keenly and genuinely interesting. It was also the warmth of a person with no boundaries: She wanted to know everything about you and would tell you a great deal about herself, right away. She had no edit function, which in part allowed her gift. She would tell you what she thought. She loved to shock, not only an audience but a friend. I think from the beginning life startled her, and she enjoyed startling you. You only asked her advice or opinion if you wanted an honest reply.

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We met and became friends in 1992, but the story I always remember when I think of her took place in June 2004. Ronald Reagan had just died, and his remains were being flown from

California to Washington, where he would lay in state at the U.S. Capitol. A group of his friends were invited to the Capitol to take part in the formal receiving of his remains, and to say goodbye. Joan was there, as a great friend and supporter of the Reagans.

That afternoon, as we waited for the plane to land, while we were standing and talking in a ceremonial room on the Senate side, there was, suddenly, an alarm. Secret Service men and Capitol police burst into the room and instructed us to leave, quickly and immediately. An incoming plane headed for the Capitol was expected to hit within minutes. "Run for your lives," they commanded, and they meant it. Everyone in the Capitol ran toward the exits and down the great stairs. Joan was ahead of me, along with the television producer Tommy Corcoran, her best friend and boon companion of many years.

Down the long marble halls, down the long steps . . . At the bottom of the steps, in a grassy patch to the left, I saw Joan on the ground, breathless. Her high heel had broken, the wind knocked out of her. I'm not going any further, she said to Tommy. Keep going, she said. I should note that everyone really thought the Capitol was about to be attacked.

I stopped to ask if I could help, heard what Joan had said to Tommy and then heard Tommy's reply: "I'm staying with you."

"Run!" said Joan. She told him to save himself.

"No," said Tommy. "It wouldn't be as much fun without you." He said if anything happened they'd go together. And he sat down next to her and held her hand and they waited for the plane to hit.

Needless to say it didn't; some idiot flying an oblivious governor had drifted into restricted airspace. I don't know if they ever had any idea how close they'd come to being shot down.

But that was a very Joan moment, her caring about her friend and him saying life would be lesser without her.

I was lucky to have known her. I owe it to Steve Forbes, the publisher and former presidential hopeful who, with his family, owned a chateau in France near the Normandy coast. It was the family's custom once a year to invite friends and associates for a long weekend, and in the summer of 1992 I went, and met Joan. Talk about a life force.

We all stayed in beautiful rooms. Joan amused herself making believe she was stealing the furniture. It rained through the weekend, which Joan feared would make Steve and Sabina Forbes blue, so she organized a group of us to go into town to a costume-rental place so we could put on a show. All they had was French Revolution outfits, so we took them, got back to our rooms, and Joan and I wrote a play on what we announced were French revolutionary themes. Walter Cronkite, another guest, was chosen by Joan as narrator. I think the play consisted mostly of members of Louis XIV's court doing Catskills stand-up. It was quite awful and a big success.

The highlight of the weekend was a balloon lift, a Forbes tradition—scores of huge balloons in brilliant colors and patterns would lift from the grounds of the chateau after dawn and travel over the countryside. It was so beautiful. I stood and watched, not meaning to participate, and was half pushed into a gondola. By luck Joan was there, full of good humor and information on what we were seeing below.

We held on hard as we experienced a hard and unplanned landing on a French farm. We were spilled out onto a field. As we scrambled and stood, an old farmer came out, spoke to us for a moment, ran into his farmhouse and came back with an old bottle of calvados. He then told us he hadn't seen Americans since D-Day, and toasted us for what America had done for his country. No one was more moved than Joan, who never forgot it.

I last saw her in July. A friend and I met her for lunch at a restaurant she'd chosen in Los Angeles. It was full of tourists. Everyone at the tables recognized her and called out. She felt she owed her fans everything and never ignored or patronized an admirer. She smiled through every picture with every stranger. She was *nice*—she asked about their families, where they were from, how they liked it here. They absolutely knew she would treat them well and she absolutely did.

The only people who didn't recognize Joan were the people who ran the restaurant, who said they didn't have her reservation and asked us to wait in the bar, where waiters bumped into us as they bustled by. Joan didn't like that, gave them 10 minutes to get their act together, and when they didn't she left. But she didn't just leave. She stood outside on the sidewalk, and as cars full of people went by with people calling out, "Joan! We love you!" she would yell back, "Thank you but don't go to this restaurant, they're rude! Boycott this restaurant!" My friend said, "Joan, stop it, you're going to wind up on TMZ."

"I don't care," she said. She felt she was doing a public service.

We went to a restaurant down the street, where when she walked in they almost bowed.

She wouldn't let a friend pay a bill, ever. She tipped like a woman who used to live on tips. She was hilarious that day on the subject of Barack and Michelle Obama, whom she did not like. (I almost didn't write that but decided if Joan were here she'd say, "Say I didn't like Obama!")

She was a Republican, always a surprising thing in show business, and in a New Yorker, but she was one because, as she would tell you, she worked hard, made her money with great effort, and didn't feel her profits should be unduly taxed. She once said in an interview that if you have 19 children she will pay for the first four but no more. Mostly she just couldn't tolerate cant and didn't respond well to political manipulation. She believed in a strong defense because she was a grown-up and understood the world to be a tough house. She loved Margaret Thatcher, who said what Joan believed: The facts of life are conservative. She didn't do a lot of politics in her shows—politics divides an audience—but she thought a lot about it and talked about it. She was socially liberal in the sense she wanted everyone to find as many available paths to happiness as possible.

I am not sure she ever felt accepted by the showbiz elite, or any elite. She was too raw, didn't respect certain conventions, wasn't careful, didn't pretend to a false dignity. She took the celebrated and powerful down a peg. Her wit was broad and spoofing—she would play the fool—but it was also subversive and transgressive. People who weren't powerful or well-known saw and understood what she was doing.

She thought a lot about how things work and what they mean.

She once told me she figured a career was like a shark, either it is going forward or it is dying and sinking to the ocean floor. She worked like someone who believed that, doing shows in houses big and small all over the country, hundreds a year, along with her cable programs,

interviews, and books. She supported a lot of people. Many members of her staff stayed for decades and were like family. Because of that, when I visited the hospital last week, I got to witness a show-business moment Joan would have liked. A relative was scrolling down on her iPhone. “Listen to this,” she said, and read aloud something a young showbiz figure who had been lampooned by Joan had just tweeted. She said it was an honor to be made fun of by such a great lady. “Joan will be furious when she sees this,” said the relative, shaking her head. “She won’t be able to make fun of her in the act anymore.”

It was Joan who explained to me 15 or 20 years ago a new dimension in modern fame—that it isn’t like the old days when you’d down a city street and people would recognize you. Fame had suddenly and in some new way gone universal. Joan and a friend had just come back from a safari in Africa. One day they were walking along a path when they saw some local tribesmen. As the two groups passed, a tribesman exclaimed, “Joan Rivers, what are you doing here?!”

She couldn’t believe it. This is Africa, she thought. And then she thought no, this is a world full of media that show the world American culture. We talked about it, and I asked, beyond the idea of what might be called Western cultural imperialism, what else does the story mean to you? “It means there’s no place to hide,” she said. They can know you anywhere. At the time, the Internet age was just beginning.

Her eye was original. Twenty years ago, when everyone was talking about how wonderful it was that Vegas had been cleaned up and the mob had been thrown out, Joan said no, no, no, they are ruining the mystique. First of all, she said, those mobsters knew how to care for a lady, those guys with bent noses were respectful and gentlemen, except when they were killing you. Second, she said, organized crime is better than disorganized crime, which will replace it. Third, the mobsters had a patina of class, they dressed well and saw that everyone else did, so Vegas wasn’t a slobocracy, which is what it is becoming with men in shorts playing the slots in the lobby of the hotel. The old Vegas had dignity. She hated the bluenoses who’d clean up what wasn’t meant to be clean. No one wanted Sin City cleaned up, she said, they wanted to go there and visit sin and then go home.

Joan now is being celebrated, rightly and beautifully, by those who knew and loved her. They are defining her contributions (pioneer, unacknowledged feminist hero, gutsy broad) and lauding the quality of her craft.

But it is a great unkindness of life that no one says these things until you’re gone.

Joan would have loved how much she is loved. I think she didn’t quite know and yet in a way she must have: You don’t have strangers light up at the sight of you without knowing you have *done* something.

But we should try to honor and celebrate the virtues and gifts of people while they’re alive, and can see it.

She was an entertainer. She wanted to delight you. She wanted to make you laugh. She succeeded so brilliantly.

The Weekly Standard

Rotherham's Collaborators

The helping professionals didn't help; the caring professionals didn't care

by Sam Schulman

Two weeks ago, the British press broke the news contained in Professor Alexis Jay's "Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham." Between 1997 and 2013, Jay estimated, 1,400 young girls in that Yorkshire town were exploited: gang-raped, trafficked to other cities, threatened, beaten, and forced to bring other girls into the network. The police did not respond to emergency calls from the girls and their families; fathers reported being threatened and even arrested for complaining. The victims and the authorities knew that "by far the majority of perpetrators" were "Asian," meaning Pakistani/Kashmiri Muslims, who constitute about 3.7 percent of Rotherham's population of 260,000. Members of this group dominate the town's taxi industry, and therefore had easy access to victims. The perpetrators were not merely pimps: They also dealt drugs and sold guns. Yet during the 17-year period she studied, Jay found, "councillors did not engage directly with the Pakistani-heritage community to discuss how best they could jointly address the issue."

Jay's report proved that virtually everyone in any position of authority from the late '90s until today must have known the scale of the sexual exploitation. Internal documents show that they heard reports on the situation several times, most notably in 2005. Town councillors have been accused of having business interests in the taxi companies—one of the companies that was accused of rounding up and grooming girls also had a contract with the city to ferry children between social services locations.

The story of such grooming rings in the north of England had been broached by many newspaper reports over the past decade, particularly by Andrew Norfolk of the *Times*. But the impact of the Jay report overwhelmed the usual attempts to say it was being exaggerated out of racism and Islamophobia. "This scale of criminality and victimhood is vast for a country that has traditionally regarded itself as law-abiding," the British journalist John O'Sullivan wrote last week. And the size and scope of the tragedy has made it safe not only for columnists but for cabinet members to say that "institutionalized political correctness" is responsible for the tragic fate of the girls of Rotherham. From 1997 to 2013 it was imprudent to say anything like this, or even to mention the ethnicity and religion of the perpetrators: A Home Office researcher who tried to tell police and superiors what was going on was sent on a diversity training course instead. (The influential 1999 Macpherson Report said any policeman who has not been given formal diversity training must be assumed to be racist.)

The only ones who haven't had much to say are the feminists—but given their dismissive attitude even to women of Muslim background like Ayaan Hirsi Ali who testify to their mistreatment by Muslim men in the name of Islam, one can't expect them to show up to support women of English ethnicity or Christian heritage, especially from the working classes. Some feminists try to defuse the situation without actually criticizing the perpetrators, such as Suzanne Moore in the *Guardian*: "The bigger picture is not, as the right claim, about ethnicity but systematic abuse of girls and boys by powerful men," expounds the subheading above her piece. "Our untouchables turn out to be little girls raped by powerful men," she claims. Dan Hodges of the *Telegraph* replies, "But they weren't. Our little girls were raped by Kashmiri cab drivers. Yes, powerful men were involved in the Rotherham abuses. But they weren't the ones doing the raping. They were the ones turning a blind eye to the rape. And why were they turning a blind eye? Because of the ethnicity of the rapists."

Thanks to the Jay report, however, we can say that the Hodges rejoinder is not entirely true. The Rotherham problem—which we'll call Childhood Sexual Exploitation, or CSE, because everyone uses that jargon—was the subject of repeated scrutiny throughout the period when 1,400 girls fell victim to it, not only by the local government itself but also by social services, private charities and their consultants, the National Health Service (NHS), and the police. The girls were abandoned only partly because so many made a cowardly choice to let a crime go unreported when they could not think of a “non-racist” way to describe it. They were also abandoned because of the way that these agencies tried to do good. The process of “caring for children” was already bad; the distortions and systematic mendacity encouraged by the ideology of multiculturalism and racial and gender theorizing made it worse.

Jay needs only about 10 pages of the 119-page body of her report to tell the big story: 1,400 victims neglected, mistreated, and betrayed. Every agency contributed to silencing the whistleblowers and abandoning the girls. Parents who acted to protect their daughters were ignored, harassed, even fined and arrested. Rotherham Council ignored their pleas and continued to give contracts to the taxi firms whose owners and drivers were the perpetrators, and in whose cars no teenager in town would ever willingly travel.

The remaining pages offer material that is, in a way, even more horrifying, because in them Jay patiently, plonkingly details the organizational behavior of perhaps half a dozen stakeholders in the tragedy, as seen through some 16 reviews, audits, and assessments by governmental supervisory agencies and private experts from the child protection establishment. Thanks to Jay's work, we can at least answer the question of what those who were responsible for protecting the girls of Rotherham *thought* they were thinking. They thought they were thinking very hard and caring very much about CSE, and doing so in the way that they had been instructed was the proper and professional manner to do so. The politicians, social workers, police, and medical professionals had every reason to believe that their efforts—which in fact were completely nugatory—demonstrated the “best practice,” or as the British more modestly say, “best known practice” on the subject. Jay demonstrates that the public services of England have been marinated in a managerial culture that makes it almost impossible for a frontline institution—local government, social services, the police force, schools, private charities, and the NHS—to see that they and their partners are doing virtually nothing at all about CSE.

Jay surveys the results of planned and unannounced inspections by government agencies, including the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI) and Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education): “a full inspection in 2003, a follow-up in 2004, a full inspection in 2008, a ‘monitoring visit’ in 2009, an unannounced inspection in August 2009, a full inspection in 2010, an unannounced inspection in 2011, and an unannounced review of child protection services in August 2012.” In addition, consultants from the venerable charity Children First reported on Rotherham's child protection efforts in 2009; inspectors from HM Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) reported on the South Yorkshire Police in 2010; the well-regarded child protection charity Barnardo's conducted a “Rotherham Practice Review” in 2013.

The inspectors told the various players in Rotherham that ever more must be done to deal with CSE—but just as urgently, the agencies must also create initiatives to *prevent* CSE, to create *awareness* of CSE, to ensure that the focus on girl victims of CSE isn't so exclusive that boy victims of CSE and LGBT victims of CSE don't have their own solutions. (Outside reviewers warned Rotherham agencies not to neglect male and LGBT victims as early as 2002, and frequently queried them about it thereafter; perhaps the nagging worked, because there have never been any reported.)

The individual girls who were victims and the particular men who picked them up in taxis from their middle schools and preyed on them in public places all over town lose their specificity. The inspectors continually praised the “focus” and “commitment” of the city and its agencies, but made victims and perpetrators vague and fuzzy categories. The weapons they recommended to fight the evil were even more abstract and ineffectual. The activity the inspectors prescribed and praised in the most lavish terms will be familiar to anyone who has ever been in private business: It consists of nominating teams from different departments to tackle a certain problem on a coordinated basis. Rotherham was urged above all to “develop multi-agency responses to CSE.” The goal was multitudinousness itself: Where two or three agencies are gathered together in the name of tackling CSE, there must be something productive going on. In business, after a point, the teamwork approach will be measured against a goal that can be enumerated: Sales must grow or production time shrink. If the goal is not attained, the collaborative effort withers away. But no social agency, policeman, town councillor, or inspector ever mentioned a numerical goal, such as reducing the number of victims or increasing the number of arrests—with the exception of adequate budgeting for staff.

In reality, the number of victims grew every year, and the number of arrests was vanishingly low. But the inspectors continued to praise Rotherham’s “commitment to safeguarding young people”; continued to measure commitment by the quality of collaborativeness itself. In 2003, the SSI praised “examples of innovation, moves towards integrated services and new preventive strategies.” In 2010, Ofsted was delighted by “effective, creative multi-agency work” to prevent sexual exploitation, and even more so by “cross-agency training.” Two years later, Ofsted smiled upon “good collaborative work between the local authority and the Police resulting in a targeted approach.”

Barnardo’s experts admired the joint “commitment to addressing CSE” on the part of the town council and social services agencies, a commitment expressed vividly in “their plans to widen the inter-agency partnership.” Barnardo’s left Children’s Services with this praise ringing in its ears, and with an advanced model for calculating risk of CSE, which it had sold to management. Social workers dealing with girls in the field found the Barnardo’s model consistently understated the degree to which their real-life cases were exposed to rape and abduction, but were made to use it, even though it undermined their recommendations.

The Inspectorate of Constabulary praised the collaborative disposition and, of course, the commitment of the South Yorkshire Police’s CSE work. Not only was everyone “conscientious, enthusiastic, and focused,” but “the force had improved its engagement with other agencies working in this field and had co-operated with them in developing strategies.” The strategies thus developed did not require constables to arrest specific sex traffickers who had been pointed out to them by material witnesses: According to the Jay report, they systematically refused to do so, using a variety of excuses that may have been developed on an interagency basis.

Most ecstatic was Children First’s 2009 review of the Rotherham Office of Children’s Services, the welfare division directly responsible for protecting children from exploitation—which, Jay reported, demonstrated little interest in children not already on their files, and none at all in children who had become sexually active or pregnant because they were raped. Children First gave the division alpha-plus marks in interagency-manship: Its partnership with one of the six Rotherham NHS units has “been well developed and represented ‘highly advanced and ambitious practice.’” The CEOs of the two organizations had “ambition to create an integrated locality structure”—all that was needed was for their joint vision to be “refreshed.”

But without social workers, volunteer advocates, and police, in uniform or undercover, to go out to the streets, schoolyards, and taxicabs of Rotherham, the most advanced integrated locality structures could not realize their full potential. It emerges in Jay's narrative that there was once such a group, ironically organized directly by the Rotherham town council itself in the late 1990s. It was called Risky Business, and its social workers went out to the streets, gained the trust of the girls at risk, and actively defended them from their tormentors. Many informants told Jay that Risky Business was the only organization they felt they could trust. But when the Risky Business staff identified girls at risk to Children's Services, they were treated with contempt. Jay says that Children's Services treated a recommendation from Risky Business as "a pretext for attaching lower importance to it"—since Risky Business's 12- and 13-year-olds were having sex or babies, they weren't really children anyway. Cops told them their clients were prostitutes or "white trash." When Risky Business gave police a carefully compiled map of victims and perpetrators, no investigation ensued.

Did the Inspectorate credit Risky Business for its success with girls at risk, limited as it was? Far from it. Risky Business lacked precisely the excellences that Children's Services and other players in the CSE game possessed in such abundance: It was judged deficient in "managerial and risk assessment skills, the rigour of case management supervision, procedures, risk management plans, defined roles and responsibilities, and office systems." The cure for such shortcomings was obvious: integrated interagency co-location. Accordingly, Risky Business was folded into Children's Services offices, where it lost its separate identity and, evidently, its effectiveness.

When it comes to the girls who are victims, Alexis Jay is most indignant about the failure of Children's Services to provide after-rape counseling to them. As a longtime social worker, she believes in the power of counseling, and she is right that these children were treated coldly and reluctantly, if they were treated at all. But it seems to me that the only failure that really matters was that of the South Yorkshire Police, who could, by aggressive policing, have pursued and arrested the relatively small group of men, whose identities were well known, who started the ring in 1997-98. Why didn't they? The leading theory is a culture of political correctness: Crudely stated, the police refused to arrest the perpetrators because they were Muslims. One of the first journalists to write about the Rotherham grooming scandal, Julie Bindel, reported this conversation in a pioneering 2010 article in *Standpoint*:

"The fact that these particular gangs are made up of Pakistani men is significant but not in the way racists would have us believe," says one child protection expert who asked not to be named. "While the BNP would have us believe that abusing white girls is an endemic part of these men's culture—which it absolutely is not—the truth is that these men are aware that the police do not want to be accused of racism in today's climate."

The eruption of Rotherham's grooming gangs in 1999 coincided with publication of the infamous Macpherson report, which concluded that the Metropolitan Police Service demonstrated "institutional racism" in its investigation of the murder of Stephen Lawrence, an 18-year-old black man, in London in 1993. A famous 2000 analysis of the report by the think tank Civitas concluded that "there was no attempt to show that the Metropolitan Police Service was racist in the sense of being formally structured to put members of ethnic minorities at a disadvantage. In spite of this, the Macpherson report found the Metropolitan Police, and British society generally, guilty of 'institutional' or 'unwitting' racism." Even to question that a crime was racist was, "in itself, adduced as evidence of racism."

But there are other factors to consider—again, factors having to do with the managerial culture of the police and criminal justice system in Britain. Begin with the fact that policing in Britain is both reluctant and, compared with American “best practices,” incompetent. In 2001-02, Rotherham’s director of education complained to police about taxis picking up young girls at school gates with the intention to abuse them. Persistence led to meetings with senior police officials. In the last, Alexis Jay reports,

she was shown a map of the north of England overlaid with various crime networks including ‘Drugs’, ‘Guns’, and ‘Murder’. She was told that the Police were only interested in putting resources into catching ‘the ring leaders’ who perpetrated these crimes. She was told that if they were caught, her local problems would cease.

This kind of thinking—conveyed with a kind of Yorkshire arrogance and impatience that Jay’s careful retelling can’t disguise—is not only bad policing, but heartless. We’re not talking about a ring of safecrackers, but of men who capture young women at the beginning of adulthood and ruin their lives. It’s the small fry who cause the greatest human damage. Rapists need no ring leaders or complicated distribution systems to enjoy the fruits of their crime.

The police may have been reluctant to arrest Muslim suspects accused by white Christians, but the police in Britain are comparatively reluctant to arrest anyone at all. The incarceration rate in England and Wales is about a fifth of ours, and accordingly, the citizens of the law-abiding country John O’Sullivan describes are 228 percent more likely than we are to be a victim of a violent crime. The actual crime rate is likely to be even higher, since the police are believed by HMIC itself systematically to underreport crime.

These managerial cultures—which prevented the social services from doing their job and the police from doing theirs—have an absurd aim. The police must show loving kindness to those who are most dangerous and threatening, lest they think the police don’t love them, at the expense of people who are vulnerable to the threats. The public services must work together as if they were members of a family, agreeing with one another on plans and standards of care before delivering any. The result is to tear apart real families, and destroy the lives of 1,400 schoolgirls. Meanwhile, only the perpetrators retained a real sense of community. The mother of a victim of grooming made this point to Julie Bindel in 2010: “These men all know and trust each other. They don’t abuse these girls because they are Muslim, but because they are criminals who think they are above the law.” The authors of the Civitas response to the Macpherson report made the same point about the effect of the new ethos of policing:

To recommend that police officers should deal with anyone who is especially uncooperative, excitable, or anti-police with more than normal restraint and tolerance because that is their “culture” is simply to invite others to develop or to claim to be part of the same “culture.”

Rotherham’s “best practices” not only unintentionally did grave harm to real families, but created a sense of community and mutual trust among the very men who preyed on the most vulnerable. In Rotherham, only the rapists could rely on one another.

The New York Review of Books

The Dying Russians

by Masha Gessen



Aprelevka train station, Russia, 1997

Sometime in 1993, after several trips to Russia, I noticed something bizarre and disturbing: people kept dying. I was used to losing friends to AIDS in the United States, but this was different. People in Russia were dying suddenly and violently, and their own friends and colleagues did not find these deaths shocking. Upon arriving in Moscow I called a friend with whom I had become close over the course of a year. “Vadim is no more,” said his father, who picked up the phone. “He drowned.” I showed up for a meeting with a newspaper reporter to have the receptionist say, “But he is dead, don’t you know?” I didn’t. I’d seen the man a week earlier; he was thirty and apparently healthy. The receptionist seemed to think I was being dense. “A helicopter accident,” she finally said, in a tone that seemed to indicate I had no business being surprised.

The deaths kept piling up. People—men and women—were falling, or perhaps jumping, off trains and out of windows; asphyxiating in country houses with faulty wood stoves or in apartments with jammed front-door locks; getting hit by cars that sped through quiet courtyards or plowed down groups of people on a sidewalk; drowning as a result of diving drunk into a lake or ignoring sea-storm warnings or for no apparent reason; poisoning themselves with too much alcohol, counterfeit alcohol, alcohol substitutes, or drugs; and, finally, dropping dead at absurdly early ages from heart attacks and strokes.

Back in the United States after a trip to Russia, I cried on a friend’s shoulder. I was finding all this death not simply painful but impossible to process. “It’s not like there is a war on,” I said.

“But there is,” said my friend, a somewhat older and much wiser reporter than I. “This is what civil war actually looks like. “It’s not when everybody starts running around with guns. It’s when everybody starts dying.”

My friend's framing stood me in good stead for years. I realized the magazine stories I was writing then were the stories of destruction, casualties, survival, restoration, and the longing for peace. But useful as that way of thinking might be for a journalist, it cannot be employed by social scientists, who are still struggling to answer the question, Why are Russians dying in numbers, and at ages, and of causes never seen in any other country that is not, by any standard definition, at war?

In the seventeen years between 1992 and 2009, the Russian population declined by almost seven million people, or nearly 5 percent—a rate of loss unheard of in Europe since World War II. Moreover, much of this appears to be caused by rising mortality. By the mid-1990s, the average St. Petersburg man lived for seven fewer years than he did at the end of the Communist period; in Moscow, the dip was even greater, with death coming nearly eight years sooner.

In 2006 and 2007, Michelle Parsons, an anthropologist who teaches at Emory University and had lived in Russia during the height of the population decline in the early 1990s, set out to explore what she calls “the cultural context of the Russian mortality crisis.” Her method was a series of long unstructured interviews with average Muscovites—what amounted to immersing herself in a months-long conversation about what made life, for so many, no longer worth living. The explanation that Parsons believes she has found is in the title of her new book, [*Dying Unneeded*](#).

Parsons chose as her subjects people who were middle-aged in the early 1990s. Since she conducted her interviews in Moscow over a decade later, the study has an obvious structural handicap: her subjects are the survivors, not the victims, of the mortality crisis—they didn't die—and their memories have been transformed by the intervening years of social and economic upheaval. Still, what emerges is a story that is surely representative of the experience of a fair number of Russians.

People of the generation Parsons describes were born in the desolate, hungry years following WWII. They grew up in communal apartments, with two or three generations of a single family occupying one or two rooms and sharing a hallway, bathroom, and kitchen with three or seven or even a dozen other families. But then, in the early 1960s, Nikita Khrushchev organized a construction boom: cheaply constructed apartment buildings went up all around the periphery of Moscow, and Russians—first and foremost, Muscovites—moved out of communal apartments en masse. By the Brezhnev years, in the late 1960s and 1970s, there were also Soviet-made cars and tiny country houses—such at least was the Soviet consumer dream, and it was within reach for a significant number of Russians.

In addition, three important things made life not only less harsh, relative to earlier years, but even worth living. One was the general perception of social and economic stability. Jobs were unquestionably secure and, starting in the 1960s, followed by a retirement guaranteed by the state. A second was the general sense of progress, both of the sort Soviet propaganda promised (the country was going to build the first communist society, in which money would be abolished and everyone would share in the plenty); and the personal material improvement this generation experienced itself moving toward. A third source of comfort of Soviet life was its *apparent* equality. A good number of people with connections enjoyed extraordinary perquisites compared to the vast majority of the population, but the wealth-and-privilege gap was concealed by the tall fences around the nomenklatura summer houses, the textbook and newspaper depictions of Soviet egalitarianism, and the glacial pace of mobility into one of the favored groups at the top.

Parsons and her subjects, whom she quotes at length, seem to have an acute understanding of the first two forces shaping Soviet society but are almost completely blind to the last: the hidden nature of Soviet social inequality. One woman says that the difference between current poverty and poverty in the postwar era is that “now there are rich folks.”

But by the early 1980s, the Soviet economy was stagnant and the Soviet political system moribund. Finally, a younger leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, emerged, but the decrepit structure proved incapable of change and, in short order, collapsed, taking with it the predictable life as hundreds of millions of people had known it. Russia rushed into a new capitalist future, which most of the population expected to bring prosperity and variety. Boris Yeltsin and his team of young, inexperienced reformers instituted economic shock therapy. As far as we know today, this series of radical measures jerked Russia back from the edge of famine but also plunged millions of people into poverty. Over the next decade, most Russian families—like their counterparts elsewhere in the former Soviet Union—actually experienced an improvement in their living conditions, but few who had spent many adult years in the old system regained the sense of solid ground under their feet.

“To Lyudmila, economic shock therapy looked a lot like war-ravaged Russia,” Parsons writes of one of her respondents. “In a terrible sense it was as if the poverty of her youth and the poverty of the early 1990s had merged together. Thirty-five years of her life, from age nineteen when she started work in the mechanics factory to age fifty-five when the Soviet Union fell, fell out of view.” Parsons devotes an entire chapter to comparisons between the collapse and chaos of the 1990s and the devastation that followed World War II. “Margarita told me with some disgust, ‘It is just like after the war.’ And then she would add—half angry, half baffled—‘But there was no war.’ ...The fifty-seven-year-old taxi driver I interviewed said, of those older than himself, ‘They will never understand what happened. No war, nothing. And everything fell apart.’”



Workers in a tractor factory, Vladimir, Russia, 1972

Not only had the retirement system collapsed, but neither the job market nor their own families—those grown children who had once been entirely dependent on their parents—had any use for these people. Gone, too, was the radiant future: communist slogans were replaced with capitalist advertising that didn't speak to the masses, who were in no position to over-consume. For those over forty, the message of the new era was that no one—not even the builders of an imaginary future—needed them anymore. Above all, the veil that had hidden the wealth of the few from the incredulous and envious gaze of the many had been ruthlessly removed: for the 1990s and much of the 2000s, Moscow would become the world capital of conspicuous consumption. No longer contributing to or enjoying the benefits of the system, members of the older generations, Parsons suggests, were particularly susceptible to early death.

Parsons' argument is provocative but not entirely convincing. She describes Russia as though it were a new country that replaced the USSR, and it was this new country that suffered a mortality crisis, which can and should be explained entirely by social forces specific to itself. This is a standard way to approach the problem, and it is not a bad description of what many Russians actually experienced. But, by attempting to identify a single turning point, she overlooks more gradual changes that may have been underway well before 1991. For example, Parsons largely skips over the 1980s, with the broad social movements and the severe economic crises that marked the Gorbachev period.

In fact, if we zoom out from the early 1990s, where Parsons has located the Russian “mortality crisis,” we will see something astounding: it is not a crisis—unless, of course, a crisis can last decades. “While the end of the USSR marked one [of] the most momentous political changes of the twentieth century, that transition has been attended by a gruesome continuity in adverse health trends for the Russian population,” writes Nicholas Eberstadt in [*Russia's Peacetime Demographic Crisis: Dimensions, Causes, Implications*](#), an exhaustive study published by the National Bureau of Asian Research in 2010. Eberstadt is an economist who has been writing about Soviet and Russian demographics for many years. In this book-length study, he has painted a picture as grim as it is mystifying—in part because he is reluctant to offer an explanation for which he lacks hard data.

Eberstadt is interested in the larger phenomenon of depopulation, including falling birth rates as well as rising death rates. He observes that this is not the first such trend in recent Russian history. There was the decline of 1917–1923—the years of the revolution and the Russian Civil War when, Eberstadt writes, “depopulation was attributable to the collapse of birth rates, the upsurge in death rates, and the exodus of émigrés that resulted from these upheavals.” There was 1933–1934, when the Soviet population fell by nearly two million as a result of murderous forced collectivization and a man-made famine that decimated rural Ukraine and, to a lesser extent, Russia. Then, from 1941 to 1946, the Soviet Union lost an estimated 27 million people in the war and suffered a two-thirds drop in birth rate. But the two-and-a-half decades since the collapse of the Soviet Union are the longest period of depopulation, and also the *first* to occur, on such a scale, in peacetime, anywhere in the world. “There is no obvious external application of state force to relieve, no obvious fateful and unnatural misfortune to weather, in the hopes of reversing this particular population decline,” writes Eberstadt. “Consequently, it is impossible to predict when (or even whether) Russia's present, ongoing depopulation will finally come to an end.”

Russia has long had a low birth rate. The Soviet government fought to increase it by introducing a three-year maternity leave and other inducements, but for much of the postwar period it hovered below replacement rates. An exception was the Gorbachev era, when fertility reached

2.2. After 1989, however, it fell and still has not recovered: despite financial inducements introduced by the Putin government, the Russian fertility rate stands at 1.61, one of the lowest in the world (the US fertility rate estimate for 2014 is 2.01, which is also below replacement but still much higher than Russia's).

And then there is the dying. In a rare moment of what may pass for levity Eberstadt allows himself the following chapter subtitle: "Pioneering New and Modern Pathways to Poor Health and Premature Death." Russians did not start dying early and often after the collapse of the Soviet Union. "To the contrary," writes Eberstadt, what is happening now is "merely the latest culmination of ominous trends that have been darkly evident on Russian soil for almost half a century." With the exception of two brief periods—when Soviet Russia was ruled by Khrushchev and again when it was run by Gorbachev—death rates have been inexorably rising. This continued to be true even during the period of unprecedented economic growth between 1999 and 2008. In this study, published in 2010, Eberstadt accurately predicts that in the coming years the depopulation trend may be moderated but argues that it will not be reversed; in 2013 Russia's birthrate was still lower and its death rate still higher than they had been in 1991. And 1991 had not been a good year.

Contrary to Parsons's argument, moreover, Eberstadt shows that the current trend is not largely a problem of middle-aged Russians. While the graphs seem to indicate this, he notes, if one takes into account the fact that mortality rates normally rise with age, it is the younger generation that is staring down the most terrifying void. According to 2006 figures, he writes, "overall life expectancy at age fifteen in the Russian Federation appears in fact to be lower than for some of the countries the UN designates to be least developed (as opposed to less developed), among these, Bangladesh, Cambodia, and Yemen." Male life expectancy at age fifteen in Russia compares unfavorably to that in Ethiopia, Gambia, and Somalia.

Eberstadt sets out to find the culprit, and before conceding he can't, he systematically goes down the list of the usual suspects. Infectious diseases, including not only HIV and TB but also normally curable STDs and every kind of hepatitis, have the run of the land in Russia, but do not in fact seem overrepresented in its death statistics; from a demographer's point of view, as many Russians die of infections as would be expected in a country of its income level. Cardiovascular disease is an entirely different matter:

As of 1980, the Russian population may well have been suffering the very highest incidence of mortality from diseases of the circulatory system that had ever been visited on a national population in the entire course of human history—up to that point in time. Over the subsequent decades, unfortunately, the level of CVD mortality in the Russian Federation veered further upward.... By 2006... Russia's mortality levels from CVD alone were some 30% higher than deaths in Western Europe from all causes combined.

And then there are the deaths from external causes—again going from bad to worse. "Deaths from injuries and poisoning had been much higher in Russia than in Western Europe in 1980—well over two and a half times higher, in fact." As of 2006, he writes, it was more than five times as high.

So why do Russians have so many heart attacks, strokes, fatal injuries, and poisonings? One needs to have only a passing knowledge of Russian history and culture to tick off a list of culprits, and Eberstadt is thorough in examining each of them. True, Russians eat a fatty diet—but not as fatty as Western Europeans do. Plus, Russians, on average, consume fewer calories than Western Europeans, indicating that overeating is not the issue. Yes, Russia has taken

abominable care of its environment, but it sees only a few more deaths from respiratory diseases than does Western Europe—and fewer deaths of diseases of the kidneys, which would be expected to result from pollution. Yes, Russians have lived through severe economic upheaval, but there is no indication that economic shock in a modern society leads quickly, or at all, to increased mortality—the Great Depression, for example, did not. Russia spends roughly as much on health care per capita as do the less-affluent European countries like Portugal. Russians smoke a lot—but not as much as Greeks and Spaniards, who live on average roughly as long as other Western Europeans.

The most obvious explanation for Russia's high mortality—drinking—is also the most puzzling on closer examination. Russians drink heavily, but not as heavily as Czechs, Slovaks, and Hungarians—all countries that have seen an appreciable improvement in life expectancy since breaking off from the Soviet Bloc. Yes, vodka and its relatives make an appreciable contribution to the high rates of cardiovascular, violent, and accidental deaths—but not nearly enough to explain the demographic catastrophe. There are even studies that appear to show that Russian drinkers live longer than Russian non-drinkers. Parsons discusses these studies in some detail, and with good reason: it begins to suggest the true culprit. She theorizes that drinking is, for what its worth, an instrument of adapting to the harsh reality and sense of worthlessness that would otherwise make one want to curl up and die.

For Eberstadt, who is seeking an explanation for Russia's half-century-long period of demographic regress rather than simply the mortality crisis of the 1990s, the issue of mental health also furnishes a kind of answer. While he suggests that more research is needed to prove the link, he finds that “a relationship does exist” between the mortality mystery and the psychological well-being of Russians:

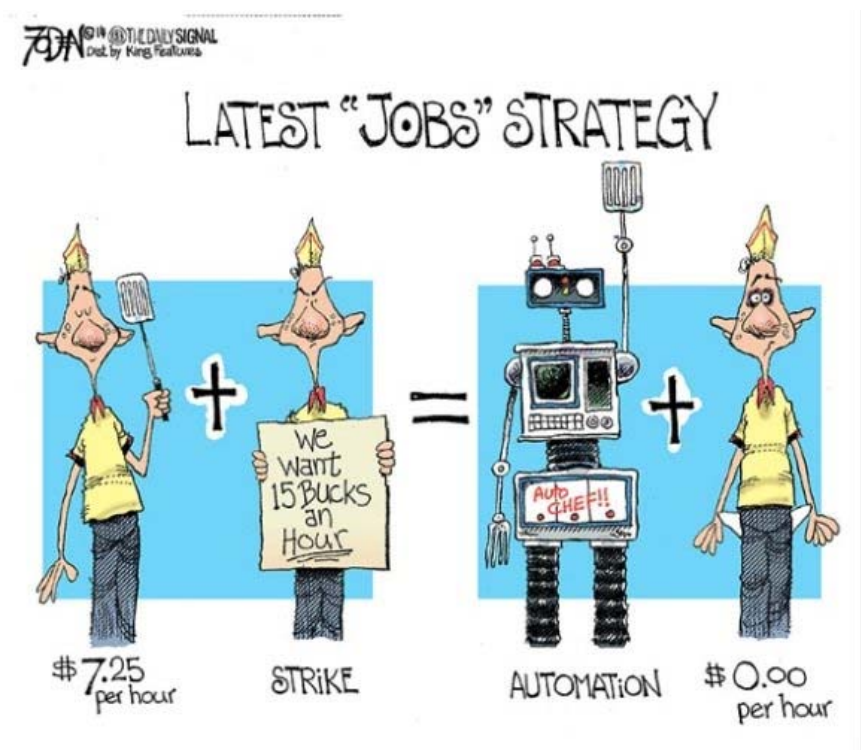
Suffice it to say we would never expect to find premature mortality on the Russian scale in a society with Russia's present income and educational profiles and typically Western readings on trust, happiness, radius of voluntary association, and other factors adduced to represent social capital.

Another major clue to the psychological nature of the Russian disease is the fact that the two brief breaks in the downward spiral coincided not with periods of greater prosperity but with periods, for lack of a more data-driven description, of greater hope. The Khrushchev era, with its post-Stalin political liberalization and intensive housing construction, inspired Russians to go on living. The Gorbachev period of glasnost and revival inspired them to have babies as well. The hope might have persisted after the Soviet Union collapsed—for a brief moment it seemed that this was when the truly glorious future would materialize—but the upheaval of the 1990s dashed it so quickly and so decisively that death and birth statistics appear to reflect nothing but despair during that decade.

If this is true—if Russians are dying for lack of hope, as they seem to be—then the question that is still looking for its researcher is, Why haven't Russians experienced hope in the last quarter century? Or, more precisely in light of the grim continuity of Russian death, What happened to Russians over the course of the Soviet century that has rendered them incapable of hope? In *The Origins of Totalitarianism* Hannah Arendt argues that totalitarian rule is truly possible only in countries that are large enough to be able to afford depopulation. The Soviet Union proved itself to be just such a country on at least three occasions in the twentieth century—teaching its citizens in the process that their lives are worthless. Is it possible that this knowledge has been passed from generation to generation enough times that most Russians are now born with it and this is why they are born with a Bangladesh-level life expectancy? Is it also possible that other

post-Soviet states, by breaking off from Moscow, have reclaimed some of their ability to hope, and this is why even Russia's closest cultural and geographic cousins, such as Belarus and Ukraine, aren't dying off as fast? If so, Russia is dying of a broken heart—also known as cardiovascular disease.





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