An intensity that transforms the field. Vagabonds and the eighteenth-century biopolitical regime in Poland

Gabriel KLIMONT-JAROSZUK*

ABSTRACT

The article investigates the emergence of biopolitical mechanisms in eighteenth-century Poland, focusing on the governance of migration and vagabondage in Warsaw during the Stanislavian period (1764–1795). It applies Michel Foucault's theoretical framework to examine how Enlightenment elites responded to institutional pressures from mass migration. The analysis traces the shift from sovereign power — focused on the right to take life — to biopolitics, which governs life at the population level, and explores how migration intensity reshaped elite frameworks, prompting a shift in policy goals from eradication to regulation of vagabonds. Methodologically, the study combines historical sociology with philosophical interpretation, analysing elite discourse and institutional regulation, including municipal decrees, interrogation records, hospital and prison regulations and legislative acts on vagabonds and urban governance. The article is divided into two parts: the first reconstructs the conceptual foundations of biopolitics — emphasizing the shift from juridical and disciplinary power to governance 'at the level of population'; the second identifies three biopolitical trends in Stanislavian Warsaw: framing vagabonds as a population-level threat, the rise of empirical social knowledge, and a shift from eradication to regulation of marginal populations. Despite infrastructural limits, findings suggest Polish authorities began to manage social groups in ways foreshadowing modern biopolitical rationalities.

KEYWORDS

Foucault, *ludzie luźni,*** vagabonds, Stanislavian period, biopolitics, migration

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  * Ph.D., assistant professor, Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw, Poland. E-mail: gabriel.klimont-jaroszuk@ifispan.edu.pl.
  ** Polish historical term, lit. 'loose people,' often meant vagabonds.

INTRODUCTION. VAGABONDS TRANSFORM THE CONCEPTUAL FIELD. BIOPOLITICAL HYPOTHESIS

The Stanislavian Period (1764–1795) was not only a time of modernisation for the Polish state, it was also one of mass migration — the uncontrolled, intensive movement of people. Between 1754 and 1794, Warsaw's population more than doubled, rising from about 54,000 to 150,000 inhabitants (Bogucka & Kieniewicz, 1984: 272), largely due to migrants and servants (Grochulska: 1966, 1980; Poniat, 2014). This influx reshaped elite thinking: numerous articles, debates and administrative measures emerged to address "vagabonds" or "vagrants" (*ludzie luźni*) (Assorodobraj, 2020: 86–100; Maludzińska, 2015). Elites depicted these migrants as leading "idle lives" with an "unstable manner of conduct" (Assorodobraj, 1946). Their movement strained institutions — hospitals were overcrowded, prisons could no longer operate as they once did — and compelled the development of new power technologies. This situation appears similar to what Foucault describes as critical conjuncture that leads to the emergence of new concepts from the institutional crisis (Curtis, 2002: 510–515; Fiaccadori, 2015: 153–154).

> It is as though power, which used to have sovereignty as its modality or organising schema, found itself unable to govern the economic and political body of society that was undergoing both a demographic explosion and industrialisation. So much so that far too many things were escaping the old mechanism of the power of sovereignty, both at the top and at the bottom, both at the level of detail and at the mass level (Foucault, 2003: 249).

This situation of "inability to govern" arises from what I call "intensity that transforms the field". I focus on how the movement of vagabonds altered the field of power through what Foucault terms "technologies of power" or "apparatuses". Rather than a broad historical study of the Stanislavian era, this article offers a focused, biopolitical interpretation of Warsaw's fight against vagabonds (1764–1794), suggesting new directions for research on the interplay between institutions, migration and conceptual change. Who were the migrants who transformed the conceptual framework of Enlightenment elites? Older research characterizes them as social marginals — irrational, rootless, migrating chaotically and prone to proletarianization (Assorodobraj, 1946). Some researchers viewed them as poor beggars (Maludzińska, 2014) or rebellious peasants (Gierowski, 1949; Grodziski, 1961). More recent scholarship, however, argues that they were often 'normal' people, temporarily migrating

to improve their agency and social standing (Poniat, 2013: 74). This significant shift demands a philosophical reinterpretation: What does it mean, with respect to power technologies, if Enlightenment authorities were actively managing their 'normal' citizens, not merely the social margin?

This article employs the approach of historical sociology, informed by philosophical interpretation, an approach which differs markedly from traditional historical methodology. In line with second-wave historical sociologists such as Skocpol, Wallerstein and Moore, I primarily synthesize secondary sources and macro-level trends identified by Polish historians, rather than conduct original archival research (Mayrl & Wilson, 2020: 1355). My aim is not an empirical 'reconstruction of facts' (see Smith, 1991: 3–4), but rather to reinterpret key transformations using modern theoretical frameworks. I also adopt a principle of Foucauldian scholars and *longue durée* historians: that the object of inquiry — here, biopolitics — may "precede the conceptual vocabulary used to describe it" (Bethencourt, 2013: 3; cited in: Meloni, 2023: 111; see also: Febvre 1962: 15).

It is important to note, however, that Foucault's ideas cannot be uncritically applied outside the three state-nation contexts which Meloni calls the "three legs of Foucault's biopolitical tripod": the eighteenth-century German medical police, French "urban medicine" and the English work health model (Meloni, 2021: 336). Biopolitical theory arises from these cases (see Meloni, 2023: 108). Given this context-dependency, my method is twofold. In the first part of the article, I reconstruct distinctions among three Foucauldian regimes (sovereign, disciplinary, biopolitical) in abstract terms, focusing on how power operates 'at the level of population.' I show why populations like vagabonds matter for understanding key biopolitical mechanisms: restricting legal dominance in the socioeconomic field and compelling subjects to 'speak infinitely' to institutions of power. I also highlight a central tension in biopolitics: the drive to govern populations through detailed, empirical knowledge of specific groups, as contrasted with reliance on abstract, universal categories (Dillon & Lobo-Guerrero, 2009: 6, 11). In the second part, I apply this framework to identify three tendencies in Stanislavian Poland's fight against vagabonds which may be considered biopolitical: conceptualizing vagrants as threating elements to be modulated for a 'healthy' society, shifting from imposing ideals to producing knowledge about the social field, and moving from eradicating vagabonds to regulating them on a population level.

My work is strongly inspired by historians and empirical researchers whose archival studies are grounded in a biopolitical perspective. These include research on biopolitics in: the royal navy in Stuart England (Neufeld, 2017), cameralist reforms in eighteenth-century Bavaria (Stein, 2011), French colonial

management (Fabre & Labardin, 2019), race in nineteenth-century Ceylon (Duncan, 2016), French phrenology (Verstraete, 2005), Enlightenment culture (Mitchell, 2018), eighteenth-century medical discourse (Hogarth, 2019), gender in nineteenth-century Britain (Harris, 2025) and statistical practices since the eighteenth century (Hacking, 1982) as well as in American sentimentalism (Schuller, 2018). The limitations of Foucault's thesis about biopolitics beginning not earlier than in the eighteenth century have been critically examined — methodologically by Meloni (2023) and philosophically by Prozorov (2022). Many have also analysed biopolitical patterns before modern state institutions, e.g. exploring Plato and Aristotle (Ojakangas, 2016), late medieval urban systems (Meloni, 2021), Bodin's works (Lindholm, 2023), early populationist thought (Lindholm, 2025) and Lutheranism (Lindholm & Di Carlo, 2024; Ojakangas, 2015).

Despite a growing global interest in biopolitics among empirical researchers, the topic remains absent from Polish research on the eighteenth century. This article seeks to redress that gap by analysing tendencies that may indicate a biopolitical regime (using 'regime' in the Foucauldian sense as a mode or technology of power — not an all-encompassing political system). Following Foucault's methodological approach, I focus on metropolitan governance, narrowing the scope to Warsaw between 1764 and 1794 and concentrating on 'mid-level' institutions like hospitals, prisons and municipal regulations instead of high-level state discourses (Curtis, 2002; Dean, 2002: 157–73). More specifically, I analyse: regulations from Warsaw's Boni Ordinis Commission (1765–1768); the Status of St. Stanislaw Order from 8 May 1765 and its financial flows (Maludzińska, 2014: 235–36; Filipow, 2009: 11–17); documents on the "House of Correction" ('Cuchthuaz,' 1766–1770); plague regulations from 1770; the evolution of Marshal's Prison regulations (1767–1795); Warsaw's vagabond-related regulations from the 1770s; Hospital Commission deliberations from 1775; Police Department documents from 1775 and 1777; further vagabond regulations from the 1780s, mainly under Marshal Mniszech; documents of the Police Commission of Both Nations (1791–1792) regarding population flows; regulations on capturing vagabonds in Warsaw beginning in autumn 1791; and 140 interrogations of individuals apprehended by the Marshal's Guard between 1787 and 1794.

MECHANISMS OF THE BIOPOLITICAL REGIME

Biopolitics is a type of power and organisation of social relations distinct from Foucault's other regimes — sovereign and disciplinary. In a sovereign

regime, power does not intervene in the conduct of life or *bios* as potentiality; it is focused on taking life or killing when the law is broken (Foucault, 2012: 3–31). Here, promulgating the law is performative, appealing directly to individual morality and aligning society with specific external models (e.g., divine or metaphysical). There is no requirement to generate knowledge about target phenomena (Foucault, 2009: 224–248), as sovereign power technologies concentrate on public punishment of bodies.

In the disciplinary regime, by contrast, non-subordinated groups undergo "great confinement", as *bios* is rigorously partitioned and controlled (Foucault, 2012: 135–169). Juridical reason creates infrastructures — hospitals, prisons, workhouses — to directly regulate individuals. Within these, an informational procedure focuses on convicts' inner lives, making disciplinary power analytical and distinct through institutional differentiation. However, power's purpose remains anchored in a stable *ratio*: "raison d'etat" determined by the state (Foucault, 2009: 255–278). Thus, social and economic chaos is still governed by an axiological order driven by the state's pursuit of power (Gordon, 1991: 9–10). The 'norm' in disciplinary modulation remains externally imposed by the state, not emerging as a 'sociological average' from data on citizens. The norm here is aimed at achieving the 'productive goal' of state power, and is not yet understood as a statistical 'standard' defined by prevailing or deviating behaviours (Ewald, 1991: 203; Foucault, 2009: 311–358).

By the end of the Stanislavian era, certain power techniques shifted towards biopolitics. The goal became managing undesirable phenomena 'at an optimal level' rather than eliminating them (Foucault, 2009: 5–6, 44, 345). Social issues like crime or unemployment were managed as variables interrelated with others — labour demand, price levels or mortality during pandemics. This shift meant a radical reduction in juridical dominance over socioeconomic interactions (Foucault, 2008: 27–47), as institutions now sought to intervene in the boundary conditions and variables, rather than in the phenomena themselves. In this framework, power becomes inseparable from the social field it governs. Deprived of external models (e.g. divine law), only socioeconomic interactions among individuals offer relevant information for governance (Gordon, 1991: 15–27). There is no predefined realm for applying power; biopolitical technologies tend to permeate the entire social field, primarily through information gathering. They target broader categories, making techniques of governance flexible and widely applicable, and focus on managing rather than eradicating phenomena across society.

The biopolitical regime operates through two main causal mechanisms. The first is the radical limitation of juridical dominance over the socioeconomic

field. According to Foucault, biopolitics emerges from a tipping point where economic intensity and movement can no longer be managed by juridical concepts (Terranova, 2009: 237–238). The experience that the socioeconomic sphere is an infinite, accumulating movement forces a shift in modernity's conceptual framework (Lasslet, 2014: 646–648). After this critical juncture, conceptual frameworks must address the vastness of economic processes, inherently numerical and resistant to fixed imagery or concepts. This transition fundamentally alters society's power dynamics: power becomes self-referential, continually questioning its rationality and scanning the social field for information, with no external model remaining (Foucault, 1997: 309–319).

This self-referentiality shapes both the social field's structure and new conceptual frameworks, and links to the second causal mechanism: in biopolitics, what subjects want must be kept secret so they can "speak infinitely" to power (Foucault, 1978: 20, 59). Thus, biopolitics is structured around a key oscillation: institutions, lacking external models, endlessly penetrate the social sphere of 'potentiality' (bios), yet the field remains too intense and chaotic for fully adequate knowledge to ever satisfy institutions. This dialectic produces two features: power both relies on and produces social phenomena as its primary information source, and the constant accumulation of *bios* becomes essential for regime stability (Kordela, 2013: 99–161). This is why, for Foucault, modernity is characterized by "pure movement" with no external limits to what biopolitical mechanisms can encompass.

This 'limitless aspect' has two key implications for how philosophical concepts function in biopolitics. Firstly, notions such as 'morality', 'justice,' 'death rate,' or 'migration' are now treated as social averages (Defert, 1991: 212–215) and dominated by statistical, probabilistic reasoning, understood through their relationships with other calculable variables. In the biopolitical regime, there is a clear orientation toward probability for all social phenomena (Foucault, 2009: 4–5). As a result, moral categories shift: rather than stemming from the 'nature' of phenomena, they now reflect the 'risk' certain behaviours or groups pose to the social order — an order focused on accumulating 'potentiality.' Foucault argues that without proper administrative process, all *bios* threatens power. As I will demonstrate, this tendency appears in the Stanislavian period, when institutions learned to produce information about social phenomena to capitalize on the potential of migrating citizens, rather than eradicating them.[1]

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[1] Sovereign, disciplinary and biopolitical must not be seen as distinct "epochs". Foucault stresses the need to grasp the "series of complex edifices" and "correlations" among these technologies of power rather than strict succession (Foucault, 2009: 8).

This new tendency to see social phenomena through the probabilistic lens of risk leads to the emergence of the 'population' level. In the biopolitical regime, groups such as migrants, vagabonds or criminals are treated as 'populations,' with power focused not on distinguishing individual characteristics but on administering these groups according to productivity needs (Schwiertz, 2025: 402). The goal shifts from understanding the 'nature' of phenomena to modulating them in response to changes like labour demand. However, despite the fact that social phenomena in biopolitics have a similar structure to 'natural' entities such as floods and plagues, their *milieu* cannot be considered natural in an independent, substantial sense. It is rather defined by its relations with other traceable variables: prices, flows, death rates (Lemke, 2021: 130–131). Biopolitical mechanisms rely on this intriguing, relational system: in isolation, phenomena seem random and uncontrollable, but when considered as interrelated variables within a population, they become predictable (Ewald, 1991: 190–203). Therefore, there is no 'risk' in individual, unrelated cases; biopolitics operates only on large sets of elements for which risk is calculable. This offers an important methodological clue: Foucault's theory operates in an ontology where there is no sense seeking an individual criminal or vagabond's 'substantial' essence.

In biopolitics, operating at the 'population level' shapes political and social ideas as social averages, while also reorienting the social field towards infinite accumulation and future-oriented care of potential (e.g. bios productivity, 'human capital,' technological advancement) (Kordela, 2013: 99–115). This transforms moral concepts like 'happiness' and 'splendour' — key concepts in eighteenth-century police treaties. Happiness now exists only collectively, highlighting security as mutual insurance ("I take care of you, you take care of me" — for all) (Pasquino, 1991a: 112–113), and is defined as safe, future-oriented behaviour. Thus, migrating populations are viewed as threats to social well-being and the state's 'splendour.' This dynamic, Foucault argues, blurs the line between "state" and "social", producing "civil society" founded on mutual obligation and reciprocal security operations. As each individual's social contribution becomes measurable, the 'contractuality' becomes a real phenomenon rather than just a political myth (Ewald, 1991: 208). The role of groups like vagabonds in 'caring' for collective human capital and burdens of social negotiation now becomes assessable. As Ewald notes, traditional ethics fade because only "what is social" remains a reference for ethics (Ewald, 1991: 208–209); all quasi-moral relations are embedded in social regulation based on "guilt obligations" and collective responsibility for the envisioned common future. So, ethical relations become largely technical.

The fact that, in the biopolitical regime, most moral concepts become 'social concepts' highlights the central role of vagabonds in biopolitical transformations. Populations like vagabonds threaten the regime because they are perceived as not performing 'security' operations: they appear unconcerned with their own potential, that of the state or fellow citizens, and they refuse to "talk infinitely" to institutions, withholding self-information (Procacci, 1991: 161–162). As a result, the key biopolitical mechanism — hiding desire and setting a 'trap' of infinite speech — cannot fully function. This explains the negative shift toward vagabonds in Stanislavian Poland, where they were described as an 'epidemic' threatening rational, productive society and the 'contract' protecting collective progress. In this sense, vagabonds represent a population that, during the transition to a biopolitical regime, fails to take 'proper' care of itself.

Vagabonds thus pose a threat to social order. Furthermore, in biopolitics, there is a shift from viewing groups like vagabonds as threats to 'society as a whole' to understanding them in addition as risks to the 'species-body' (Schwiertz, 2025: 400–402). As populations, vagabonds are never assessed at an level of an individual subject, nor by individual "good" or "bad" choices. In addition, complete information about their behaviour is unattainable, and the authorities do not want to establish strictly statistical or mathematical relationships with individual 'wants.' According to Foucault, the biopolitical regime cannot function through pure mathematics (statistics) alone. In 'The History of Sexuality,' he argues that if desire was a transparent unit of information, the endless, self-referential cycle of surveillance and speech would not be able to reproduce itself. The focus on 'species-oriented' categories thus reacts to the impossibility of fully regulating society with numbers alone. Instead, biopolitics requires a figure of the 'species' — open to imagination and fantasies — to fill the gap left by the insufficiency of purely statistical regularities.

The emergence of population categories based on species-like concepts — vagabonds, criminals and the poor — has significant implications. In the sovereign regime, little knowledge is produced about specific subjects, so all are viewed as equally likely to commit crimes. This reflects the lack of infrastructure for explaining "good and evil at the social level" and the anthropological claim that "metaphysical evil hides in every man". Thus, anyone can become a *homo penalis*, with crime understood as a temporary position relative to the law, not proof of belonging to a separate 'species' (Pasquino, 1991b: 237). Paradoxically, while this 'positional' thinking echoes statistical biopolitical logic — suggesting all have an equal chance of committing crime — the biopolitical regime marks a shift: it constructs the criminal as another species

(*homo criminalis*), using increasing data collection to argue that some groups are more likely to commit crimes. Their wants and actions, though empirical, now become evidence of a group's criminal 'nature'.

Thus, evil is now explained using species-like categories (the criminal, the vagrant) rather than *milieu*. Vagabonds are labelled 'antisocial' and pushed to the social margins, which is paradoxical bearing in mind how important their movement and labour is for the functioning of the society. Pasquino argues this reflects a dynamic similar to social Darwinism (Pasquino, 1991b: 242): biopolitics uses these "antisocial" categories at the population level to define groups as occupying lower stages of development, or as "resistant to development or simply incapable of it" (Dillon & Lobo-Guerrero, 2009: 6). Such groups are seen as threats to societal splendour, now linked to the future potential of contractual human capital.

Biopolitical theory suggests that the emergence of species-like categories of this kind can be understood as the antithesis of imposed solidarity which embodies the contractual nature of a new civil society. This contractuality is intertwined with society's self-referential nature, which elevates societal splendour as the sole criterion for judging the success of all individual actions. As I will argue, this process occurs to some extent in Stanislavian Poland.

BIOPOLITICAL MECHANISMS IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY POLAND

FROM THE STABLE POSITION TO A "THREAT TO SOCIETY"

The first notable transformation concerns the vagabond's position in the structure of social affects. Early in the Stanislavian period, almsgiving and care for migrating poor were traditional Christian virtues: vagabonds — recipients of charity — enabled public displays of virtue and did not need to have their subjectivity transformed (Geremek, 1989). The public practice of charity was not then guided by a probabilistic or efficiency-oriented approach. This sovereign technology of power is evident, for example, in Stanisław Młodziejowski's 1774 Partition Sejm speech (*Protokół albo opisanie czynności na Delegacji (1773–1775)*, 1776: 31). He praised the fact of "having the poor" for enabling acts of public charity and displays of state splendour "in front of God's eyes" (Maludzińska, 2014: 245). Helping others was not yet associated with increasing the productive potential of the poor and did not operate at the biopolitical 'population' level.

However, this subjectification technology evolved during the Stanislavian period. The first sign of this change was the outlawing of begging in Warsaw in 1776 — reflecting the inability of authorities to distinguish between "productive" and "unproductive" poor. In addition, street beggars had to obtain identification certificates and wear them (Giedroyć, 1908: 125–126). Authorities also tried to control almsgiving by introducing a state-run charity system in 1765, funded by elite 'subscription-like' donations rewarded with the St. Stanislav Order, a symbol of status and high moral standards.[2] Yet from 1765 to 1794, collection rates were extremely low (Diakowska, 2008: 402), suggesting the state could not successfully convert donations into symbolic capital after removing the public aspect of charity.

What did change, however, was the image of the migrating poor produced by state discourse. Once vagabonds lost their place in the Christian ethical and social structure, they were easily recast as a public threat. The shift became especially pronounced in the 1770s and 1780s, when numerous Warsaw official documents depicted this group as dangerous to social order. In July 1776, Wojciech Lobert, President of Old Warsaw, gave vagabonds four weeks to obtain a certificate to beg in the city; after that, they faced expulsion (Giedroyć, 1908: 125–126). In 1783, Polish authorities entered a contract with Baron Le Forte who promised to "free the general public from this dangerous force [vagabonds], that, with such fierce intensity, attacks houses and flats, so that in the near future no one could feel truly secure in their own home" (Sobieszczański, 1967: 388).

This negative state image also affected 'normal' non-migrants: in February 1784, Warsaw citizens were forbidden from assisting or sheltering vagabonds.[3] Regulations from June 1786 blamed citizens for helping "suspicious elements", called such assistance "unproductive" and harmful to private entrepreneurs who could have otherwise use vagabonds for productive work.[4] In June 1786,

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[2] Status of the order: https://sankt-stanislaus-orden schweiz.com/html/statut_krolewski_orderu_sw_sta.html (20.06.2025). For an analysis of the order's financial flows, see Maludzińska (2014: 234–38); regulations concerning conferment also discussed in Dunin-Wilczyński (2006) and Filipow (2009).

[3] Mniszech's "order regulations", 3 February 1784 (BN, SD W.4.681) held hosts of vagabonds accountable for damages caused by them.

[4] The "Regulation against begging" [Urządzenie przeciwko żebractwu] (AGAD, WE, 860, p. 37) banned all begging throughout Warsaw, its suburbs and Praga, ordering fortification guards to admit no beggars under threat of removal from duty. Tavern-keepers and kiln-attic overseers faced fines of 50 złp., rising to 100 złp. for repeat offenders. The document indicates that power institutions recognize certain affective practices of citizens can drive up labour costs. The marshal sided firmly with employers, never questioning the real causes of migrants' refusal of supposedly "handsome" wages in manufactories, ascribing to them a "carefree" lifestyle.

vagabonds were explicitly portrayed as a threat to society because their "ways of behaving" and "idle life" were supposed to harm Poland's overall potential.[5] In May 1787, vagabonds were to be apprehended and forced into the army ("Gazeta Warszawska", 1787, 9 June), while in February 1787, only those migrants with employer documentation (confirming the location and duration of their employment) were legally permitted in Warsaw[6] (Klimont, 2024: 228–231).

In philosophical terms, what is striking is how regulatory practices broadened and destabilized the term 'vagabond': anyone 'suspicious' to the authorities and lacking legal documents might be labelled a 'vagabond' and become a threat to social order (Diakowska, 2008: 412–413). This semantic broadening is central to biopolitics, as population-level concepts must be expansive enough to permit authorities to arbitrarily determine both inclusion and exclusion as well as to decide what counts as 'healthy' or 'abnormal.' Ambiguity in social concepts at the population level is thus productive in terms of power. Notably, these biopolitical mechanisms arise from the intensity of migrant movement and the inability of sovereign or disciplinary techniques to manage this movement. When authorities could not distinguish between the 'real poor' and the 'fake poor,' it became preferable to treat all migration as a potential threat, thus producing the biopolitical level of 'population.'

From ideal model to real knowledge about the social field

The authorities did more than create a species-like, biopolitical discourse on vagrancy; they also sought to generate empirical knowledge about migrant movements. Stanislavian institutions moved away from simply applying law to regulating and responding to social phenomena. This trend is visible in the operations of the Commission of Boni Ordinis (1765) which aimed to build

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[5] Okęcki's "Proclamation concerning beggars" [Uniwersał względem żebraków], 23 June 1786 ("Gazeta Warszawska", 1786, 5 July) portrayed vagabonds as deceivers who manipulate "ordinary" people, using the protection of these "ordinary people" to justify the "free-catching" of vagabonds. As mechanisms to distinguish the deserving poor failed, the authorities allowed anyone to seize vagabonds and put them to any kind of labour, rhetorically aligning the interests of landowners, factory proprietors and the "common man" ("Gazeta Warszawska", 1787, 9 June).

[6] Gurowski's regulations, 28 February 1787 (AGAD, WE, 860, p. 45) and the Proclamation Concerning the Reporting of the Condition and Status of All Persons Arriving in Warsaw and Praga [Obwieszczeniu względem raportowania wszelkiego stanu kondycji osób do Warszawy i Pragi przybywających] (AGAD, WE, 860, p. 59) decree a comprehensive statistical survey of Warsaw, requiring every property owner to compile tables of residents and plan quarterly updates to deepen the marshal's knowledge of population flows.

datasets on tax payments, building permits, and to unify juridical frameworks across cities[7] (Smoleński, 1913: 7–10). Authorities also required Warsaw real estate owners to maintain databases on migrants (Diakowska, 2008: 400). The Police Commission of Both Nations, founded in 1791, was tasked with administering a broad range of aspects of social *bios*, including gathering knowledge about migrating criminals, beggars and the "unstable" as well as responding to disasters and ensuring free circulation of information and economic data[8] (Zahorski, 1959: 91). This illustrates a shift toward biopolitics — focused on gathering knowledge about various 'intensities' within the social field to maximize their productive potential — instead of merely enforcing the law.

The trend of producing knowledge about phenomena for the sake of governance appears clearly in the interrogations of people arrested in Warsaw between 1787 and 1794 (Turska, 1961). Authorities systematically extracted information, structuring interrogations around at least eight variables: gender, age, social background, religion, legal conflicts, year of leaving parents' home, parents' current status and occupation. Investigators gathered more than just facts about alleged crimes, routinely asking detainees to "tell the story of their lives" from leaving home until arrest. Thus, Marshal's Guard officers' practices can be seen as a new power technology, aimed at comprehending social movements.[9] A similar trend was present in Warsaw's Prison. Early in the Stanislavian period, officials focused on punishing bodies, not prisoners' inner lives. Over time, they began questioning prisoners about daily habits and

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[7] Rescript on establishing the Commission, 1 June 1765 (AGAD, WE, 1, pp. 1–7); on reactions to contradictory juridical regulations, 12 June 1765, Commission's protocol, 16 August 1765 on the metrical management of the city and tax data (Smoleński, 1913: 7–10); rescript from 1767, "Establishment of the Ordinance Serving the City of Old and New Warsaw, Joined as One" [Ustanowienie ordynacyi, miastu Starej y Nowej Warszawie, na jedno złączonemu, służącej] (AGAD, WE, 8, pp. 1–35); Sejm constitution "The Condition of Our Royal Towns and Cities in the Crown and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania" [Warunek miast i miasteczek naszych królewskich w Koronie i Wielkim Księstwie Litewskim] (Volumina Legum. Vol. 7, pp. 754–758).

[8] Volumine Legum. Vol. 9, p. 291; Commission's session, 24 January 1792 (AGAD, AKP, 150, p. 128); "Proclamation Issued by the Police Commission Both Nations Concerning Newcomers" [Uniwersał KPON względem przychodniów], 15 May 1792 (AGAD, AKP, 152, p. 142); "Resolution of the Police Commission of Both Nations in response to the memorial of the ensign of His Majesty's Loyal Cossack Regiment concerning recruitment in Warsaw" [Rezolucja Komisji Policji Obojga Narodów na memoriał chorążego pułku wiernych kozaków JKM w sprawie werbunku w Warszawie], 25 July 1792 (AGAD, AKP, 205, p. 99); Proclamation concerning passports [Obwieszczenie względem paszportów], 26 May 1792 (AGAD, AKP, 152, p. 280).

[9] I analysed 90 interrogations published in Turska (1961) and 50 first interrogations of the instigator Świętosławski from 1787–1788 (AGAD, AKP, 313, pp. 1–19).

work outside prison, as well as encouraging communication among inmates (so guards could listen) and letter writing (to invigilate them) (Rafacz, 1932: 50, 69–72; Bieda, 2015; Czołgoszewski, 2016).

The trend of generating empirical knowledge about vagabonds and migrating populations created an interesting biopolitical tension.[10] Authorities used a 'species' logic, claiming that vagabonds threatened the social field's potential, while also seeking to use these populations productively — so the same group appeared as both threat and opportunity. This tension produced significant effects. Sometimes, species-like images of vagabonds obstructed projects to increase the state's 'productive potential,' as in 1792 when the king vetoed the Police Commission's plan to encourage foreign migration — he argued that subsidizing migrants' food and tools would create more "idle men" dependent on the state[11] (Zahorski, 1959: 172). Conversely, viewing vagabonds as a public threat made their administration problematic, as witnessed in the regular roundups initiated in May 1775 by Bishop Okęcki, who embraced the state image of vagabonds as 'antisocial' species[12] (Maludzińska, 2014: 268–270). He saw no issue with the regularity and thus predictability of these manhunts, completely ignoring the question of vagabonds' integration in social networks and citizen support. The project also assumed that the roundups would be funded by the sale of goods found on captured vagabonds, because, according to official propaganda, vagabonds only "pretended to be poor" while carrying a large amount of valuable stolen goods. This myth was obviously false, as evidenced by the Marshal Guard's later interrogations (Turska, 1961).

The aforementioned tension — between the need to treat vagabonds as a threat to a 'healthy' society (species-oriented discourse) and the need to develop empirical data about the population — reveals much about how the biopolitical regime functions (Fiaccadori, 2015: 166–171). To fully utilise populations, authorities must constantly oscillate between two sides of this tension: conceptualising the population at the informational level to (a) arbitrarily

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[10] Apart from interrogations and prison regulations, this trend also appears in the Marshal Guard's collaboration with Jewish spies, who had real empirical knowledge about migration flows in the city (Sprengel, 2017: 32–22), and in Marshal Lubomirski's introduction of 'health certificates' during the 1770 plague preparations, alongside his plan to build a regular database of people entering Warsaw (Wejnert, 1980: 261–278; Srogosz, 1997).

[11] Commission's project (AGAD, ML VII, 172, p. 209); king's negative response (AGAD, ML VII, 155, p. 393).

[12] "Project Concerning Beggars in Warsaw and the Entire Country, Submitted to the Police Department by the Presiding Officer" [Projekt o żebrakach w Warszawie i całym kraju Departamentowi Policji od prezydującego podany], 20 May 1775 (AGAD, ML VII, 69, pp. 184–190).

construct threats when it is convenient (e.g., when vagabond labour is not needed) and (b) exploit the potential of migrants when labour demand is high. Administering this oscillation is critical for understanding what it means to keep a population at an 'optimal level' in biopolitics.

From eradication to partial acceptance at the 'optimal' level

To maintain the population at an optimal level, two conditions must be met: refraining from power technologies aimed at eradicating specific social phenomena, as well as introducing regulation that modulates related factors (e.g. prices, flows of goods, health rates). Both trends are evident in the Stanislavian period, as numerous administrative documents show a move from eradication to productive regulation. For instance, Okęcki's 1775 project called for regular manhunts on vagabonds, involving medical examinations, head shaving and expulsions beyond the city borders to their parishes[13] (Maludzińska, 2014: 268–270). Similar eradication efforts can be found in President Lobert's 1776 regulations (Giedroyć, 1908: 125–126). Over time, however, regulation and the productive use of the vagabond's *bios* became central. From 1768–1770, the Wool Manufactory Company used court-sentenced people as free labour (Wejnert, 1857: 88–108), and 1770s projects often instructed city officials broadly to "assign vagabonds for public works"[14] (Bartoszewicz, 1872: 164–165). As knowledge grew, elites specified ways to use free vagabond labour to expand state potential,[15] often via private contractors — as evident in Marshal Sulkowski's 1775 proposal to drain the Warta and Pilica rivers engaging private companies (Michalski, 2004: 316), and in Baron Le Fort's 1784 project for Warsaw's "Institute of the Poor", a publicly funded workshop to relieve 'normal citizens' from the 'plague' of vagabonds (Assorodobraj, 1946: 180).

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[13] "Project Concerning Beggars in Warsaw and the Entire Country, Submitted to the Police Department by the Presiding Officer" [Projekt o żebrakach w Warszawie i całym kraju Departamentowi Policji od prezydującego podany], 20 May 1775 (AGAD, ML VII, 69, pp. 184–190).

[14] Regulations of Hospital Commission from 1775 (AGAD, ML VII, 145, p. 293r); Młodziejowski's "Ordinance concerning Beggars" [Uniwersał o żebrakach], 25 May 1776 (AGAD, WE, 860, p. 856); Mniszech's "Regulation against begging" [Urządzenie przeciwko żebractwu], 3 June 1786 (AGAD, WE, 860, p. 37).

[15] This happened in Warsaw's prison, where free labour was used from 1783, as well as during 1791–1794 when regular manhunts introduced forced army recruitment for vagabonds, "Proclamation concerning passports" [Obwieszczenie względem paszportów], 26 May 1792 (AGAD, AKP, 152, p. 280). Organized, though largely unsuccessful, attempts were also made to direct vagabonds into Warsaw manufacturing. See Wiktor's Loga reports from January–March 1793 (AGAD, AKP, 234, p. 58; AGAD, AKP, 236, p. 435).

The second biopolitical transformation involves regulating vagabonds indirectly through related factors like labour demand and prices, managing them as a 'population.' This trend is clear in projects granting vagabonds certain freedoms, such as time or movement, while still maintaining optimal control (Klimont-Jaroszuk, 2023: 82–85). For instance, after 1791, migrating poor people "without stable manners of conduct" could seek work in Warsaw, but only until 8:00 AM in summer and 9:00 AM in winter — after which their bodies fell under state authority (Zahorski, 1959: 183). Similar partial freedoms appear in versions of Zamoyski's Codex (1776–1778), which accepted vagabondage as social phenomenon but required migrants to register in their towns of arrival, seek work within three days, and, if unable to find any, be "marked by special signs" and serve in street cleaning, firefighting or for "suppressing riots" (Michalski, 2004: 318–319). In addition, two other types of 'registers of knowledge' were proposed: a mandatory passport system for all migrating townsmen and servants and a dedicated rental register where landlords were required to record all servants. Other aspects of Zamoyski's Codex included giving vagabonds a year to choose their city and encouraging migration during harvests to better meet labour demands.

Biopolitical governance through the modulation of external factors was also visible at the end of the Stanislavian period, notably in the system regulating Warsaw vagabonds from 1791 to 1794. This system involved four regulatory elements. Firstly, regular manhunts targeted people without attestation who were apprehended simultaneously in strategic city locations. Secondly, those apprehended were transported to private businesses and local church institutions where they were employed as free labour. Authorities provided state-sponsored security to prevent escapes. Finally, operations were funded by a centralized-alms system requiring all citizens to alter their affectual practices and donate to local parishes to be free from the 'plague' of vagrants (Maludzińska, 2014: 309–430). This illustrates another aspect of an intriguing biopolitical tension: the species-oriented discourse depicting migrants as a threat served as ideological justification for their productive exploitation — not according to a universal, metaphysical model of social order, but in response to fluctuating, unstable labour demand.

CONCLUSIONS

The biopolitical framework offers a novel interpretation of power transformations in the Stanislavian period. Several trends support the thesis that late

eighteenth-century Poland developed biopolitical mechanisms. First, there was a shift from juridical reasoning to a mode of power focused on extracting information from socioeconomic movements. Secondly, new technologies of power spread throughout society, as seen in regulations initially targeting vagabonds but later extended to all real estate owners and townspeople. Third, migration seems to appear as an early 'traumatic' disruption — prompting elites to rethink key ideas like social mobility and urban welfare. Fourth, even before formal statistics, power technologies oriented society toward 'risk' and 'probability,' building a reciprocal relation between authorities and the social sphere that started to "inform programmes and practices of government that seek to affect the size, composition, [and] life opportunities" of a population (Scheel, 2020: 575). Vagabonds were conceptualized as both risk and potentiality, highlighting a biopolitical tension between broad, species-level categories for exclusion and empirical knowledge aimed at governing populations productively.

What remains unanswered, however, is how successful and stable these biopolitical technologies were in practice. The central tension, between species-oriented categories and productive knowledge, appears in elite discourse, but whether this tension improved authorities' capacities at the infrastructural level — rather than merely at the discursive level — remains to be investigated. Some evidence suggests that many Stanislavian initiatives were not permanently implemented due to infrastructural and material limits (Murphy, 2018; Sowa, 2011; Pospiszyl, 2023). This question requires rigorous historical study rather than purely philosophical inquiry. Nevertheless, applying Foucault's conceptual framework could yield new insights from this historical material.

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