

The Real Man of Politics in Russia (On Gender Discourse As a Resource for the Authority)

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In December 2009, news agencies disseminated an all-Russia poll data ($N = 1,800$; 7 regions) on who could be seen as a real man in Russia. Vladimir Putin accounted for the majority (14%) of votes, far in excess of the actors Vladimir Vysotsky and Konstantin Khabensky (7% each), the Emergencies (Emercom) Minister Sergey Shoygu (6%), the businessmen Roman Abramovich (5%) and Mikhail Khodorkovsky (3%), the head of the Chechen Republic, Ramzan Kadyrov, and Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov (2% each).¹ How do these data relate to Putin's stably high political ratings and to what extent are they relevant to politics at all?

Power is practiced, not only in the form of direct coercion but also as a signification and a legitimization. Its resources in this case are ideas, knowledge, values, traditions and rituals, with the cultural factors occasionally proving more significant than economic or political interests. In the political rhetoric, researchers believe, evaluations prevail over information, the emotional over the rational, and values over facts.²

The gender discourse holds a place apart among resources available to the authority. We can define it as a system of representations that emphasizes the differences between sexes and constitutes a method for symbolically organizing the world in binary oppositions, with the sides of the latter being associated with either masculinity or femininity. A most important part of the social order, gender is actively used in order to make a picture of the world as a whole and to organize social relations between different social groups (nations, classes, cultures), as well as between mankind and nature.³ The role of the gender discourse is determined by the fact that views on men and women would easily fit in with one's personal experiences, while relations between sexes are perceived as well-nigh the most obvious, clear and therefore legitimate affairs.⁴

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Gender Discourse As a Resource for the Authority: A Methodology for Analysis

A number of factors make it possible to consider gender outside of relations between the sexes proper, factors amongst which let us particularly note the gender discourse's role in delineating social boundaries and hierarchies. The same goes for identity policies. Frederic Barth showed that the social boundaries between communities are established with the help of ethnic markers, or elements of culture selected (occasionally at random) by group members themselves in order to emphasize their differences from those around them (for example, clothes, language, lifestyle, etc.).⁵ Based on these ideas, Nira Yuval-Davis suggested that gender symbols should be interpreted as symbolic markers. Along with other markers, these identify people as members or nonmembers of a certain community.⁶

The gender factor's importance for the human identity is behind its broad use for political mobilization. Invoking gender identity is a discourse element that establishes an interconnection between political behavior and certain models of masculinity and femininity. Not only do gender identifiers help to differentiate between Friends and Foes, they also produce a system of evaluations and preferences. To quote Joan Scott, gender is the primary means for labeling power relations.⁷ The gender discourse serves not only to polarize the masculine and the feminine but also to organize them in a hierarchy. In the first place, this concerns men-women social relations proper that are characterized by the privileged status of men. Culture's androcentrism, that is, the presence of a value hierarchy of masculinity and femininity, also influences the hierarchy of social subjects (such as political actors), the marking of which as feminine or masculine involves attributing to them some appropriate qualities and an appropriate position in the social hierarchy. Power, let us say, correlates with the traditional attributes of masculinity (strength, reason, will, responsibility, vigor, fairness), while submission more likely correlates with the attributes of femininity (weakness, passivity, emotionality, bias, impressionability, indecision). Interpreting the feminine as something second-rate and subordinate determines the main, if not the sole, form of gender metaphor: Friends are represented as being masculine and Foes as feminine, something made an active use of in both internal political infighting and in foreign-policy propaganda.⁸

Hierarchical nature is inherent in relations not only between different gender groups but also inside them. Robert Connell pays attention to the coexistence of different types of masculinity or to the existence of a multiple masculinity determined by different social identifiers. Different types of masculinity are in relations of rivalry and infighting, while masculinity itself should be seen as a field of competing discourses.⁹ Representatives of the hegemonic masculinity (i.e., masculinity dominating the determination of what in particular should be seen as the norm of gender relations) wield power over representatives of subordinate-type masculinities and derive more privileges from gender inequality than the latter. The most remarkable bearers of the hegemonic masculinity are far from

always the most powerful persons; likely to represent a model of sorts that legitimizes the gender hierarchy are, for example, sports stars, as well as film actors or the characters they play.¹⁰ In modern Russia, one of these models is certainly Vladimir Putin.

The fact that political infighting may be interpreted as a contest of masculinities is of particular interest for our study. If, for example, we take the foreign-policy aspect of the masculinities' contest, the thing that should be kept in mind is this. There is a tradition to personify the states as their key statesmen, which results in international relations appearing as relationships between men. Sometimes representations of world politics are reminiscent of soap operas with their set of "good and bad guys."¹¹

Thus, the gender discourse emerges as a resource of power insomuch as it is involved in efforts to organize a certain picture of the world and to legitimize the authority.

Russian Politicians within the Masculinity Hierarchy

A "real man" as an estimate applied to Vladimir Putin is often used in the public discourse by politicians, journalists, and cultural figures. Suffice it to turn to Internet search engines to see hundreds upon hundreds of relevant references. In 2007, we held a questionnaire poll ($N = 400$, Ivanovo) that sought to clarify how the gender factor influenced the "ordinary voters" as they come into contact with politicians. What we wished to know specifically was what meaning they put into the notion of "the real man" and how they wielded it as they conceived their estimates of Russian politicians.

The respondents were in no difficulty in identifying "the real man" of Russian politics and substantiating their choice: Putin was the first name hit upon by nearly a half of those polled (44.8%); next, trailing far behind, there followed Sergey Ivanov, Vladimir Zhirinovsky, Sergey Shoygu, and the then First Vice Premier Dmitry Medvedev (5.8%, 5.0%, 4.8%, and 3.5% respectively).

The motives for the choice are of interest, too. In the first place, the respondents referred to some personal qualities which, as they saw it, characterized Putin the man: his wit (16.8%), resolve (10.5%), firmness of convictions (10.3%), virility, masculine strength of character (9.5%), strength (7.8%), sense of responsibility (6.3%), activeness, vigor (5.8%), integrity (5.5%), reliability, fairness, "can answer for his words" (4.5% each), good education and competence (4% each), leadership qualities, exactness towards himself and subordinates, and prestige with subordinates (3.5% each). Indicatively, part of the respondents (5.8%) explained their choice by calling him the real man because he was a good politician. Some even said this: Vladimir Putin was a real man because he was President. These replies are sufficient evidence confirming the existence of a close link between masculinity and power.

But in what way do some or other components of the Putin image become criteria of the "true virility?" First, they are declared as being relevant to politics and

become part of the political image, and, second, they figure as arguments in the fight for power. Let us single out among the most important discourse practices, i.e., the ones engaged in coining connotations and denotations, those which serve to militarize, eroticize and present a political leader's image as a national symbol.

The *militarization* of a political leader's image is due to the views on the existence of an inseparable link between the military sphere and masculinity.¹² Historically, warfare plays a crucial role in determining what "being a real man" is all about in the Modern epoch at the symbolic, institutional and corporeal levels. The warrior's image correlates, first, with the real-man image, and, second, with the poetics of power. Representations of the military competence of politicians at all levels serve to justify their bid for power. These are due to demonstrate the strength, virility, resolve, reliability, courage and, military qualifications, if any.

This kind of information plays a particular role in the representations of top-level politicians and of aspirants to the top position. This is because President is constitutionally the Supreme Commander-in-Chief and because presidency is a projection of dominance and power. The Supreme Commander-in-Chief is given a real chance to demonstrate his virility and has a duty to do that, for the post of the President gives him an advantage over other candidates. Our content analysis of the electoral press in the few latest presidential campaigns¹³ showed that mention of different aspects of military competence accounted, in 2004, for example, for nearly one-third (34.6%) of all competence markers, including candidates' skills in handling military equipment, involvement in military training exercises, or even simply uniform-wearing appearances in public. We can site numerous examples of presidents and presidential candidates donning army fatigues and posing with an automatic rifle. The military factor was used with particular vigor in the presidential race of 2004, when it was necessary to design Vladimir Putin's image. Putin used to a good effect the advantages that inhered in the position of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief so as to show off his strength, resolve, reliability and courage. For example, most national newspapers covered his participation in the large-scale naval exercises in the North that occurred during a hottest point in the campaign. He did not confine himself to the general guidance: wearing a uniform with the emblem of the Space Troops, he took part in the testing of a Molnya-M missile; with a sailor's black jacket on, he performed a dip, with a crew of submariners, on board SSBN *The Archangel*. Comments and photographs that accompanied the textual reports on the exercises both bore witness to the President's courage and substantiated the need for the head of state to perform this kind of role. "A real man must be with those who defend the homeland," said State Duma Vice Speaker Arthur Chilingarov. As we can see, his utterance directly relates true masculinity to the duty of defending the homeland.

The same is achieved by making the representations of a politician involve the sports discourse (sports often figure as a substitute for "war"). The well-known media foregrounding of politicians' athletic exploits (judo, mountain skis, etc.) is meant to demonstrate their manliness, young vigor and health.¹⁴

Another significant discourse practice is *eroticizing* a politician's image. According to many pre- and post-election polls, Putin enjoyed much greater popularity among women than he did among men.¹⁵ Women's attitudes to Vladimir Putin—a characteristic that at first sight is irrelevant to exercising his powers—are actively exploited in the political discourse. The keynote of the female chorus in support of Putin before the 2004 ballot was mostly this: he is reliable, responsible, sober and strong. The arguments of this kind would push into the background any estimates of a presidential hopeful's professional qualities. Incidentally, the female decision accepted in this "truth mode" is often explained by the fact that rather than a presidential hopeful's political program the "fair sex" assess the degree of his virility, something that, let us note this, is strengthening the sexist stereotypes, while being a sufficiently clear characteristic of civic competence inherent in the female sex as such. Let us quote one female voter: "The important thing for a woman is to have by her side a reliable and confident man, on whom she might rely in a predicament. Let stones fall from the sky—no scare! This sort, I regret to say, is increasingly infrequent nowadays. Putin, I think, is one of those men—low-key on the outside but strong in spirit."¹⁶

Occasionally the liking is expressed more openly. Russian media repeatedly reported about women who saw Putin in their erotic dreams.¹⁷ The eroticization techniques were used on a rather broad scale during the presidential campaign in 2000. This role, in all evidence, was reserved for the websites that reproduced women's "erotic dreams" about Vladimir Putin, this regardless of the degree to which those "dreams" reflected the real view of the Russian female majority. The same function was performed by news-portal chats that discussed a 2001 sociological poll, where 3,500 out of 5,000 women described Russia's President as its sex symbol.¹⁸

Serving as a background for this eroticization of the political leader is the eroticization of the political discourse as a whole, something displayed in the use of sexual images and metaphors, including those of marriage, potency/impotency, prostitution, and the like. Relied upon to denote authority-submission relationships, the active exploitation of this kind of language makes the sexual sphere relevant to politics in the eyes of voters.

Finally, let us mention yet another important discourse practice, the use of masculinity as a national symbolization. Being highly important, the national identifier is actively used in political rhetoric, including in its gender aspect. An element of national identity comprises the images of masculinity and femininity of both Friends and Foes. The gender order of Friends is usually represented as a norm, while the gender order of Foes as a deviation (Friendly men are most manly, and Friendly women are most womanly).

Emerging as a canon of manliness that figured importantly in the national identity in the 2000s was the image of "he-man" (*muzhik*). It was Olga Shaburova who first noticed it appear in the post-Soviet culture. In her estimate, the "*muzhik*" model is structured as a standard of modern Russian manliness. She showed that all facets of that model could also be observed in Russia's mass culture that became the principal "designer" of modern male images,¹⁹ specifically

in cinema, advertising, and the song pop culture. Linguists, in turn, discovered that this canon of manliness was also reflected in language structures of modern Russian.²⁰ In this context, the “*muzhik*” becomes an evaluative category. For example, following the death, in summer 2009, of Igor Tkachenko, commander of the Russian Knights aerobatics team, a colleague of his said this to a central TV channel: “He was a real *muzhik*, a real Russian bear!”

This concept proved included not only in the gender but also in the nationwide discourse. Shaburova revealed a role of negative identification in those processes: to become a man, you have to prove that you are neither a woman, nor a child, nor still a homosexual. For the purposes of this study, it is important to keep in mind yet another “not:” the Russian “*muzhik*” standard is evolved in opposition to the Western masculinity representations. A product of what is a unique sociopolitical situation in Russian history, a product of postmodernist media technologies, it to a certain degree synthesizes the liberal and the Soviet types of masculinities. This type is based on self-reliance, economic independence, and respect for private property (in this sense, “*muzhik*” is anticomunist). At the same time, he is anything but a one-hundred-percent supporter of liberalism, whose values are interpreted as a cult of individualism and egotism, while the most important components of the “*muzhik*” image are comradeship and male brotherhood. Neither does “*muzhik*” share the liberal values of political correctness; in this environment, sexism and homophobia are not seen as vices. Unlike the imagined man of the present-day West, “*muzhik*” is sturdy, robust and strong; a man of few words, he always means what he says. Finally, he is a patriot, preferring the values of the Russian culture and being ready to defend his homeland. It is no wonder that the “*muzhik*” concept is taking root both in mass culture and politics.²¹

The Russian authorities are seeking to incorporate mass culture’s “*muzhik*” mythologem into the ideology they are building up. As we see it, the authorities are not just exploiting this masculinity type but are also active in its production and advancement, like, for example, the US elite of the Cold War period was evolving a masculinity type modeled on John Wayne’s characters. As is obvious, each masculinity type embodies certain values and thereby assists in the strengthening or demolition of some or other political system. It was not accidental that one of the name options for a bloc of the ruling elite that was being formed in the fall of 1999 was *Muzhiki*,²² along with the subsequently approved *Medved* (Bear) (in Russian, *MEzhregionalnoye DVizheniye “EDinstvo”*).

Vladimir Putin’s image—it was during his presidency that the “*muzhik*” concept became legitimized)—was being put in conformity with this masculinity type. Initially it was constructed as an alternative to Boris Yeltsin’s image whose supporters were active in exploiting the national factor, representing the President as a typically Russian ruler and a typical Russian man with his strong points and weaknesses. Putin’s image, initially, was, on the contrary, rather in accordance with the Western masculinity canons. He posed as a rational, practical and cool manager. His first presidential campaign saw a certain “German” slant to his image: the emphasis was on his stint of service in the GDR and his good com-

mand of German, his military past, his military department, his indifference to alcohol, and his special affection for St. Petersburg. An odd, if eloquent, illustration to that “German” slant was a book by Germany’s Russia expert, Alexander Rahr, that was entitled *Vladimir Putin. A German in the Kremlin*.²³

Soon, however, instead of a Western manager, the electorate was offered a “father tsar” image, a man who defended his subjects from the West’s intrigues and from the bribe-taking negligent officials.²⁴ On the other hand, the Putin image increasingly squares with the “muzhik” canon. For Russians, Putin is more and more “one of the family, whom it would be nice to see a soccer game with and down a couple of pints of lager.”²⁵ The President’s language also helped to work the image change. As estimated by Boris Kolonitsky, the country accepted Putin as “a real *muzhik*,” and “a macho in the national style” after he promised to “waste the terrorists in the outhouse.”²⁶ Researchers estimate that his simple and plain vocabulary makes his image even nearer and clearer. The communication methods that Putin has practiced over the few recent years further pushed his style closer to the “muzhik” image.

Some details of that image, which, being at odds with the canon, failed to find electoral support (for example, his total abstinence) get, in turn, adjusted. While at first it was stressed that Putin preferred water to alcohol,²⁷ later voters were informed that the President was from time to time not averse to sitting down with a good pint of beer. As it transpires from an interview he granted shortly before the 2004 elections, he would not shirk other alcoholic drinks either, although he knew “when enough is enough.”²⁸

Despite its popularity, the “muzhik” canon is only one type of masculinity in modern Russia’s culture, including political culture. Certain opponents of Vladimir Putin called into question, particularly during his first presidential term, the “Russianness” of his masculinity. The Communists, for example, opposed to this canon the distinctive character of their leader, Gennady Zyuganov, claiming that “Zyuganov’s way of thinking itself is national and original, a product of the deep-flowing Russian life, both present-day and erstwhile... The element of free Russian thinking is seething in Zyuganov. Putin, on the contrary, smacks of the dryness of St. Pete classicism.”²⁹

Moreover, far from everyone is delighted with the “muzhik” model itself. The editor-in-chief of the Russian *Playboy*, Artemy Troitsky, attacked it in an interview of his, published under this colorful heading: “I Think, the ‘Real Russian *Muzhik*’ Ought to Die Out.” Trotsky’s hope was that the Russian *muzhik* in Russia would be replaced by a generation of modern men, “clean, neat, clever, romantic and respectful of women:” “I hate the format of the ‘real *muzhik*,’ or the Russian myth about him. In my perception, the ‘real *muzhik*’ is a bloated, foul creature from the advertisement for ‘Fatty,’ the beer brand. The ‘real Russian *muzhik*’ is fond of boozing and mugging, while his attitude to women is one of contempt mixed with apprehension...”³⁰

The “muzhik” discourse has an international dimension as well. A German journalist writes in an article entitled “The Beast in Mother’s Darling” about a thick-set and unpredictable bear as a symbol of the Russian *muzhik*.³¹ France’s

Liberation and *Le Figaro* converse about the primitive Russian men, described as infantile alcoholic machos.³² A British MP, Michael Howe, pours irony on a number of 2007 photographs portraying a bare-chested Russian President: “On one level Vlad is showing us all that he’s a remarkably fit man for his age (54) and that, unlike in the decadent West, Russia’s leaders remain the physical embodiment of their nation’s vigor—classical champions in the manner of those Roman emperors who would renew their mandate to rule on the battlefield or even in the gladiatorial ring. His bare-chested peacockery is, in that respect, in line with the broader cult of Putin as his nation’s silverback—the leader of the band.”³³

New Russian Manliness in the Context of Remasculinization

Developing an attractive national masculinity model is part of a larger-scale process that we would designate as “Russia’s remasculinization.” The remasculinization phenomenon was studied primarily on the basis of the material related to the collective identity of the Americans in the period of Ronald Reagan’s presidency. The need to modify the standard of the dominant masculinity was a reaction to the United States’ defeat in the Vietnam War, the weakening of its foreign policy standing in the latter half of the 1970s, and shifts in the gender order of US society.³⁴ In its most manifest form the dream about a strong and independent man that defeats both his own and the nation’s foes was embodied by the movie industry (in films about Rambo, for example). This kind of images and ideas proved in demand in the US political discourse, too, as exemplified by the recent presidential campaigns.³⁵

Similar processes reveal themselves in the collective identity of the Russians as well. The deconstruction of the Soviet system implied a deconstruction of its gender order. In analyzing the context of the “velvet revolutions,” Katherine Verdery observes that in the late 1980s critics of socialism attributed its “preternaturalness” not in the least to the fact that it distorted the proper relationships between the sexes and, in so doing, engendered infantile traits in men; the basis of masculinity was seen in private ownership with its attendant independence, sense of responsibility, and self-dependence.³⁶ Chosen as a target for criticism was, alongside Soviet masculinity, Russian masculinity, too: Russian men were accused of lacking manliness. The masculinity crisis was further traced not only to the socialist system but also to the Russian culture as such.³⁷

How successful did the perestroika-era project of “Russia’s masculinization” prove? On the one hand, quite a few Russians really became independent, self-reliant, well-off, and bread-winners to their families, that is, more successful in line with the understanding of masculinity and femininity inherent in the Modernity discourse. On the other, the collective identity of Russians in the post-Soviet period is more likely characterized by the demasculinization. Aiding that was, firstly, a dramatic decline in the living standards of the overwhelming majority of Russian citizens. The reforms of the early 1990s conferred a market dimension on manliness, as aptly illustrated by the saying that the exchange rate of the

Russian man in the market did not exceed that of the ruble to the dollar.³⁸ Secondly, the Russian man proved a failed creature not only in relation to his family but also to his country as a whole; internationally, *perestroika* was accompanied by Russia's demasculinization. Some factors in this process are as follows: the loss of the superpower status, disintegration of the USSR, defeat of the Russian army during the armed conflict in Chechnya (1994-1996). Yet another factor is sex trafficking. In the 1990s, Russia was frequently represented as a whore rather than Mother; prostitution came to figure as a metaphor of its foreign policy. Finally, a role was played by the image of the first RF President, Boris Yeltsin, whose notorious "squiggles" were seen as the evidence of New Russia's unmanliness and femininity, of its chaotic character, mystery, occasional proneness to hysterics, and dangerousness.

Demasculinization emerges as an element in the public discourse, a diagnosis pinned on a "sick Russia." Calls for restoring the collective masculine dignity emerged in the Yeltsin epoch, primarily so in the opposition discourses. Serving as an argument in political struggles, images of the suffering and humiliated Mother Russia and of raped women formed a background for appeals to the gender identity of Russian men.³⁹

Reviving national dignity was Vladimir Putin's trademark since as early as his prime ministerial appointment in September 1999. Already then he went on record as saying: "Russia may rise from her knees and fetch a good blow."⁴⁰ What leaps to the eye in this instance, aside from the wish to rehabilitate national manliness, is the general modification of Russia's image, namely the extending to it of the attributes of masculinity, including independence, individualism, rationality and strength.

Let us pay attention to nationalism, another characteristic of modern Russia, which is taking shape as an alternative to messianism. It should be stressed that for Russian identity this is a very remarkable shift. To quote Putin, "We should not give ourselves airs as a great power or kick against the pricks. No messianic ideas for us: we already got it in the early 20th century."⁴¹ Meanwhile, the messianic idea implying one's duty to engage in service to mankind and to help its salvation did figure importantly in different versions of Russian identity, be it Vladimir Solovyov's "Russian idea," or the Soviet idea of internationalist duty. As indicated by the gender analysis of the messianic discourse, this perception of Russia's mission implies figuratively conveying to it some feminine traits, like compassion, readiness for sacrifices, and humility.⁴² This is reflected in the rhetoric characterizing the extreme currents in Russian nationalism and urging to eradicate the "eternally feminine" in the Russian soul.

Pragmatism, preached by the changing political regime and bereft of ideology and historical grievances, makes it possible to add rationality to Russia's image, yet another masculine trait; in parallel, many neighbors are represented by the image-makers as irrational, excessively emotional and devoid of self-control. The concept of "sovereign democracy," one so important for legitimizing the current political regime, is also directed at asserting the country's independence and self-reliance. Sovereignty is seen as an opportunity to decide Russia's

fate on one's own, to render it less dependent on international financial organizations, to make it a subject rather than an object of world politics, to lay claim to a measure of self-sufficiency—these are precisely the things that the Putin rule is given the credit for.

Finally, yet another masculine trait is the cult of strength, be it the national military might, athletic achievements, or fitness of the national leaders. Meriting our attention are Vladimir Putin's comments on the terrorist attack in Beslan in September 2004: "We've displayed a weakness. The weak get the thrashing."⁴³ In July 2009, Dmitry Medvedev stressed this: "We want to see the Russian Federation as a strong state... Of course, we should not put forward some prickles, but at the same time we should be capable of delivering a reply, if confronted with difficulties. Sometimes a tough reply, sometimes a very tough reply..."⁴⁴

That these appeals by the Kremlin leaders reflect predominant public moods is evident from sociological polls showing that it is not by far the "salvation of mankind" or the "protection of the oppressed" that is now regarded as Russia's most desirable mission. In 2003, the Public Opinion Fund suggested that respondents complete this sentence: "I would like the world to consider Russia as..." Almost a half of them (48%) opted for Russia being seen as "powerful," "invincible," and "unconquerable." Next, there followed, with a considerable lag, a wish that Russia be rich and prosperous (22%). Another 9% would like Russia to be independent and self-sufficient. Only 6% would like Russia to be perceived as an "educated" and "cultured" nation, and 3%, "peace-loving and friendly."⁴⁵

An indirect confirmation of the same tendency is the growing popularity among Russians of Russia's "bear" image. The cult of strength has found an expression in the wish to choose precisely this national symbol whose dominant characteristic is power and being able to hold one's own (this popularity, to be sure, has another source as well, the Kremlin project of United Russia Party (*Yedinaya Rossiya*) and its political branding⁴⁶). As indicated by our sociological poll held in the US and Russia (2009), strength is a trait associated with the bear as an allegory of Russia, primarily in the replies of Russian respondents (although Russians identified this strength with good nature and justice, while Americans, with imperialism and bloodthirstiness).

Finally, the remasculinization of Russia is displayed in the representations of significant Foes. Being a necessary aspect of the desired image of Friends, representations of Foes are an important part of identity policies. One of the basic human needs, the striving for a positive identity comes to fruition in a situation where you improve the image of Friends and degrade the image of Foes. Insofar as the androcentric picture of the world interprets the feminine as deviant and needing to be controlled by the masculine, this process, in the context of gender metaphor-making, takes on the form that tends to masculinize Friends and feminize Foes. In the Russian identity, we can observe the same tendencies in the representations of both external and internal Foes; its most important dimension is asserting its own masculinity at the expense of demasculinizing Foes.

In particular, it asserts preeminence of its own masculinity over the deviant masculinity of the West. As indicated by our study of the gender aspects of anti-

Americanism (Ivanovo, 2006), Russian men were given higher masculinity grades than the Americans.⁴⁷ Other studies note in the Russia-loving (Rusophile) opposition discourse the tendency to feminize America.⁴⁸ A similar tendency can be observed in the representations of post-Soviet states, particularly those that saw “flower revolutions.” For example, a TV broadcast covering gas price rises in January 2006 represented a former USSR republic as a self-interested kept woman, a “feather-brained Ukrainian mistress.” “A gentleman always pays for his girl-friend” read a placard held up at a contemporary protest in front of the US embassy in Moscow, one meant to urge the United States to pay Ukrainian debts to Russia. Demasculinization is also implemented via relating the political Foe to yet another gender Foe, homosexuality. In 2005, for example, in a comment on the difficult Russia-Georgia relations after the “revolution of roses,” Vladimir Putin told *Komsomolskaya pravda* the following: “Now they have a pink revolution, next they’ll think up a blue [= gay] revolution.”⁴⁹ In the “five-day war” discourse, the Georgian Foe was demasculinized primarily through representations that showed President Mikhail Saakashvili as a cowardly and hysterical person. “He’s exposed himself: he can chew his tie and flee from his own planes. In the Caucasus, a man cannot do that. It isn’t for that that men wear pants,” was the comment that came from the Vice Speaker of Abkhazia’s Parliament. The President of South Ossetia, for his part, went on record as saying this: “Saakashvili’s a far cry from the democratic values; I am not mentioning the manly ones—there are none.”⁵⁰

Finally, the background, against which is asserted the masculinity of Friends, is not only the external but also the internal Foe. At this point let us catalogue yet another demasculinization trick; it is about using metaphors, specifically the prostitution metaphor that usually denotes political fickleness, a breach of original understandings, easy juggling with convictions, and venality. “We salute the march of political hard-currency whores!” was a placard that activists of pro-Kremlin youth organizations unfolded at a rally staged by the opposition Other Russia (*Drugaya Rossiya*) Party in April 2007. The implication was that the oppositionists were working off the money provided by their foreign sponsors.⁵¹

In summing up, let us note that the gender discourse is a resource for the authority in various forms, one of which is using the masculinity and femininity models for the purpose of legitimization of power. Looked at through the gender oculars, Vladimir Putin’s popularity can be explained by the fact that he embodies the hegemonic masculinity. His image is formed on the basis of different discourse practices, the most important of which is nationalizing masculinity via the he-man “*muzhik*” image. The “he-man” (*muzhik*) masculinity corresponds to the new socioeconomic regime as something that both serves to legitimize the sociopolitical system and prop up the foreign policy rhetoric.

Each authority seeks to manipulate gender symbols, images and metaphors. Most success falls to the one that can divine the psychological needs of its citizens. Vladimir Putin’s popularity is to a considerable extent associated with the processes that revive the collective male dignity. This factor has to be taken into consideration as we estimate the stability of modern Russia’s political system. A

reaction to the demasculinization of the 1990s, the remasculinization of the national identity, which occasionally takes on some highly brutal forms, is conveying to Russia's image masculine connotations, evolving attractive canons of national manliness, and feminizing the significant Foes. As is obvious, the political and national discourses, in turn, become factors in an emergent gender order of Russia's society. Finally, let us note yet another circumstance. The masculinization of politics and of the authority serves to delegitimize femininity and, indirectly, to lower the role of women in politics.

NOTES

- 1 <http://www.regnum.ru/news/1231490.html>.
- 2 E. Sheygal, *Semiotics of the Political Discourse*, Moscow, 2004, p. 44 (in Russian).
- 3 C. Cohn, "Wars, Wimps, and Women: Talking Gender and Thinking War," *Gendering War Talk*, M. Cooke, A. Woollacott (eds.), Princeton, 1993, pp. 230, 228.
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