

# Changes in gender structures and gender ideals in the conditions of the war

Online seminar

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## Early Warning Signals for the War in Ukraine: Gender Systems in the Putin Autocracy

“Like it or not, you have to put up with it, my beauty,” Russian President Vladimir Putin announced on February 8, 2022, the eve of his military’s invasion of Ukraine. In late November, he met with a select group of pro-regime mothers. As a politician, Putin has shown himself to be someone who prizes performances, often highly gendered ones. Yet his penchant for riding horseback bare chested in Siberia is more than just a photo op. As an approach to rule, I argue, it enshrines his power while silencing the voices of dissidents and strips the structures and discourses of government and civil society of their power. This essay uses public, mass media data to analyze the structures and institutions of the Russian political sphere on five levels: 1) Putin’s personal hypermasculinity; 2) the definition of politics as “dirty” and therefore outside the purview of all individuals identified as female, non-binary, queer; 3) the toxic self-subordination of the Duma to the masculinized leader and its willingness to out-Putin Putin; 4) the prioritizing of praetorian personal guard elements and paramilitary organizations in his government; and 5) a punitive and menacing foreign policy with strong gender overtones. Taken together, these gendered political elements suggest some of the mechanisms of illiberal politics that can, and in this case have, led to war.

Dr. Sergei Akopov\*

## Our wounds are our “punctums”: the “war gaze” on biopolitics of feminine loneliness in Russian cinemascapes

This report approaches newly emerging archipelago of visual biopolitics from two theoretical grounds: contemporary ontological security studies, and black feminist existentialism. The first perspective deals with visual representations that encapsulate human anxiety about the absence (or imaginary loss) of a stable, unique and complete identity. Respectively, feminist existentialism provides phenomenological apparatus that enables us to reveal how these representations are underpinned by human desire to avoid loneliness. I use Roland Barthes technique of ‘stadium’ and “punctum” to empirically explore mechanisms of what I later unpack as “feminine politics of loneliness.” More specifically I explore how cinema mirrors “male gaze” that dominates Russian society and leads to its militarized version of ‘ware gaze’ in domestic affairs and geopolitics. I structure my research by explaining what is “feminine politics of loneliness”; what role dominant “male gaze” plays in facilitation of such politics; how we can use existing research in visual political anthropology to empirically deconstruct silenced “phallogocentric positionalities.”

## \*Bio

**Elizabeth A. Wood** teaches Soviet and Post-Soviet History and Politics and Women's and Gender Studies at MIT, where she also directs the MIT Eurasia Program, which includes Ukraine, Armenia and Lithuania. Her books include *The Baba and the Comrade: Gender and Politics in Revolutionary Russia* (1997); *Performing Justice: Agitation Trials in Early Soviet Russia* (2005); and *Roots of Russia's War in Ukraine* (coauthored, 2016). Select articles include: [Hypermasculinity as a Scenario of Power: Vladimir Putin's Iconic Rule, 1999-2008](#) *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 18, 3 (2016); [Right-wing populism as gendered performance: Janus-faced masculinity in the leadership of Vladimir Putin and Recep T. Erdogan](#) (coauthored with Betül Ekşi), *Theory & Society* 48, 5 (2019); ["Paradoxes of Gender in Soviet Communist Party Women's Sections \(the Zhenotdel\), 1918–1930."](#) *The Routledge International Handbook of Gender in Central-Eastern Europe and Eurasia*, eds., Katalin Fábíán, Janet Elise Johnson, and Mara Lazda (Routledge, 2021): 219-226; ["Performing Memory and its Limits: Vladimir Putin and World War II in Russia"](#) in David L. Hoffmann, ed., *The Memory of the Second World War in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia* (Routledge, 2021); [Chapter 4. A Small, Victorious War? The Symbolic Politics of Vladimir Putin](#) in Elizabeth Wood et al., *Russia's War in Ukraine* (2016); "Гендер и воображение в период Гражданской войны в России: отсталые женщины и передовые мужчины в иконографической перспективе, 1917-1922 гг." in *Гражданская война в России: Жизнь в эпоху социальных экспериментов и военных испытаний, 1917-1922* (St. Petersburg: European University of St. Petersburg Press, 2020), pp. 223-237. Website: <https://history.mit.edu/people/elizabeth-wood/>

**Sergei Akopov**, born in St.-Petersburg, Russia. He is Doctor of Political Sciences and has gone through a postdoctoral training in Sweden, Denmark and Hungary. Sergei has been an invited lecturer at Aarhus University, Helsinki University, Tulane University, Tartu University and SciencesPo Aix-en-Provence. He is the author of over 100 publications in Russian, English, Hungarian and Spanish (including in *Journal of Political Ideologies*, *Russian Politics*, *Europe-Asia Studies*, *Russian Politics*, *Social Science Information*, *Review of Central and East European Law*, *Russian Journal of Communication* etc.), as well as four books. His fields of interest include Russia's identity and ontological security in world politics, gendered nationalism, transnational intellectuals, Russian existentialism, visual political anthropology, and "politics of loneliness.: He likes to travel, meet people, and write with/about them. After February 2022 he is currently a research fellow at Free University, Berlin, Cluster of Excellence SCRIPTS.