M. Bouchard

University of Northern British Columbia
Canada, Prince George
ORCID: 0000-0001-8807-989X
E-mail: michel.bouchard@unbc.ca

T. Poluektova

Northern State Medical University
Russian Federation, Arkhangelsk
ORCID: 0000-0003-0897-3037
E-mail: Uniquespirit@ya.ru

E. Penrose

University of Northern British Columbia
Canada, Prince George
E-mail: elena.penrose@alumni.unbc.ca

M. Henderson

University of Northern British Columbia
Canada, Prince George
E-mail: marydmhenderson@gmail.com

The Warrior muzhik and fakelore maiden: Russian banal nationalism on and offline

A B S T R A C T. Nationalism is often understood in terms of grand political movements, political speeches and too often in wars pitting states against each other or nationalist insurgents rising against. Yet, nation and nationalism can be studied in the banal events of daily life as Michael Billig (1995) proposed. The flying of flags in front of houses, the draping of St. George ribbons or icons off of rearview mirrors, the small symbolic markings of nationhood — all these reinforce the nationalism that can be harnessed by larger political movements. This article will examine the banal in the cyberspace, notably how idealized images of masculinity and femininity are created, liked and shared on social media, and how such mundane daily affirmations of nationhood reinforce larger national narratives. Individuals are thus not passive recipients of national discourses, but can be active contributors to them by taking and sharing photos of themselves in folkloric dresses or working out in gyms. They can thus either reinforce or challenge the prevailing narratives and participate in the making of nations. This is clearly seen in Russian social media sites where online nationalism both buttresses and occasionally challenges older ideals of nation and gender, both intertwined in defining what it means to be Russian.

М. Бушар

Университет Северной Британской Колумбии
Канада, Принс-Джордж
ORCID: 0000-0001-8807-989X
E-mail: michel.bouchard@unbc.ca

Т. Полуэктова

Северный государственный медицинский
университет
Российская Федерация, Архангельск
ORCID: 0000-0003-0897-3037
E-mail: Uniquespirit@ya.ru

Е. Пенрозе

Университет Северной Британской Колумбии
Канада, Принс-Джордж
E-mail: elena.penrose@alumni.unbc.ca

М. Хендерсон

Университет Северной Британской Колумбии
Канада, Принс-Джордж
E-mail: marydmhenderson@gmail.com

Мужик-воин и фейклорная дева: обыденный русский национализм онлайн и офлайн

А Н Н О Т А Ц И Я . Национализм часто фигурирует в категориях политических движений, политических речей и, слишком часто, войн, натравливающих страны друг на друга или на националистических мятежников, восстающих против них. Однако, нацию и национализм можно изучать и на основе обычных событий повседневной жизни, как предлагал Майкл Биллиг (1995). Развевающиеся флаги перед домами, георгиевские ленточки или иконы, свисающие с зеркал заднего вида, маленькие символические метки принадлежности к нации — все это подпитывает национализм, который может быть использован в своих интересах более крупными политическими движениями. В настоящей статье будет рассмотрено обыденное в киберпространстве, в особенности то, как создаются идеализированные образы маскулинности и феминности, как их отмечают как понравившиеся и делятся ими, и как такие неприметные повседневные подтверждения национальной общности усиливают большие национальные нарративы. Индивиды, таким образом, проявляют себя не как пассивные реципиенты националистических дискурсов, но вносят в них активный вклад, выкладывая свои фотографии в фольклористических костюмах или во время тренировок в спортивном зале. Таким образом они могут либо усиливать, либо противостоять доминирующим нарративам и участвовать в формировании наций. Это можно ясно видеть на сайтах российских социальных сетей, где онлайн-национализм как укрепляет, так и бросает вызов более ранним идеалам нации и гендера, которые переплетаются в определении того, что значит быть русским.

Social media sites such as Facebook have reached out to hundreds of millions of users who share their daily lives. This new medium does more than share photos of cute kittens and the more innocuous memes, they also are used to define nations and to encourage forms of extreme nationalism that can potentially lead to violence and threaten the security of individuals. In the Russian Federation, politics fueled by nationalism and extremist behavior are being woven together online, as social networking groups are used to promote a form of nationhood that is too often both xenophobic and homophobic. The actions of anonymous posters on social networking sites such as Vkontate (translation: In Contact or In Touch) amplify the discourse and the politics of intolerance of the state. Social networking sites thus help to promote a form of banal nationalism that idealizes a certain Russian nation, while also encouraging a much more heated form of violent nationalism that endangers the lives of individuals and possibly will lead to more wide scale conflict in the future. Though such extremist nationalist groups are still marginal, social networking sites facilitate the dissemination of rhetoric that is often masked by the smiling photos of pretty women and children in flowery fields dressed in pseudo-folkloric dress. The men are in turn depicted a warriors, medieval or modern, or in the gym for the nation and the men are encouraged to drink milk not vodka. This can be understood as a process of "remasculinization" of Russia whereby nation pride is tied to male pride and in turn to banal nationalism whereby daily use of Russian social networking in contemporary Russia is promoting a reinvigorated nationalism that is playing itself out both in everyday life in Russia and in the global arena.

BANAL NATIONALISM

Social networking sites are certainly the example par excellence of banal nationalism, a term put forward by Michael Billig (1995). Images are posted, shared, and liked as users scan through news feeds glancing on images and messages that are posted. One image will not create a nation, but dozens and hundreds of posts shared widely across social networks will nonetheless define iconic images of the nation and will serve to define or redefine the boundaries of the nation, at times encouraging special social and political action in the name of the nation. In this article, we will examine a number of open groups on both Facebook and Vkontate to examine how the Russian nation is defined

on social networking sites. The groups vary in the total number of participants with the largest being "Я_РУССКИЙ" [Ya_Russkii] that has over 200,000 followers, and there is a continuum in terms of material presented ranging from the more innocuous photos of attractive women in folk clothing posing in fields and picturesque villages to extreme xenophobia and homophobia. Nonetheless, there is a significant overlap with the sites featuring much of the latter also having some of the former, while the sites that feature prominently the latter feature some hints and allusions to the former. This article thus seeks to present an analysis of the discourse prevalent on these sites to demonstrate how the nation is defined through the banal acts performed by tens and hundreds of millions of people daily around the world now plugged in on social networking sites. Though there is not necessarily a direct connection between the state politics, the social networking sites and the acts of violence that have occurred, we will argue that there is an overlap in the discourse of the state and local actors as both participate in the creation, and occasionally contesting, narratives of nation. Though the narrative coming down from the state actors, notably the state-owned or controlled media, may be much louder, the fact that it is amplified by individuals clicking, posting and tweeting away reinforces nationalism in everyday life, in the same way that visiting graves in local graveyards reinforce a sense of space and homeland ("родина" or "rodina") (Bouchard 2004).

EVERYDAY NATIONALISM

Michael Skey (2011: 24) in his work National Belonging and Everyday Life and building upon the work of Hopkins and Dixon (2006), highlights how territory provides a "place" which is both familiar and secure. The nation is thus "spatially defined and exhibited through the management of the physical environment, the consistent patterning of socio-spatial relations and a range of recurring material/symbolic features. These elements (re)produce the nation as somewhere that is familiar and secure." Yet, quite often the exhibited space must be in turn "cleaned" as demonstrated by Tim Edensor. The latter provides a telling example, that of Britain's best-selling quarterly magazine, *This England*, which features "a countryside that contains little or no signs of modernity (no 'modern' buildings, hardly any cars and even television aerials are strangely absent)" (Edensor 2002: 42). The photos locate England in a distant past and the magazine features nostalgic, patriotic poetry and the images and words taken together produce a narrative whereby "the fixity of rurality is a bulwark and a resource which can be mobilised in the contest over national identity" (Edensor 2002: 42). Thus, it is through tying together "space" and time that national identity is being reproduced through an everyday item, a magazine. As Skey (2011: 25) highlights: "it is a combination of these ritual events [national holidays, cultural events and feast days] and their everyday representation in books, film, museums, the educational system and so on that,

in connecting the past and present, concretise the idea of the nation moving through history." In the case under study, we will examine how photos of idealized rurality are exhibited online and shared via social media to cultivate a nostalgia for an idyllic rural past, and when one adds the images of medieval warriors defending the nation and contemporary Russian soldiers fighting for the nation, certainly depict a nation moving through time with a shared past and culture.

In the article "The Russian nation is a myth", Alexander Tsipko (2018), draws the attention of readers to the fact that "the Russian nation, as something holistic, never existed," as in Russia from the time of Peter the Great and afterwards there were essentially two Russian nations: that of the uneducated peasants who could not read and appreciate the verses of any of the great poets of Russia, and the refined nobles who knew more than one foreign language. Therefore, to talk of a national idea, let alone one ideal that is lost, is the height of incredulity. He writes, "People, as a rule, begin to search for a special idea for themselves when they lack a feeling of national pride, when it begins to fade, or when there is already nothing that would bind people with their national souls, leaving them just with St. George ribbons that are put on as a show for others." The St. George ribbons have become ubiquitous in recent years, notably following the conflict with Ukraine and the incorporation of Crimean into the Russian Federation. The author calls for focusing on the essence of the problem, which, in his opinion, does not lie in the need to revive the national idea, but rather "start a serious conversation about the formation of the Russian nation as something organic and holistic, about what turns the people into a nation and what we have yet to achieve." Thus, the author sees the idea of rebuilding a great nation in a number of key changes in the consciousness of the majority: the rejection of the use of weapons in the political struggle, the recognition of the historical authenticity of the victims of political regimes, presumably including the Soviet Union, and the personal responsibility of the nation for what has been done. This requires a "genuine, deep unity of the people is created on the basis of empathy with national disasters and the tragedies, torment and suffering of their compatriots." In other words, a genuine nation is "the unity of people who can bear without truth, without fear, the truth about themselves, their history, the truth about their own power." Yet, if our examination of Russian social media is exact, it is the inverse under way. It is not a search for truth, but rather the affirmation of tropes that do not require reflection or dialogue (Tsipko 2018).

Egor Kholmogorov (2018), a free blogger, writes in his article "The Russian nation is united in its history" that "Russians are not just one of the old nation-states of Europe. In a sense, it is the oldest as already in the 9th century, when introducing themselves to the court of the Frankish emperor Louis, the Russian ambassadors used the diplomatic formula "we are from the Russian family." The author emphasizes that the identity of the nation

Fig. 1. Young woman with Russian forest in the background wearing a stylized traditional Russian summer dress and bouse with her head adorned by a Pavloposad shawl.
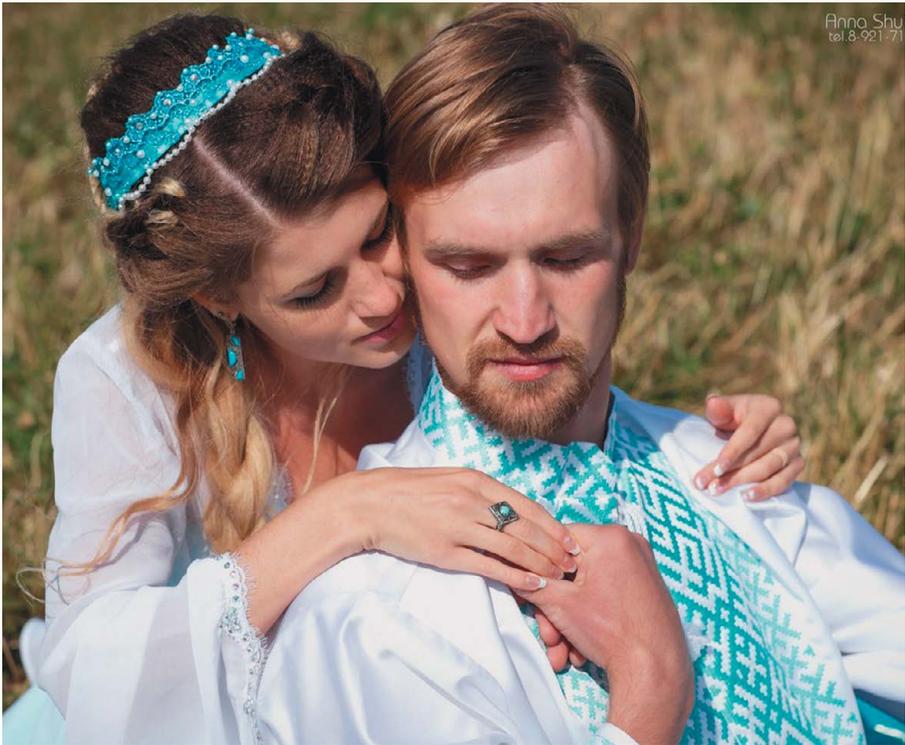
Fig. 2. Idyllic image of a couple in love with both wearing stylized Slavic traditional costumed with a Russian field as background.

has deep historical roots. This need to affirm history thus feeds into the visual imagery on the Russian nationalist groups on social media. Modern Russian youth, in seeking to revive the national idea, turn to what is familiar and comforting, images that hearken to past centuries, to the time of the birth of Russia, depicting this with external attributes: women and girls with wreaths in their hair and wearing folk dresses, as well as men in long shirts held in place with a belt and bast shoes, shoes made of birch bark. The imagery thus appeals to the older trope of the 1,000 year old Russia, while reaffirming an idealization of the masculine and feminine. It is thus both new, yet familiar (Kholmogorov 2018).

In his work, Skey (2011: 127) rightfully identifies that new technologies such as the Internet have been "domesticated" and incorporated into the "rhythms and routines of daily life" citing the work of Maria Bakardjieva (2005). However, he sees the Internet as a means to take individuals "all round the world" where they will both witness and engage with difference on a routine basis (Skey 2011: 127–128). We will argue, rather than taking individuals to other locales, many Russian sites seeking to promote national ideals transport individuals to idealized Russian villages where maidens are

dressed in folkloric dresses in fields and forests. Thus, the Internet does not automatically promote a "banal globalism" (Szerszynski & Urry 2002: 477), rather much like Edensor's *This England* magazine, it can readily be used to promote a banal nationalism. The Internet and social networking must be understood as an extension of the routines of everyday life, and it is also necessary to take into account both the macro and micro as Emilia Pawłusz and Oleksandra Seliverstova (2016: 71) highlight whereby: "Ordinary citizens and their actions cannot be perceived as passive recipients of elite strategies but rather as active actors who adaptively transform the nation-state." This is evident in the various Russian nationalist groups on social media where there is much overlap, but competing narratives which seek to integrate individuals to slightly differing national ideals. Some, for example, will be laden with the symbols of Orthodox Christianity, while others will endorse Russia's "true" pagan roots, promoting the Slavic deity Perun as opposed to Orthodox Christianity. As will be demonstrated, much of the imagery shared on Russian social media sites seek to inspire but as Skey (2011: 166) highlights: "inspiration is a crippling nostalgia that is unable to offer anything beyond an obsession with reviving past 'glories' or blaming those who (so the story goes) stand in the way of such projects." Other inspiring photos, however, do encourage young men to go to the gym to train, and shame them to stop smoking and drinking as such choices in everyday life weaken future warriors needed to defend the nation. Thereby tying passive imagery to actions that can be taken into everyday life through social networking sites that promote a "national identity as a nuanced, embodied experience, intertwined with many aspects of everyday life" (Pawłusz & Seliverstova 2016: 82).

In his article "Why there are no Russians in Russia: An analysis of the constitution, logic and common sense," Alexei Zhivov (2017), political scientist, public figure, and organizer of the first Russian March in 2005, says that the concept of a "Russian people" is not present in the Constitution of the Russian Federation, and there is no national idea, which the author highlights as odd, because in Russia, which is a state comprised largely of the Russian people, the idea of an [ethnic] Russian nation is not confirmed in a legal sense. On the contrary, according to the author, "our constitution offers us a unique oxymoron construct— a multinational people. The multinational people of the Russian Federation is both everything and nothing at the same time". Further, the author discusses the differences between the concepts of nation and people and encourages readers to reflect on the fact that, in Russia, "we have actually ethnic Russians and cultural Russians with other ethnic origins who together form a single Russian political ethno-cultural nation." The paradox revealed by the author in the discussion about the fate of the Russian nation within multinational Russia is that "among the subjects of the Russian Federation there are republic-states endowed with their own constitutions and having their own titular nations, in the interests of which these states are established, and

where the respective nations are named and guaranteed rights and freedoms not only as citizens of the Russian Federation, but also as citizens of their national states." This of course refers to the federal structure of the Russian Federation, itself a legacy of the Soviet Union where there was confederal state, yet true power was wielded by a unitary Community Party. The author thus laments the Russian nation, which forms the basis of Russia, yet has no such separate republic-state. Referring to article 9, part 1 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation, the author says that every people (ethnic nation) living in the Russian Federation has a right to land, with the exception of Russians, because they, as a people or nation, are not mentioned in either federal or regional legislative acts. At the same time the author highlights that "thanks to such a civil construction, Russia does not belong to anyone and at the same time belongs to everyone at once who has a Russian passport." Thus, Russian nationalists are conforming to the tenets of traditional nationalism, the need to have the contours of the (ethnic) nation conform to the state or in this case have an explicit recognition of a Russian territory within the Russian Federation.

Zhivov (2017) conclusions highlight the tension that exists between the state and nationalist narratives. Though the state can curry Russian populist nationalism, it cannot fully embrace it as it runs counter to the very foundational document of the Russian Federation. Those posting on social media are confronted by a fundamental question: how does one articulate a national narrative when it is not recognized, let alone privileged, in the Russian Constitution? Then there is the existence of neo-Nazism and other forms of extremism in relation to the peoples and nations of the Russian Federation, whose rights in the Constitution are emphasized and vested with privileges in theory though not necessarily always in practice. Tracing changes in the wording of the Constitution regarding the role and importance of the Russian nation, Zhivov emphasizes that "the term multinational people of Russia appeared as a source of power during the tragic events of the collapse of the USSR and the separation of the RSFSR into a separate independent state." From the point of view of history, for Zhivov was the revolutionary coup, the formation of the USSR, and then its collapse that introduced confusion into the concept of the Russian nation, abolishing the role of the Russian nation at the legislative level in Russia. The author concludes his thoughts with the phrase that "as a result, it is impossible to demand protection of the legitimate rights and interests of a Russian person from the Russian Federation in principle, because there are no Russians for the Russian Federation" and calls for amendments to the Constitution or self-identification of the Russian people in accordance with international standards." Zhivov's analysis is following the same narrative as the images shared on Russian social media: that of the lost nation, that risks being submerged, its essence diluted if not protected.

MASCULINITY AND THE CLICHÉD IN RUSSIAN
SOCIAL NETWORK SITES

The sites observed and analyzed allow for passive consumption through simple "likes" and "sharing" but also more active participation through comments or creating material for distribution. Nationhood is thus created and contested "locally" though the local is a specific group in the social media universe. It also ties to the "macro" as images and media can be shared that is tied to the nation-state and its governing structures and national media. Thus the "locally" micro amplifies the state's narrative, but local actors can also challenge the state narrative in turn. As Rico Isaacs and Abel Polese (2015: 376) highlight with their analysis of monuments whose meanings are interpreted and shaped by local actors, "nation-building can be an erratic and contingent process susceptible to the influence and agency of local actors." The Russian state can therefore propose via the state-owned and controlled media state sanctioned narratives, and they are invariably amplified in its retelling in social media, but occasionally challenged as well. This also contributes to nation-building, but one whereby social media sites are thus both echo chambers of national macro narratives, and creative generators of national narratives. Typically, the images shared on Russian social media are not overtly political, but instead call upon a shared nostalgia of habits or what are presumed to be the practice of ancestors. As Skey (2011: 91) argues: "common habits helped generate a sense of familiarity and confidence in the management of relations with disparate others, so that these 'shared' activities led to mutual recognition and the establishment of a moral order." This permits us to build upon Michael Billig's (1995) concept of "banal nationalism," while adding a dynamism that this model lacks, a dynamism which does not present the state as the sole fabricator of discourses. As Skey (2011: 342) rightly cautions: "This type of approach does not, of course, mean ignoring institutional discourses or the degree to which they may dominate a particular social environment, but should make us acutely aware of the manifold ways in which different groups are addressed (or ignored) and respond to, challenge or ignore such discourses." Social networking sites are thus enabling actors outside state institutions to participate in the creation and dissemination of national discourses.

SOCIAL NETWORKS AND RUSSIA

Though Russia did lag behind other countries, the use of the Internet has been growing exponentially. In 2013, a bit more than half of the population, 52 % is now online at least once per week, whereas a decade ago the Internet users in Russia would have numbered in the single digits (Forbes 2013). Not only is a majority of the population online, the Internet demographics were also quite young: 52 % of the internet users were under the age of 35. However, as

of July 2016, it is estimated that over 71 % of the Russian population is online (Internet Live Stats 2016) indicating that both young and older demographics are online. Effectively, most Russian youth and adolescents are now online, and Vkontakte is one of the most popular sites in Russia with more than 43 million users, outpacing its social media rivals, Odnoklassniki (Classmates) and Facebook. Whereas the Forbes columnist is optimistic that the growing number of Internet users in Russia will mean that the stranglehold of the largely state-controlled television news will be weakened, we will argue that the Russian social networking sites are also a means of promoting a Russian patriotism and at times an extremist Russian nationalism. Thus, the Internet in Russia is not solely a force for greater liberalization, but also for the dissemination of extremist views that encourage violence and encourage youth to embrace a highly nationalist worldview that is at times saturated with neo-Nazi ideals. Thus culture and national narratives must be understood holistically. Quite often, national narratives are articulated and propagated most effectively in mundane ways, such as within children's animated films (Bouchard & Podiakova 2014), as opposed to the speeches of politicians.

IDEALIZED MASCULINITY

The men depicted in Russian social networking sites are typically medieval or modern soldiers, with the rare Russian family man with in folk garb thrown in. In one example of a photo shared online, a man sits astride a tank holding a machine gun. The images thus reiterate ideal gendered national roles. The woman is maternal, as we will demonstrate, taking care of farm and family, while the man is off fulfilling his marital duties by protecting the family. The need for women to return to femininity and men to masculinity was urgently brought to the fore as Russia reeled under the effect of the economic crisis and dislocations of the 1990ˢ. As N. E. Tikhonova (2003) writes, the suffering women felt was often gendered and understood as ceasing to be women:

> ...the greater deprivation of women compared to their husbands and other family members, the extended family, and often the workload, with the forced abandonment of significant needs, the understanding of the disadvantage of their position in the labor market and the impossibility of changing this situation, paired with a feeling of absolute social insecurity contributes to the deterioration of the psychological state of women, which was noted during the study by both women and men. Moreover, they began to appear in interviews with complaints about what the constant self-restraint means for them not only in their refusal to undertake certain actions, but also abstaining completely from certain needs, and of the fact that because of the need to sacrifice their interests to those of the family, they cease to feel like women.

Fig. 3. Young woman with mittens decorated with traditional ornaments, an embroidered jacket with a stylized Slavic decorative motif, and a Pavloposad shawl.

The suffering of women certainly helped to generate a longing for an idealized past where beleaguered women could "feel like women" and could explain the proliferation of the idealized depiction of gender roles based on nostalgia for a romanticized peasant past. The ideal roles for men and women are thus defined visually through memes that affirm gendered roles where a woman must be chaste and feminine, while a man must be a brave defender and warrior for family and nation. In one image, a young child, 3 or 4 years old, is dressed up in a Russian military uniform and holding a pistol. Below, the inscription: "POWER OF RUSSIA: The future is in our hands." However, it is not enough to be a soldier, one must also be ready to die for one's homeland and this is intertwined with religion. In one photo, a young man in uniform lays on the ground, certainly dead, within the foreground a simple cross has fallen out of his hand. The noble sacrifice is highlighted with the words: "We boldly go into battle for Holy Rus [Russia] and shed the blood of the young." Death in war is a noble virtue and this is affirmed through such photos depicting a contemporary soldier, as well as the painting of medieval soldiers going into battle under the standards of Orthodox Russia. Nation is tied to God and death in battle is a glorious deed.

CLICHÉD IMAGES AND BANAL NATIONALISM

Martin Müller (2008: 129) in his work *Making Great Power Identities in Russia*, classifies as 'banal patriotic politics' the repetition of photographs and other images that glorify Russia. They combine the official and the everyday to strip away the mystic aura of high politics to have them become a mundane and natural part of everyday life (Foxall 2013: 135). Andrew Foxall highlights the role of photographs and images in trying to define masculinity and how it is tied to nationalism. He notes the importance of the various images of Putin: "photographs of Putin help to configure and establish hegemonic discourses about public forms of masculinity in Russia" (Foxall 2013: 137). The need to define masculinity is tied to what has been argued as the marginalization of masculinity (Kukhterin 2000: 73) in the Soviet Union where in the heady days of the Revolution emphasis was placed on the "women's question" (*женский вопрос/zhenskii vopros*) as traditional masculinity and patriarchy had been associated with the old pre-revolutionary order (Foxall 2013: 137–138; Ashwin 2000). With the outbreak of World War II, the Great Patriotic War as it is known in Russia, there was a return to an idealized masculinity. This was presaged by the release of the film *Alexander Nevsky* who in the film states "who comes to us with a sword, shall die by the sword." As Bouchard (2013) examined, there was certainly an idealized remasculinization of the nation fighting Fascism tied to the war effort and this period serves as an archetype in contemporary Russian narratives of nation. This would be contrasted with the chaotic 1990s after the breakup of the Soviet Union where it was often female labour which supported families. As N. E. Tikhonova (2005 [2003]) writes, the economic crisis of the 1990s, a structural crisis following the breakup of the Soviet Union and the fall of the Communist regime, led to an increased role of women in earning the wages that families need to survive. As men were increasingly unemployed or earning comparatively less, women were effectively filling the gap: today, in two thirds of poor urban families, women function as the main or equal breadwinner in Russia, and in poor families overall, women are the main or equal breadwinners in about half of families, in contrast to the more affluent segments of the population, where this indicator is noticeably lower. A similar assumption of this role by women in a number of poor families of the previously uncharacteristic function of women as the main or equal breadwinner is compelling and serves as a vivid indicator of a decline in the standard of living of the family, requiring in turn the intensification of women's efforts to maintain it.

A significant contribution to this transition in households of the function of the role of breadwinner to women is tied to the rise of alcoholism or drug addiction among men along with falling wages, rising unemployment, and increased disability of husbands. In any case, judging by the data of the study, in two-thirds of two-parent families where the woman was the main

breadwinner, there were conflicts due to husbands' alcoholism or drug addiction, and in some other families the problem of husbands' alcoholism disturbed the women interviewed, although it was not the cause of quarrels. In addition, in families where there was this problem, women were almost twice as likely as men to work longer hours to make extra money. It is significant that in such cases if a woman in a family with an alcoholic husband assumes the function of not only the breadwinner, but also the effective head of the family, i.e. begins to make decisions on the management of available resources, then the economic degradation of the household stops (Tikhonova 2005 [2003]).

As noted in the same article (Tikhonova 2005 [2003]), data was obtained on the gendered negative consequences of the reforms of the 90s in Russia. The research notes that respondents reported an increase in the psychological stress of men because of the fall in their earnings, their greater tendency to depression, heart attacks, suicides, etc. Men were simply unable to find a worthy place in the new conditions imposed by the crisis and successfully fulfill their traditional function as primary "breadwinner." Both men and women indicated the difficulty men faced adapting to the new economic conditions of the state, as they proved to be less flexible than women in the workforce, less mobile and less willing to change the usual nature and content of their labor, to change their specialty to accept new work. As Tikhonova writes, in a word, as one of the respondents stated, "although men have more opportunities in all areas, they proved to be psychologically unprepared" while for women, "there are fewer opportunities, but their adaptability was greater than that of the 'stronger' sex."

Into this void, a redefined masculinity has stepped in as a means for defining the nation. As Foxall (2013: 136) writes: "Scholars have noted that such a militarised masculinity has been mobilised for national patriotism" (Sperling 2009). In his concluding remarks, Foxall (2013: 151) remarks that the photographs of Putin, official photographs taken by Kremlin photographers and distributed via the Kremlin, use landscape to symbolize the territorial bonds linking individuals to the nation, promote Putin as iconic of the nation, and highlight "the emergence of militarised and sexualised narratives of masculinity, which is linked to nationalism." The elevation of Putin as the ideal man is certainly evident in the social networking sites analyzed, but tied to the emergence of a militarized and sexualized narrative of masculinity, there was an equally sexualized but "domesticized" narrative of femininity. Men were the warriors, the defenders of the homeland, while women were beautiful as they ensured domestic bliss.

VIRILITY AND POLITICS

Politics and political discourse is by its nature extremely gendered in Russia, with an emphasis on virility. The President Vladimir Putin has

emphasized virility as part of his public persona as he seeks to demonstrate that he participates in many activities that highlight his masculinity. This included photos taken of him fishing bare chested in Russia, his expertise in judo, the accounts of him shooting with a (tranquilizer) rifle a tiger in the Russian Far East, and the latest being his catching a 21 kg fish on his vacation. Putin is also known for using a language that is very jocular, using phrases that are far from diplomatic, throwing out words and expressions that would be quite crude by Russian and international standards. For example, when the war with Georgia was raging, it was reported that Putin told the French President that the Georgian president should be "hung by his balls" (The Telegraph 2008). When he first rose to power, overseeing the war in Chechnya, he is reported as having said that he would deal with the Chechens by "wiping them out in the shit house" (Strauss 2003). His language, often sprinkled with swear words when off camera, evokes the language of working class men and soldiers. We would argue that the persona that has been cultivated seeks to promote Putin not only as president and politician, but as an idealized representative of Russian masculinity (Johnson & Saarinen 2013), a masculinity that fits quite well with the masculinity that is presented in the discourse articulated online in the social networking sites and the nationalist groups under study.

In the article "The Crisis of Masculinity in the Post-Soviet Discourse," Elena Zdravomyslova and Anna Temkina (2001) reflect on the gender role of men in the post-Soviet era, and analyze post-World War II (Great Patriotic War as it is known in Russia) gender demographics. It is a given that the men who were of age during the war were killed in large numbers leaving a demographic imbalance, but Zdravomyslova and Temkina highlight that more infant girls survived than boys the war and the period which follows. Citing Urlanis, they highlight that according to the 1959 census there were 230 thousand more women aged 20–24 years old than men, and 350 thousand more young women aged 25–29. This generation was too young to have served on the front, but clearly girls were much hardier and survived in greater numbers. The authors highlight that this would have had a social impact and would have affected both gender relations and narratives. The authors note that "the demographic deficit of men in Soviet society led to an increase in their symbolic value and to the problematization of masculinity." Not only was there a demographic imbalance, but also many of these young men would have been raised without fathers, with many of the latter not returning home from the front. Mass fatherlessness, according to A. Kharchev (1979), led to the formation of specific models of masculinity, notably a form of brutal masculinity, characterized by a tendency to violence, according to Soviet researchers (Sukovataia 2012; Klimenko 2012; Tartakovskaia 2013), agreeing with Westerners, is the result of the upbringing of boys in teenage environments where there is no tangible influence of older men. According to Isaev and Kagan (1979: 29): Boys raising without a father either adopt the "female" type of behavior, or create a distorted idea of male

behavior as antagonistic to the female and do not perceive everything that the mother is trying to instill in them. In both cases, there is a vulgarized idea of male behavior as aggressive, rude, harsh and cruel.

In the folk science of the Russian layperson, the "surplus" of women as compared to men is used to explain that the men that remained were lavished with attention. Here, Isaev and Kagan are offering an alternative explanation whereby the demographic imbalance pushes to two extremes: hypermasculinity versus effeminization. What is nonetheless evident in both popular and scientific narratives is the struggle to define ideal forms of masculinity and femininity. As seen in contemporary social media, this struggle is ongoing. Family sociologists have been proposing new interpretations of the crisis of masculinity they have perceived in in recent years. They note the deprived position of men in the Soviet family, caused by the inability of men to exercise the role of sole breadwinner, tied to what they see as the dominance of women in the private sphere and the violation of paternity rights (see Harutyunyan 1987, Gurko 1998, Kletsin 1998). The authors identify several possible causes of the masculinity crisis: 1) the unattainable ideal of the father who was the hero of the Great Patriotic War, the builder of the new Soviet world, 2) the inability of contemporary men to fulfil any model of masculinity whether that of the hardworking peasant, or the courageous and valiant nobleman aristocrat, the guarantor of the code of honor, 3) the blind enthusiasm expressed for Western ideals notably the cowboy reminiscent of medieval knights, 4) men's inability to accommodate themselves to the emancipation of post-Soviet women who have become "superwomen." As masculinity, form the perspective of these authors is formed in relation to femininity, the perceived rise of women would have undermined from this perspective masculinity. Thus, scholars and nationalists posting on social media understand Russian masculinity as in crisis and requiring authentic models of true Russian masculinity to help men rise from its torpor (Zdravomyslova and Temkina 200).

Putin, thus, is put forward as a form of role model for men. In the Foxall's analysis of the photographs of Putin, he notes that they must be understood within the larger context:

> Putin's photographs are not isolated, but rather gain currency through how they circulate and connect with other (wider) performances of masculinity, including Putin's decision to launch the Second Chechen War, his use of street language and swear words (which simultaneously excludes women), his threats of violence toward those who undermine him (particularly members of the press), and his 'de-masculinisation' of rival politicians and oligarchs (2013: 151).

Likewise, Foxall notes that even though the photographs of Putin could be seen as quite homoerotic, they are in effect quite heteronormative. As Foxall (2013: 150) writes: "Putin has been far from ambivalent in making his views

on homosexuality clear; indeed, his views conform to a 'heteronormative' rejection of homosexuals." Putin thus becomes the ideal man, to be desired by women and emulated by men.

Thus, Putin coming to power in 1999 is tied to what has been called the "remasculinization" of Russia (Riabov & Riabova 2014). The decade following the collapse of the Soviet Union had been quite traumatic for Russians, but in many ways more so for men. The nineties were associated with unemployment, unpaid wages, rising rates of alcoholism and drug use and general chaos in both the economy and the society. It is in this period when Russian life expectancies plummeted and the toll paid by men was considerably greater than for women. Between 1992 and 1994, life expectancy for men dropped from 63.8 to 57.7 years and from 74.4 to 71.2 years for women (Gavrilova & Gavrilov 2009:119). The population was both ageing and shrinking rapidly, and this was certainly exacerbated by the high rates of mortality for men. Russian scholars have argued that Perestroika and liberalization initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev and continued by Boris Yeltsin were used to promote the return of traditional gender roles: "the liberals who created the ideology of perestroika believed that the new order would provide an opportunity for the development of a hegemonic patriarchal masculinity of autonomous liberal heads of households who would return women to traditional roles" (Riabov & Riabova 2014: 25). Though in the 1990s a hypermasculine system of values was established, few men could benefit as the economic hardships left few with the means of being true "bread-winners," a core requirement of the idealized masculinity (Riabov & Riabova 2014: 25). Thus, ideals were established that could not be attained by a large number of men, and additionally the nation was seen as under threat with the men incapable of doing much: "Another reason for this collective demasculinization was that the Russian man was incapable in regard not only to his family but also to his nation" (Riabov & Riabova 2014: 25). Putin thus had to oversee a remasculinization of Russia, which would seek to enhance both national and male pride, and which would certainly entail the successful promotion of gendered roles whereby men could be the patriarch both at home and in the nation. Riabov and Riabova (2014: 26) thus argue for the emergence of a new hegemonic form of masculinity centered on the concept of the "muzhik" in the 2000s: "Thus, the word 'muzhik' designates both national masculinity and high-ranking, 'real' masculinity. This type of masculinity should be considered hegemonic for Russia in the 2000s." To be a real man, a *muzhik*, it is necessary to demonstrate that one is not a woman, not a child and certainly not homosexual. Homosexuals and feminists are marked as deviant (Riabov & Riabova 2014:26, 32). In reviewing the main themes of Russian nationalism in social media, it is evident that the goal is to relegate women to the domestic sphere, angelic beauties in the countryside taking care of hearth and children, while teaching men to be real *muzhiki*, true warriors whether in gyms or in the armed forces ready to defend the homeland.

SPORT: PREPARING THE RACE WARRIORS

In the subtle discourse promoted by the various online groups is the need for sports. The Russian who trains for sports will also be a future warrior for the nation was a narrative trope observed in images shared on nationalist social networking pages. An example is a video that was posted of a blind trainer working with a wrestler/fighter who had had one arm and leg amputated. The administrator of the group "I am Russian" asks: "Will you as before complain of your health and say that you cannot train?!" In another image, an administrator of the group "I am Russian" posted a photo and comments that it is sad that Russian vodka is cheaper than weights. With this comment, the poster affirms the recurring message: Russian men should quit drinking and start training for their health and the health of the nation.

Ironically, where the ideals of this masculinity was played out was in fact in the streets of Marseille, France. In an online article "Russian hooligans were savage and organised, say England fans," *The Guardian* cites one witness to the violence in the streets of southern France: "You could easily see who they were. They had black T-shirts with Russian writing on, and were all extremely muscular. They didn't muck about. They picked out English blokes to attack, and then ran off when the police arrived" (Boffey 2016). In the photo that accompanied the piece, one tee-shirt is evident with "Я Русский" (I am Russian) written across the chest. The football violence is in many ways encapsulating the ideals of such online groups as "Я Русский" and related pages such as "Боевая Русь" (Warring Rus) as they both feature young men spending many hours training in gyms, aspiring to "defending the nation" and seeing in violence the expression of idealized Russian manhood. Their actions were in turn lauded by Russian politicians and high ranking state officials who in turn sought to define what a "real man" is and should be. The ideals expressed by politicians dovetailed with what is lauded online.

A particularly telling case is one tweet by the head of Russia's federal investigative committee Vladimir Markin. He wrote: "Нормальный мужик, каким он должен быть, вызывает у них удивление. Они же привыкли "мужиков" на гей-парадах видеть..." or "A normal guy, as he should be, surprises them. They are used to seeing "men" in Gay [Pride] parades" (Euronews 2016). This statement deserves to be dissected. First he begins with the informal "мужик/muzhik" which would be the informal way to refer to a man comparable to the English fellow or guy and thus the Russian hooligans were simply normal guys, and Markin specifies "as they should be." Their violence is thus both normalized and idealized, while continuing by highlighting that "normal men" provoke surprise among them, the them being western Europeans. He then goes on to explain why he believes the Europeans were taken off guard. He continues by stating that they are used to seeing "guys" (in quotation marks) in gay parades. The quotation marks are there to highlight that gay men are not

real men, and this also converges with the popular insult that is bandied online of "Gayropa" whereby there are no "real men" in Europe, only gay men. For Markin, the organized Russian hooligans were in effect a source of national pride, something to be lauded, and they were used to demarcate Russia from Europe.

There is also a feedback loop at play as the words of politicians are then taken and amplified online. A case of this is the twitter account for the Russian "Ultras," the group associated with the clashes in Marseille and Lille in June. They cite in English Putin stating: "I don't know how 200 Russian fans could fight several thousand of the British" (@russian_ultras tweet June 17, 2016). The Russian Ultras retweet an image taken from the popular American television program Family Guy depicting a large number of naked men on a bed with the tweet stating "England's hooligans who stay at home" (original tweet by @funtria posted June 16, 2016). Here too, implicit homophobia is central to the self-definition of "real" masculinity of the Russians in Marseille against English. The newspaper reports also highlight how the masculinity of those attacked by the Russians was also questioned as the reporter cites the "hooligans" encountered: "black-shirted [Russian] hooligans likened English fans to 'women and children' and saying they were 'too old, drunk and fat' to fight back" (Rose 2016). As is constantly evoked online, a true man is a warrior whether in the trenches or in the streets of Marseille. The theme of masculinity seeking to counter emasculation is extended from individuals to entire nations. Thus, the nations of the European Union are stigmatized as being too effeminized, incapable of producing truly masculine and heterosexual men.

IDEALIZED RURAL LIFE AND FEMININITY

One of the groups examined is Russian Spirit: Rus Resurrected [Русский дух. Русь воскресшая]. This particular group bridges both Facebook and Vkontakte, the latter being the largest social networking site in Russia and among a larger Russian-speaking global populace. The nationalism articulated in this particular group is relatively innocuous with the bulk of the imagery presenting picturesque photos of women in rural setting or paintings representing medieval warriors, Russian Orthodox Churches or peaceful village settings. Nevertheless, such groups do serve to promote a form of Russian national identity that can feed into the more extreme forms of Russian nationalism, as shall be discussed.

The use of media images, such as landscape and portrait paintings, for promoting a national identity has a long-lived history in Russia. The nineteenth century Russian art movement Peredvizhniki or Itinerants (Brooks 2010; Sartorti 2010) along with lubok or a folkloric image, characterized by the simplicity of the images with the meaning easily accessible to all. Such prints were influential in creating a historical national identity that is shared within

the collective consciousness of a post-soviet Russia (Gitman & Stigneev 1994; Kinsman 1995; Shah 2013). The Peredvizhniki was a group of Russian realist art students that left the St. Petersburg's Academy of Arts in an act of defiance against neo-classicism training and government authority. With a desire to provide accessibility of Russian art and paintings to the provinces through travelling exhibits and illustrated magazines, these artists created a landscape that held social and national meaning. Notable artists such as Ivan Šiškin and Isaak Levitan used imagery of sweeping landscapes and birch tree forests to portray a Russia that is strong, expansive and rich in resources. A landscape that not only rivaled popular 'westernized' landscapes of the time, but characterized what is Russian (Sartorti 2010: 378–379; Brooks 2010). This included the use of nature inspired motifs that were already bound to the collective identity through pagan traditions and superstitions (Sartorti 2010: 383). While contemporaneous lubok prints and illustrations mass produced motifs of militarized stalwarts of Russia along with rosy cheeked women dressed in colourful traditional folk clothing enjoying an idealized peasantry life (Brooks 2010). Painters such as Alexey Venetsianov produced series that depicts peasant life as carefree and perfect (Shah 2013: 751). At the same time, Russian Orthodoxy encouraged the promotion of a national image largely through illustrations of churches and sacred icons (Brooks 2010).

Artists such as Mikhail Nesterov and Isaak Levitan are mentioned often by sources as influential in creating a historical national identity that has become part of the collective consciousness of a post-soviet Russia (Gitman & Stigneev 1994; Kinsman 1995; Shah 2013). The use of a group's shared history is argued to be essential for the establishment and maintenance over rights and attachment to territory (Moore 2014). Cross-reference and reverse image searches of memes and images found on vk.ru reveals influences from these 19th-century Russian artistic movements. This is relatable to Eliot Borentstein's article, "Survival of the Catchiest," which discusses meme theory and the replication and naturalization of memes through media in post-soviet Russia.

One typical image presented in the photostream of the group is a young family, dressed in embroidered clothing standing in a wheat field that is surrounded by forest. The wheat is golden, the father and the children have blonde hair, and the mother has a crown of wheat. The image is accompanied by a poem entitled "Russian Shirt" [Русская рубашка] penned by Igor Kobzev (1968) who simultaneously glorified the ethnic Russian shirt, preferred as a gift over modern ties, while lauding the wise Soviet Fatherland and affirming that such affirmation do not pose any problem of "chauvinism." The emphasis is on the rural, the rustic, the familial and the folkloric. The "village prose" of the 1960's and 1970's idealized a peasantry lifestyle so as to preserve a cultural heritage, or the Russkaia ideia (The Russian Idea), believed to be disappearing (Laruelle 2014: 314, 316). To drive the point home, other photos reaffirm the way in

which clothing defines a nation, as on two occasions the traditional folk shirt was set next to a photo of a t-shirt affirming "I am Russian" [Я РУССКИЙ] to highlight that the former defines authentic Russianness without the need to spell it out. The only other acceptable garb for men, as we shall examine, is a military uniform.

The organizers of the Russian Spirit group post a significant number of photos that are professional in quality and were clearly posed and produced in various village and forest settings. In the hundreds of photos reviewed, they have yet to post one photo of a woman in an urban setting. Invariably, the photos feature contemporary women dressed in folk dresses or at the very least their head covered by a colorful Russian scarf. They are featured in front of rustic village dwellings, log houses, idyllic fields or surrounded by forest, usually birch trees. In one photo, a young woman is braiding her long reddish hair while standing in front of a log building. She is wearing a relatively modest scarf, but her summer dress is embroidered with typical Russian designs. The photos depicting young women exude innocence. In another photo, a young woman is braiding a girl's hair as they are in a log house. Seemingly, to affirm the village setting, a chicken is on the bed next to the young women, and to highlight the bounty of the land large squash are tucked away under the bed. This particular photo, at the time it was viewed, had been "liked" by 90 and shared by 13. Another photo that typifies both the village and maternal idyll is the staged photo of a young pregnant woman sitting next to a large haystack, an overturned basket with apples strewn out next to her. In the photo, she tenderly has her hands placed on her future child, lovingly looking down. Such photos define femininity as maternal bliss in the village, presumably far from the polluting influences of modernity and urban life. It goes without saying that these photos will never depict a woman with a man who is not Russian or at the very least Slavic. One of the greatest betrayals often expressed in the online groups and the comments is a Russian woman having a relationship with a migrant from the Caucasus, Central Asia or elsewhere, and having a child with him. These children are depicted online by Russian Spirit group as a betrayal to the nation.

One photo where a young woman is depicted within an urban setting is telling in that it nonetheless affirms the lost innocence of rural life. In the edited photo, this young woman in full folk costume — brightly colored dress, hair fully covered — stands smiling as the faceless urban dwellers stream by her. Below the photo, text reads: "Do not fear to stand out; fear getting lost in the crowd, ignoring yourself." The image is thus affirming the need for authenticity, even in the faceless crowd, where joy achieved through being true to one's inner nature.

IDEALIZED PAST, IDEALIZED FUTURE, DECORATED PRESENT

The Russian social networking groups present, we will argue, an idealized past featuring colorful folk dresses, brave and heroic soldiers and an idealized Russian nation that adhered to values that are desired for the present. As we shall discuss, the imagery features pseudo-folklore as attractive women are shown wearing what appears to be traditional folk clothing, though most ironically also have lipstick, eyeliner and other modern cosmetics. The women, often with children, and occasionally with men, tend to be depicted in fields, next to wooden houses in the countryside or in birch forests. The images present an idyllic view of a curated past where the nation is portrayed through banal images of countless women with scarves and flower wreaths. The other popular motif are the images of the glorious soldiers and conquering heroes of the past whether Alexander Nevsky or the soldiers of World War II or the Great Patriotic War as it is known in Russia. An idealized past is presented and though it is not accurate it is sufficient to evoke a common past thought to have been shared by all Russians. Alexander Nevsky, a Prince of Novgorod, is depicted as leading a heroic battle against the German Teutonic Knights and their allies whereby the critical battle is on the ice of Lake Peipus. Sergei Eisenstein certainly immortalized the event in Soviet cinema to create an epic battle worthy of the Russian nation becoming a key trope of Russian nationhood and in turn is recycled in contemporary online narratives. These social networking sites are not alone in seeking to promote idyllic, idealized, images of the past to achieve their set goals. Others will also call upon the past for mercantile interests, a case in point being the marketing of vodka.

Through the branding of Russian made vodka, marketing of a heroic past that is perhaps not historically accurate, but does seek to glorify the nation while profitably selling to the masses. Such marketing allows new narratives to invade not only public but private spaces as well. During the end of the Soviet Union, many consumers felt that the old Soviet labels were symbolic of subpar spirits (Kravets 2012: 366). During this time, those who were aspiring to be part of the distillery business knew they had to set themselves apart from the old and create something new and eye catching. Entrepreneurs began tapping into reserves of cultural images that fell under two broad themes: Empire and Regionalism (Ibid.). Empire branding focused on images that allowed consumers to feel a great sentiment for a past time that encompassed a unique history. By including Czars, royal insignias, soviet symbols, the Orthodox Church, Russian literature and art as well as historical and mythical heroes, consumers are able to take great pride in the history of their country (Ibid.). Regionalism, just as the name suggests, focuses on specific regions and locales to promote natural and cultural treasures within these areas (Ibid.). One example that has

gained quite the following is the brand White Admiral from Omsk. On this la-
bel, Admiral Kolchak is featured in full regalia in front of St. George's cross
(Ibid.: 367). Kolchak for those who have learned about his dictatorship seems
to be the last person anyone would want to promote, but through this branding,
White Admiral vodka has revived and popularized a story of the past in which
the people of Omsk take pride (Ibid.). The use of historical and cultural ima-
ges within branding of vodka allows for the public to take these images into
their homes, allowing for discussion within a more private space. In doing so,
what can be seen as "contradictions of historical facts within mythified ver-
sions of events are not openly questioned" (Ibid.: 372). Due to these images
not being openly questioned, the mythological past becomes part of everyday
life. Ultimately, both those marketing vodka and the Russian social network
sites promoting Russian patriotism and sobriety are reworking the past, and
marketing a glorified past to achieve their aims while promoting the nation
through daily banal activities of clicking and drinking.

Returning to the social networking sites, the second common current that
runs through many of the groups is how to achieve an idealized future. Here,
the groups call upon the young to adopt morals that measure up to the ideal of
the nation. Slogans are used stating that to be Russian is to be sober and that
real Russian men should exercise, should not smoke and should be good family
men. A recurring theme is the promotion of a healthy lifestyle for the benefit
of the nation. In a recent example, the "I am Russian" page posted two pho-
tos: to the left a man pictured with a woman and child, both kissing a toddler
in the middle, and to the left a man holding a bottle of vodka in his right hand
and a bottle of beer in his left, while kissing the bottle of vodka. The caption:
"ценности у всех разные" or "what is valued is different for all." Clearly the
intent is to demonstrate that it is best to be a father and value children, than
drinking. However, the first comments were quite critical. One person asks
whether to post stupid comparisons is also something to be valued. Another
writes that such parents could have posed only for the sake of the photo while
the other may in fact be the very best of fathers and thus conclusions cannot
be drawn from one photo. Clearly, the narrative was being contested. Another
image, this time of symbolic women with word bubbles over their heads, oddly
all but the "good" woman have a recycle symbol for a head, saying such things
as "All men are goats" and "I am a Goddess." The "good woman" depicted in
red and with a circle for a head, in among these "primitive broads" is the one
saying "I love my man." This image was not challenged by anybody. Instead,
it was liked by 385 and shared by 71.

Finally, in some of the more extreme nationalist sites, the nation is pre-
sented as polluted, and certain groups are targeted as being a threat to the nation.
These include migrants, notably those from the Caucasus such as the Chechens,
Muslims from Central Asia such as the Azeris, Jews and others that are seen as

threats to the nation. Such online narratives are tied to what B. Omarov (2010) describes as the "The aggravation of interethnic conflicts, the strengthening of xenophobic tendencies, which are the burning problems of modern Russia. The difficult socio-economic situation of the population, geopolitical changes and significant migration flows directly affect public opinion in the field of interethnic relations." In his article "The manifestation of extremism and nationalism among youth" Omarov writes that youth have always been the "mirror" of all social changes and including the relations between nations in Russia: "As an element that is most sensitive to all social and political changes, it notices and reacts sharply to that which seems unfair to it, that which does not coincide with its general opinion, often imposed on youth by pseudo-heroes from the TV screen, pages of newspapers and magazines". The author also proposes to distinguish between patriotism and nationalism, recognizing that both concepts have a common origin — love for their nation, their homeland. However, according to the author, "the nationalist builds for himself an internal scheme of 'I am good, the world is bad ,' which allows the justification of any action, while the patriot is trying to change this world in other constructive ways." Omarov argues that "aggressive behavior with traits of racial, ethnic and religious hostility arises in the early stages of individual development, and if it is not given due attention, it may become entrenched or aggravate as an individual grows older" and he calls for measures to be taken to extinguish the conflict at the stage of its formation . "Many scientists emphasize that the basis of youth extremism is the so-called ethnocentrism — a set of conflicting group ideas, emotional-sensual states and the ideology of hostility between one's own and other groups. The subjects of the carrier of ethnocentrism (ethnic conflict of conflict) are different youth communities that differentiate from others by ethnic, religious, social and other characteristics." In this case, nationalism becomes a way to designate oneself as good and the opposite nation as evil, defining the boundaries of interaction or rather mutual resistance. Clearly, the nationalist narrative in Russian social media does conform to Obamov's description.

In the article "Nationalism as a factor in the emergence of extremism" Y. Andrienko (2014), stresses that "during crises and extremism, political parties of a radical nature, as well as political groups and organizations of an extremist spontaneously emerge on the wave of nationalism" and adds that more recently," cyberspace has become regarded by extremist ideologists as an attractive platform for disseminating ideological propaganda, as it allows you to get an unprecedented degree of freedom in cultivating hatred, "including cultivating latent extremism." The author considers that promoting a national tradition in the upbringing of children to be the most effective way of combating extremism, arguing that it "remains the main condition for the revival of any national traditions and the national revival in general." Thus, promoting one national narrative to counter more extremist versions.

CONCLUSION

An analysis of social networking sites provides a more nuanced understanding of the nation, nationalism and the larger politics of the state in the Russian Federation. Though there are differences, they nonetheless are part of a larger spectrum whereby the more banal forms of nationalism feed into the more extreme forms. Central to narrative is the idealized past, a past where brave warriors fought for Russia, whether in medieval times or in recent decades. All the groups present the nation as a moral community, with Russians being moral and defined by values that cut across the nation, though there is some debate as to how to best define these values. Finally, there is the presentation of an idealized and pseudo-traditional past founded on what would certainly be called fakelore by folklorists. It creates nostalgia for a past that was presumably lost, though never truly existed as presented. A past centered on the presumed idyllic Russian village or occasionally the glory of the Soviet Past. These groups present that which is feared, those forces that will destroy what is left of the nation, or those forces that stand in the way of achieving the idealized representations of what should be the nation. These include tolerance for migrants, interethnic unions and the children of those unions, homosexuality and "non-traditional sexual relations. Central to the rise of Russian nationalism in the 2000s is the way in which masculinity is tied to an aggressive form of national identity. To be a great state, Russia requires true *muzhiks*.

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