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Becoming patriots in Russia: biopolitics, fashion, and nostalgia

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The article seeks to explore the common ground between biopolitics, fashion, patriotism and nostalgia. Taking off from the Foucauldian notion of biopolitics as a control apparatus exerted over a population, I provide an insight into the modern construction of the Russian nation, where personal and collective sacrifice, traditional femininity and masculinity, orthodox religion, and the Great Patriotic War become the basis for patriotism. On carefully chosen case studies, I will show how the state directly and indirectly regulates people's lives by producing narratives, which are translated (in some cases designers act as mouthpieces for the state demographic or military politics) into fashionable discourses and, with a core of time, create specific gender norms – women are seen as fertile mothers giving birth to new soldiers, while men are shown as fighters and defenders of their nation. In the constructed discourses, conservative ideals become a ground for the creation of an idea of a nation as one biological body, where brothers and sisters are united together. In these fashionable narratives, people's bodies become a battlefield of domestic politics. Fashion produces a narrative of a healthy nation to ensure the healthy work- and military force.

Keywords: biopolitics; Russia; nostalgia; fashion; patriotism; national identity

Introduction

The patriotic frenzy that burst out with the annexation of Crimea materialized in Russian dress culture. T-shirts with the messages *Russia*, *I am Russian*, *Crimea is ours*, etc., were given away on 12 June 2014 in several Russian cities in place of T-shirts with messages such as *I love New York*. This staged performance, called *Modnii Russkii* (Fashionable Russian), promoted "the correct patriotic attitudes" by means of exchanging clothes of *foreign* fashion brands for clothes with Russian patriotic slogans and symbols (Emel'ianenko 2014).

The event was organized by a youth organization Set' (The Network), a reincarnation of the infamous pro-Kremlin movement Nashi (2005–2012, leader Vasily Yakemenko).[1] After Moscow street protests prompted by fraud during the parliamentary elections in 2011, it became clear to advocates of the Kremlin's political course that youth politics should be reorganized and the means of persuading young people altered, away from the street actions used by Nashi. The members of Set' said that they reclaimed the streets from the liberal protest movement (Tumanov and Surnacheva 2014). Instead of focusing on mobilizing loyal crowds for demonstrations and street protests, the Kremlin turned

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toward cultural and patriotic upbringing of young people to ensure the regime's support and create a new sort of sincere and ardent patriot.

This is how a new concept was born: the penetration of heavily loaded political messages through cultural and artistic practices aimed at managing young people. The Set' is thought to provide young people with a platform for innovative activities while inculcating affection and loyalty to Vladimir Putin. The Set' has its own in-house designer, Ukrainian-born Anna Kreydenko[2], who debuted in the Novii Russkii (The New Russian) fashion show in Sevastopol, Crimea, in May 2014. Kreydenko is among a group of designers called PUTINVERSTEHER[3].

The creative collaboration skillfully co-opts the pejorative German term *putinversteher* ("Putin understanders"), which usually refers to Putin supporters in Germany, by using it to show pride in their Russian origin and support for Putin's politics. In choosing the name PUTINVERSTEHER, they reinforce and justify the discourse of Russia as being *disrespected* in the West and, hence, plead the case for defending the country and its image in the global arena.

The brand aims to produce "meaningful fashion" – fashion with an important political message. "By wearing clothes by PUTINVERSTEHER you not only support Putin, but you challenge the whole world with its corporations, revolutions, humanitarian bombing, double standards, and bearded women," declares the brand's public relations copy, hence claiming nearly civilizational differences between Russia and the rest of the world. While that statement refers to such sensitive topics as gay marriage and the work of NGOs, the brand's imagery consists of military symbols combined with romantic outfits. The clothes visually reinforce the movement's manifesto, which proclaims its role in defending "traditional family values," Russian culture and history, the legacy of the Great Patriotic War, and support for the Russian president. The brand associates official youth politics and strategies of patriotic upbringing with the conservative agenda, hence presenting a form of strategic communication where art and culture become the main fabrics and tools of conduct.

Against this background, the article seeks to explore contemporary Russian popular culture and its use by political forces by looking at fashion design as a platform for investigation. Taking off from the Foucauldian theoretical framework on biopolitics as a control apparatus exerted over a population (1976), this work provides an insight into the modern construction of the Russian nation, where personal and collective sacrifice, distinctly defined gender roles, and the Great Patriotic War become the basis for patriotism. By applying Foucault's concepts of biopolitics and governmentality, I suggest looking at both how designers position their work in relation to the state and the country and what message about gender identities they construct. In this particular case, it is the combination of the neoliberal mentality of maximum economy (Foucault 1998, 74) and an authoritarian political regime, where governmental activity is hardly bound by the sphere of individual freedom.

With the help of qualitative visual analysis of several fashion brands, scrutiny of their press releases, and interviews conducted by the author, this article provides an insight into how the designers understand their work's contribution to the national economy and cultural development. At the same time, it examines how the state directly and indirectly regulates people's lives by producing patriotic and gender narratives, which are translated into fashionable discourses and eventually create specific gender norms. In these constructed discourses, nostalgia for the "good old days" and the military victory as the pinnacle of masculine power becomes a ground for the creation of a nation as a biological body. Meanwhile, people's bodies become a battlefield of domestic politics.

To open up the discussion, I will introduce fashion as a tool for the construction of gender identities and identify its connection with the political sphere. Then I will present Michel Foucault's theoretical concepts and subsequently present empirical examples of expressions of patriotism through fashion production and gender identities.

Power of fashion

Just recently Vladimir Putin identified patriotism as a Russian "national idea" ("Putin … " 2016). He declared patriotism as a "moral compass" and "the sacred duty of Russians," stressing its role in national security. These ideas are also cemented in the key document that provides the guidelines for Russian youth politics, the State Program of Patriotic Upbringing 2016–2020 (Gosudarstvennaia Programma "Patrioticheskoe Vospitanie Grazhdan Rossiyskoi Federatsii na 2016–2020 gody"), which asserts culture to be an important strategic area for development (Pravitel'stvo 2015). Meanwhile, fashion and design, spheres of creative industries usually neglected by politics, are given significance and strategic importance. They are recognized as the most effective areas for the promotion of values, the preservation of which is a matter of national security. Moreover, the program stresses the importance of supporting cultural grassroots activities with an attention-grabbing agenda and suitable content.

Such attention to fashion and design is hardly new in Russia. The Soviet state interfered dramatically in the personal appearances of its citizens, trying to create a new Soviet person (Gurova 2008). As a matter of fact, dress has always been a playground for challenging ideas and the embodiment of specific ideologies. Fashion is a *symbolic economy* and a "powerful market of cultural construction of meaningful identities," with dress "constituting one of the most basic methods through which we are able to place ourselves and others in the social world" (Goodrum 2005, 24). Moreover, fashionable attire "is particularly apposite in addressing questions about group and self-identity" (Attfield 2005, 77).

Despite making statements about social, cultural, and economic position, clothes' "principal messages are about the ways in which women and men perceive their gender roles or are expected to perceive them" (Crane 2000, 16). Dress marks a demarcation line between the body and the outer world, acting as an agency wherein social expectations about gender roles can become a reality and are made obvious to the body. Dress also regulates our gender and bodily practices through being one of the tools to perform gender identity and self-regulation (Butler 1990). For example, wearing a long skirt slows down a woman's movement and makes her less active than wearing trousers, which allow for a greater variety of activities (doing sports, biking, etc.). Clothes regulate people's behavior and shape bodily practices that suit normalized conceptions about the roles of men and women in a society. They actively contribute to the performances associated with being female or male as well as to the performances that deploy gender as a social strategy (being feminine and masculine). While techniques of being female and male include practices traditionally associated with fertility and nurturing, defense and fighting, techniques of masculinity and femininity are characterized by practices of display and projection of the male and female body.

Regulations of gender norms and politics

Changes in fashion usually go hand in hand with societal transformations: political, social, and economic. Political conservative agendas shape conceptions of women's and men's roles in society in biological terms and ascribe conventional characteristics (mothers, daughters/fathers, sons, nurturers/breadwinners). Meanwhile, progressive agendas

reshape the appearances of both men and women, keeping up with the changes in their social roles as well as creating comfortable "bodily" frameworks for such progressive changes to happen (Crane 2000).

Political conservative agendas often endorse nostalgia for "the good old days" and the discourses of return to the times "when boys looked like boys and girls looked like girls." While political and religious leaders call for the restoration of "true" values and "traditional" family relations, popular culture provides us with a desirable fantasy and imagery of the "happy days of yore" (Doane and Hodges 2013, 3). As nostalgia is not only an emotional experience, but also a discursive practice, it establishes an image of the past that counters the present: in some cases, it advocates for the return of "traditional family values" and gender roles. It creates a new version of the past, which challenges the "decadent" present, which in Russia is believed to be brought into life by the efforts of Western feminism and the protagonists of liberal reforms.

The contemporary effort to redeem the idealized past in Russia is often closely connected to the criticism of the feminist movement and the extensive involvement of the Russian Orthodox Church in private and state affairs. The discourses about traditional gender roles and patriarchal structure of family relations have become more prominent with the interference of the church in the public and private lives of citizens (Mikhaylov 2015), and the roots of this gender nostalgia lead back to more ancient times than the Soviet period.

There are forces that strive for the re-establishment of the "natural sexual identity" and male authority. The proponents of such gender nostalgia often construct their version of the past to authenticate women's traditional roles as mothers and wives and often challenge the feminist critique of it (Doane and Hodges 2013). Contemporary gender nostalgia in Russia is hence nostalgia for the loss of the patriarchal certainties and could be also seen (and sometimes even presented) as a backlash against liberal values and feminism. The proponents of gender nostalgia want to maintain a strategy of opposition and hence sustain the order of dominance and subordination, which are believed to be traced to the past.

Nevertheless, one should be careful with aligning gender nostalgia with nostalgia for the Soviet past, as interest in and the use of the Soviet aesthetic and rhetoric do not always mean nostalgia for the Soviet gender order. Several gender scholars have pointed out the existence of academic and public discussions on a masculinity crisis in the Soviet Union (Zdravomyslova and Temkina 2002; Kosterina 2012), which makes it problematic to see the Soviet man as the ideal of masculinity. Yet, the ideal Soviet masculine identity was based on military discourses,

> in which the role and the image of the soldier is somehow incorporated into other contemporary heroic roles and images of masculinity, whether as a miner or a builder of an underground railway, a steeplejack, a Communist, an engineer, or a seaman. (Dmitrieva 2015, 58)

In retrospect, we can see that the image of the Great Patriotic War remains a very prominent element of masculine identity in Russia.

The 1990s presented us with new masculinities – such as the brutal criminal whose main goal is to become rich, establish his sexuality, and kill; and the honest police officer or soldier, who fights these criminals. It was emblematic that these new Russian men tended to reject their dependence on the state in the public sphere, and instead wanted to be professional, freestanding, rational individuals. These men affirmed their sexuality in a more direct way than had been allowed in Soviet times (Sukovataya 2012, 37–59). They became aggressive conquerors. Sex became a tool to exclude the weak and to rise above the others. Meanwhile, women had to become passive and submissive.

Concurrently, nostalgia for feminine ideals in the Soviet era can hardly be reconciled with the triple burden Soviet women had to withstand (of work, family, and political loyalty). Therefore, when it comes to nostalgia about the Soviet past in fashionable discourses – as I will demonstrate in the following discussion – an ideal masculinity could materialize in the mythic image of a soldier – a defender of the nation as well as a devoted patriot, a young pioneer working for the greater good of his own nation. Meanwhile, the feminine ideal presents a combination of pre-revolutionary ideals and cinematic mythology of a young and active woman who nonetheless needs protection. Moreover, artistic uses of the Soviet aesthetic might serve both a liberal gender agenda and conservative gender imperatives.

On the state level, the main reason for maintaining the structure of dominance and subordination is to hold power and ensure the security of the ruling elites. Even "political mobilization is achieved by appealing to gender identity, in the course of which a connection is made between models of masculinity and femininity on the one hand, and individual political behavior on the other" (Riabov and Riabova 2006).

Against this background, ideas about the "superiority of the Russian family and of Russian gender norms" have long been present in national identity discourses. They can even be "traced back to the works of the Slavophiles" before being cemented in Soviet propaganda during the Cold War (Riabov and Riabova 2006). Within this discourse, allegations about the decadence of Western civilization are prominent. In contemporary patriotic and often inherently anti-Western discourses, gender became the central aspect of civilizational differences that is also used to explain a probable "civilizational decline." Europe, with its liberal politics, the legalization of same-sex marriage, feminism, and the blurring of the traditional family unit, is presented as being in a state of decay that will (intensified by the increased influx of migration) be followed by a consequent collapse. In this respect, Russia is often presented in official and even public discourses as being "on a global mission to save humanity from degeneracy" (Riabov and Riabova 2006).

In order to create the image of the global savior, Russia is being masculinized; meanwhile, the significant Other loses its masculine qualities and becomes disempowered, for example, feminized. Scholars have pointed out two dimensions of this process, which include "the creation of attractive models of national masculinity and of an image of Russia with masculine connotations. … In particular, the cult of strength largely supports the image of Russia built up through the symbolic politics of the Putin presidency" (Riabov and Riabova 2006).

Understanding biopolitics

Andrei Makarychev and Sergei Medvedev write that "in Putin's third term, official rhetoric has become a normative, moralizing discourse promoting Russian traditional values as opposed to the 'moral decay' of the West" (2015, 45). They argue that the "biopolitical turn" in Russian politics – "a redefining of the boundaries of the Russian political community and extension of state sovereignty into private lives – is part of the authoritarian drift of the Russian political regime" (2015, 45). Within this discourse, "conservative family values are proclaimed to be the national idea and spiritual bond of the Russians, and grounds for opposing the West" (2015, 45). This connection between biopolitics and a conservative turn Andrei Makarychev and Alexandra Yatsyk propose to call "biopolitical conservatism," which refers to the "ideology of officialdom, often formulated in cultural terms" (2015, 139). They write:

> Different versions of conservatism, addressed to both domestic and international audiences, are grounded in explicitly biopolitical arguments that are overtly manifest in publicly raising intimate issues of corporeality, sexuality, family, and religion. This biopolitical core of the conservative agenda intends not only to find a new legitimation for Putin's reign by means of discursively constructing and politically relying on a conservative majority but also to give a new twist to the practices of "normalizing" Russia. (Makarychev and Yatsyk 2015, 145)

The gender discourses play a central role in defining Russia's geopolitical position articulating the incompatibility of Russia and the West, which is the main narrative of Russia's foreign politics during Putin's third presidential term (Makarychev and Yatsyk 2015). Maintaining strict bipolar gender roles becomes a matter of security and is achieved through less obvious political cultural and creative practices. In so doing, fashion design turns out to be a useful tool for the implementation of a nostalgic agenda for *natural* gender roles, as fashion is both an embodied experience and a symbolic economy that affects the performative nature of gender (Butler 1990).

The picture is not as simple as it might seem, as the actual practices of fashioning become the battlefield between the promoted ideology, the personal interests of people involved in the design process, and sociocultural and economic conditions.

In order to comprehend this working, one has to look at "the mechanisms that try to shape, sculpt, mobilize, and work through the choices, desires, aspirations, needs, wants, and lifestyles of individuals and groups" (Dean 1999, 12). Here notions of biopower and biopolitics are useful. While biopower is understood by Foucault as a technology of power for controlling an entire population through numerous and diverse techniques and series of networks penetrating the societal body (Foucault 1998, 140), biopolitics is a control apparatus, which regulates and controls the biological and political bodies of citizens in order to maximize the utility of the population for economic wealth and security. Biopolitics functions on a mass scale and makes use of different tools and strategies in the forms of legislation, norms, and values. Through legislation and a set of rules and norms, biopolitics governs and regulates social behavior and controls the physical and political bodies of the citizens (e.g. abortion laws and adoption laws) (Foucault 1976). Taking into consideration the working of power not only through direct violence, but also through identity mechanisms and discourse (Foucault 1976), internalized gendered national discourses regulate and govern people as political subjects in order to maintain power in the hands of the ruling elites through ensured political and economic stability.

Analyzing the role of fashion in the production of patriotic discourses in Russia, it seems appropriate to use the Foucauldian definition of governmentality, which is understood as a tool for thinking not only about governing, but also about how citizens think about the ways of being governed (Dean 1999, 16). However, the governed might not recognize their mentality as constructed, but instead understand it as natural and take the way they live for granted (Dean 1999, 17).[4] Despite this, the governed produce new knowledge and alternative practices, and are capable of reflexivity and change (Dean 1999, 18).

Discourses about the body and self-regulation are usually applied to liberal democracies and neoliberal economies, where power is decentralized and indirect measures are needed to ensure the development of political, cultural, and economic agendas. Governments in liberal democracies use their governing power in order to optimize life for their citizens, "governing others and ourselves in a wide variety of contexts," hence nudging conduct of individuals in the needed direction instead of using direct administrative or political resources (Dean 1999, 19, 212). However, we should view neoliberalism not as a consistent

hegemonic project, but rather as "mobile calculative techniques of governing that can be decontextualized from their original sources and recontextualized in constellations of mutually constitutive and contingent relationships" (Ong 2006, 13). Taking into consideration that "in the Putin era, Russia underwent significant change – it moved from being a 'laboratory' for neoliberal reform to a site of backlash against it" (Hemment 2012, 522), this conceptual frame can also be applied to the Russian context, providing a useful tool for understanding the complex working of the neoliberal economy and the disproportionate attempts of the government to interfere into the social, cultural, and political life of individuals, as well as how these individuals think about the way they are governed.

Gender identities in Russian fashion

Denis Simachev

In the mid-2000s, well-known designer Denis Simachev[5] unveiled to domestic and global fashion markets his ideal of the modern Russian man, built on mythological heroes of the civil war, aristocrats, Soviet athletes, and astronauts.

The men's spring/summer collection 2005 was inspired by the figure of the Soviet sailor, a young navy officer from St. Petersburg (Makarov 2013). The models were dressed in a *telniashka* (striped shirt), a look often attributed to the lowest strata of the sailors' hierarchy, the seaman, and associated with strict subordination and even homosexuality (Pastoureau 2001, 71). By including an image of a sailor in the collection, Simachev toyed with homoerotic ideals of male beauty. He paid homage to the fashionable trend of metrosexuality and sexual liberation, disregarding Russia's problematic stand toward homosexuality (see Kondakov 2014, 2015; Sperling 2014). He also acknowledged the brutal masculinity persistently present in Russian society (see Kon 2009; Kosterina 2012). For example, his spring/summer collections of 2004 and 2007 propagated brutal masculinity through the presentation of strong muscular and brutal models. The *Bang-Bang* collection was saturated with reminders of the 1990s era of gangsters and the mafia, including gold chains. The imagery of the collection disclosed several discourses of Russian masculinities built against the background of the criminal life of the 1990s, with its shifting power from one clan (*brigada*) to another by shootouts (*razborka*). A major part of the collection was devoted to the courageous, brave machos of the era, represented by either the mafia or the police.

Next to this inclusive imagery of masculinities, the brand presented the Russian modern woman, who ironically combined modernized and remodeled snow-woman's (Snegurochka) winter coats with oversized jeans jackets, high heels, colorful leggings, and skirts:

> The heroine of the new DENIS SIMACHEV collection is a pleasure seeker and a real hoyden. She is indifferent to common moral values and rules of conduct. Building a nest, acquiring a home and family and having children are not the things she is dreaming of. (Original text. Simachev, Collection Spring/Summer 2008)

The woman of the brand was presented as a free spirit, a strong individual who follows her own dreams and is not bound by patriarchal norms and values. She wore oversized bombers and trousers, mixed haute couture and mass market garments, and wanted to shock and bemuse. She was open to the world and had a strong sexual appeal. The clothes signaled her curiosity to the national heritage and a desire to belong to the global consumption culture. They allowed her to move across gender stereotypes and become a modern active woman.[6]

Ulyana Sergeenko

A *feminine* ideal was presented to Russia and to the world by a new wave of Russian haute couture fashion, especially the brand of Ulyana Sergeenko. The début collection 2012 consisted of reminiscences of the summer vacations and almost cinematic imagery of the 1950s and 1960s. Her heroines, dressed in garments decorated with flower patterns and high school black-and-white aprons, called to mind the female characters from famous Soviet comedies: fragile, romantic, and pure. Her collection was described as a blend of "elements of Russian military, babushkas, fairy tales, and Soviet cartoons" (Wilson 2012). This nostalgia for the good old days when women were feminine and men were masculine became one of the most recurrent themes in the collections: skirts of different lengths and puffed sleeves, aprons and bateau-neckline were almost copy-pasted from the cinematic gallery of Soviet films. Nevertheless, the Soviet past was not the only source of inspiration – the designer elegantly translated Russian fairy tales, imperial glory, and modern sources into fashion language.

Antonina Shapovalova

Valerie Sperling argued in connection to the pro-Kremlin youth organization that a display of women's bodies could serve as an organizational recruitment tool (for men and women alike) (2012, 241). They also send messages about the masculinity of the male political leaders with whom the women are (albeit loosely) affiliated. In this respect, the case of in-house Kremlin designer Antonina Shapovalova[7] deserves extra attention.

The cult of motherhood, purity, and romanticism became a trademark of Shapovalova's design – during one show, a model even went on the catwalk carrying a baby in her arms. In her fall/winter 2010–2011 collection, named Pobeda no. 22 and inspired by a military or, more correctly, victory theme, Shapovalova celebrated "victory, determination into the future" (Shapovalova, official website). By adding the number 22, which referred to her age at the moment of the creation of the collection, Shapovalova generated an affective link between the life of an individual and the collective experience of Victory Day.

Shapovalova's take on the military theme was about introducing the glamor and sexuality of a military uniform into the fabric of national identity and patriotism. This collection was a celebration of youth and life, showcased by young and handsome men and women in modified military uniforms. Massive ankle boots with double heel worn over coarse woolen socks spoke of power and physical strength. Altered military attire (women were dressed in open bodices) was accompanied by romantic looks of the females in knee-length dresses and long flowing garments adorning the curves of their bodies.

In the Gagarin 2.0 collection, Shapovalova continued encouraging living in the present day without much thinking, becoming pilots, poets, sincere romantics, caring fathers, and sensual lovers. "Fleeting, bright, eternally beautiful, with burning eyes gazing into the faraway enormous world, inspired and enlightened, they could wait forever for Prince Charming and believe in his sincere love, romantic heroism, and desperate altruism" (Shapovalova, official website). The designs also continued propagating sensual looks and romantic attire.

PUTINVERSTEHER

The PUTINVERSTEHER brand unites several design initiatives and caters to different fashion tastes and gender ideals. Besides long dresses in dark colors matched with traditionally decorated head pieces, it creates modern forms of wear such as jeans, bombers, tight

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leggings, and T-shirts as well as knee-length dresses with puffed skirts and a plethora of decorative elements and colors. Some clothes are decorated with the Russian flag, the image of Vladimir Putin, or motifs resembling traditional folk crafts. The brand produces fitting, yet comfortable, clothing and suits, composed of interchangeable pieces, as well as shirts and skirts showing slender and attractive bodies.

Besides the visual manifestation of adherence to national traditions, the brand's description on the website of the Set' movement[8] promotes strictly defined gender roles and the cult of a soldier, an invisible conqueror and defender – *a green polite man* – a reference to the anonymous Russian soldiers who occupied Crimea, who were referred to as "polite men" (*vezhlivyie liudi*). During the show *Obrazi Rossii* (Images of Russia) in Rostov-on-Don, a man dressed in full military uniform walked on stage holding a little girl by the hand. This symbolic appearance both alludes to Russian propaganda discourses about the *peaceful return of Crimea* to Russia and provides a link between the image of the unknown soldier and the modern Russian army, hence establishing continuity of time and legitimacy of military actions.

Patriotic fashion

Designers' search for inspiration among his or her own people and culture is intimately connected with the development of fashion globally and cannot be seen as ultimately a Russian phenomenon. In the UK, for instance, British fashion became a national promotion card (Goodrum 2005). What could be regarded as rather exceptional in modern circumstances is the fact that Russian fashion and design have such a vivid role in praising the country's leadership and as a platform for propaganda.

In the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s, Russian fashion production was mainly characterized by the presence of the established haute couture designers (Bartlett 2011). Starting from the mid-2000s small-, medium-, and big-scale designer brands catering for both high-end and low-end street fashion consumers invaded the national fashion market. By 2012 Russian fashion was highly creative, with designers regarding their work as a patriotic matter aimed at remodeling Russian identity and revitalizing the Russian fashion industry (Kalinina 2013).

In the very beginning of the 2000s, while the general fashion trend in the 1990s–2000s was under the influence of *foreignism* (*podrazhanie inostrannomu* – in Russian), only a handful of designers gambled on using the *Russian theme* in Russia. However, some, like Denis Simachev, quickly realized that the only way to make headway on the global and domestic markets was to play the Russian card (Kalinina 2013).

It can be argued that such attentiveness to national heritage within the fashion industry was a response to the perceived Westernization or Americanization of Russian culture after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The fall of the Iron Curtain opened Russia as a new market for the capitalist economy, which fast became filled with new media formats, fashion brands, and consumer goods. Shortly afterward, the popular attitude toward everything foreign started to change to, if not rejection, then mistrust and suspicion (Russia-West relations 2015; Western Lifestyles 2015). Globalization was seen in the light of cultural homogenization, when local cultures become absorbed by global trends and lose their unique features ("Globalizatsiia, Antiglobalisty, VTO" 2010). Designers decried the overwhelming presence of foreign media formats, clothes, and accessories, and wanted to boost national cultural production (Simachev 2012).

Playing the national cultural heritage card was for many designers in the 2000s a strategic move often fueled by personal interest and curiosity – they integrated elements of the

country's artistic and historic legacy they individually felt connected to – memories of childhood, animated films and comedies, and consumer products they used to enjoy. Some designers even ironically reflected on these cultural transformations:

> Sedate inhabitants of the USSR have found out about the so-called Abroad, and now they want to look "Western," showing their participation in all things foreign. In reality they have little chance of that, but for the Soviet person deficiency has never been an obstacle. (Original text. Simachev, Collection Fall/Winter 2009–2010)

While reaching practical goals of promoting their business on both domestic and international markets, many Russian designers also have more idealistic notions of contributing to the national economy and changing Soviet and early post-Soviet attitudes to fashion consumption (Kalinina 2013). The designers argue that despite the state's claims to be supporting small- and medium-size businesses and focusing on subsidizing patriotic youth activities, not everyone gets this financial support. Having hardly any funding from the state, they see their work as a form of civic participation in the county's development (Kalinina 2013). One project that has received governmental support is the Antonina Shapovalova brand.

Shapovalova developed *patriotic glamor*, a sort of glamor that glorified and emphasized the allure of military power, active patriotic civic engagement, and state-approved moral behavior. During and after the events of the Crimea annexation, this trend reached its zenith and spawned several design initiatives (Feldman 2015). In Russia, where dress functions to produce and reproduce power relations (Klingseis 2011), the emergence of such a trend deserves extra attention.

The brand was a political project that resonated with the civic action campaigns organized by Nashi. It functioned as both, using Ellul's terms (1968, 70), agitation propaganda, by calling for action to join the army or increase birth rates; and integration propaganda, by slowly indoctrinating people. The strength of fashion propaganda lies in the medium used to disseminate political messages: fashion often seems nonthreatening and hence is well-suited to take people off-guard (Atkins 2005, 52). The designs called for patriotic devotion to Russia in the form of personal involvement in supporting the state's decisions and actions, which Shapovalova called "an active civic position" (Shapovalova 2013). The language of Shapovalova's patriotism was aimed at strengthening and directing the passions of young people toward personal sacrifices for the state and the country. The brand displayed a can-do attitude, a supreme faith in the country's future, and a conviction that military service and other sacrifices for the country would ultimately bring victory.

Designs on the brand's T-shirts and half-joking messages call on young people to take an active position, saying, "You gotta join the army, my friend!" (Tebe pora v armiiu, druzhok!) and "War is not a game" (Voina ne igrushki). Others sported the St. George ribbon, which served as the main symbol for the state-supported St. George Ribbon 2010 campaign marking the 65th anniversary of the end of World War II. In a playful manner the brand promoted a positive image of the Russian Army, following the state objectives on improving the image of military service in Russia (Pravitel'stvo 2005, 2010). The brand fashioned a connection between past heroism, today's aspirations for glory, and military service. That is why the umbrella theme of the Pobeda no. 22 collection was "overcoming victory, a victory as a commitment to excellence" (Shapovalova, official website). The brand also contributed to Nashi's campaign on improving the demographic situation by producing T-shirts that declared, "Mating is pleasant and helpful!" "Razmnozhat'sya priyatno y polezno!" – hence fulfilling the aim of maximizing the country's power through reproduction of new citizens – taxpayers, nurturers, and soldiers.

Here something interesting is afoot: Nashi was an organization through which the Kremlin offered "'voluntarism' as a means to morally educate youth, here cast as a 'patriotic education' (*patrioticheskoe vospitanie*)" (Hemment 2009, 38). It presents an interesting case of the relationship between state social welfare policies and youth policies, where social responsibility was taken away from the state and put on the individual. However, Nashi did not take over the state functions, but instead cooperated intimately with the state. Hence, Nashi should be understood as a form of "governmentality that is directed primarily at the volunteers who participate" (Hemment 2009, 38).

The leaders within the movements, called "commissars," were supposed to undertake various forms of service. Shapovalova's service was communicative in nature – through the form of visual propaganda, it was supposed to mediate the message both within the youth groups united around the president and to the broader public. As the message was directed mainly inward (and only then outward), the brand's popularity on the fashion market was not so important – it reached its target audiences through youth forums such as Seliger, where Shapovalova was active. She refashioned participants of the Seliger lake youth forum and members of the Nashi movement by swapping their clothes with more colorful patriotic clothes of her own production (Potupchik 2011), and therefore articulated national politics so that the fashioning of the self was made coextensive with the fashioning of the nation. This refashioning of the young people had its goal in creating groups of people who would "sincerely" take part in "actions that become historical" (Shapovalova, official website). By turning to the country's main uniting event, Victory Day, she joined in persuading young people to commit to the protection of their own land, make sacrifices for the sake of the country – women to give birth and men to serve in the army. She called for a devoted attitude toward the victory, hence responding to growing annoyance with the official celebrations and pomposity introduced during Putin's presidency:

> Over 65 years, an emotional message became weak and is broadcast more out of inertia, and not from the heart. In this collection, I want to focus on the personal attitude to victory, to think about the place of heroism in the context of every day. (Shapovalova, official website)

Nashi and Shapovalova both exercised power and submitted to the power of others in the creation of a certain type of patriotism. In the society of spectacle with its "universal cult of luxury, fashion, and an exotic and erotic lifestyle promoted by mass media," glamor became an official ideology, which is "promoted by the political elite" (Menzel 2008, 4). "Glamor culture," with its "ideology of money, success, entertainment, and conspicuous consumption" (Rudova 2008, 12), during Vladimir Putin's third term as president has acquired another component – "patriotism spectacle."

Correct patriotic attitudes advertised by Set' have been amalgamated with Russian glamor culture, creating patriotic glamor – an outward manifestation of support for the regime. In a culture where the middle class strives to keep up with the recent fashion developments (Gusarova 2008, 15), introducing *patriotic* state-supported brands that target the mass consumer by promising the chance to become closer to the elites through consumption seems a well-considered move.

In order to do this, brands such as Shapovalova, PUTINVERSTEHER, Alexander Konasov,[9] and Anyavanya[10] link fashion with politics, hegemonic masculinity, popular spectacle, and stardom. This is not surprising in a country where politicians "have become dazzling personifications of style, wealth, social status, power, youthfulness, and conspicuous consumption" (Mesropova 2008, 12). The ultimate masculine ideal, the president, appears on Shapovalova brand underwear in slogans like "PUTin the Best" or "Vova,

ia s toboi" (Volodya, I am with you), further "fostering a macho image" that "has been one of the central features of Putin's political 'advertising' trajectory" (Sperling 2012, 242).

With Crimea the figure of Vladimir Putin entered the mass market. In 2014 images of Putin and Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov appeared on T-shirts and sweaters sold in the central department store in Moscow (Anyavanya, official website). PUTINVERSTEHER's "Modern Russia. Our days" collection features T-shirts and dresses with a portrait of Putin, sweatshirts and caps with images of machine guns, and puffed skirts in camouflage colors. Affordable prices (a dress costs around $50) make the clothes popular among ordinary people. By buying such a T-shirt, one votes with the wallet and pronounces his/her civic position.

How to become modern by supporting traditional values

The motto of the Set' movement states that its members oppose same-sex marriage and adoption into homosexual families, and declares any type of sexual relations that differ from heterosexual a deviation. Claiming a nuclear family is a must for ensuring the continuity of the human race, the movement declares having parents of both genders the *right* of a free person to have a *complete* model of relationships and choices.

Such a conservative and nonnegotiable outlook on gender relations is hardly communicated by the look of the garments produced by the brands (perhaps with the exception of a few collections that evoke more traditional dress). On the contrary, the designs are reminiscent of today's hipster culture popular in any large European city. Hence, the idea of strict gender roles stays at the level of discourse and messages rather than form. In this respect, patriotic designers follow the latest fashion trends producing modern urban wear, which includes both comfortable outfits as well as more classic dresses for women and garments for men.

Meanwhile, if taken within the context of compliance to traditional values – a rather ambiguous formulation of conservative views and support for the state – these designs illustrate how the Kremlin uses modern popular culture and technology for mediating conservative views. Consumer products become important media that propagate ideas and values, with fashion as a tool with which ideas are communicated in both the domestic and the international arena, and shape those who are involved in the production:

> It is not enough to produce good clothes. What is needed is the production of clothes that tell about us. (…). Purchasing modern clothes, we buy a message addressed to other people that we are fashionable. Hence, when we buy something that is a bit more expensive than a necessity – we pay for a message. Our goods will work for Russia. (Set', official website)

These fashion brands present a new turn in Russian fashion culture and the Kremlin's youth politics: fashion becomes an active propaganda tool that mediates state politics and ideology. The Kremlin designers show their collections during official festivities and have exclusive entrance to the most visited cultural platforms. This is a new type of fashion, geared to indoctrinate the masses.

Kremlin fashion focuses on the subjective implications of political exclusion, and concentrates on young adults who experience their own personal coming of age in the context of the modern international political crisis and events in Ukraine. They are forced to make a choice between the global world, liberal values, and cosmopolitan citizenship, on the one side, and Russia's domestic and foreign politics, newly established traditional values, and desire for global dominance, on the other. Such Putin-fashion could be called the *uniformed production of exclusion*, which reveals the interrelations between individual attire, subjectivity, and the political. PUTINVERSTEHER constructs its consumer as a rebel by giving

her/him the qualities of a hero fighting against the world order, presented in this case by the Western "Other." This is indeed an attractive identity, which creates a strong emotional bond between an individual and the motherland in danger.

This fashion is supposed to become a patriotic symbol of new Russia. In the wake of the financial crisis and economic sanctions, which led to the disappearance of several global retailers from the Russian fashion market, one might not be able to afford international brands. That is even to one's advantage, because since now on one could support the national fashion industry and hence provide a symmetric response to the West. This patriotic fashion consumerism facilitates political and civilizational liberation from perceived Western domination; meanwhile, the new Russian conspicuous consumerism metaphorically inaugurates a process of the *right* political visibility.

Fashion consumerism in this scenario is seen as a matter not only of personal sartorial satisfaction, but also of getting the country's economy back on track, articulated as a defiant stance against Western civilization. If one buys PUTINVERSTEHER, he/she supports the Russian economy. By linking this fashion design and consumption to patriotism, the contemporary pro-Kremlin designers function as a technology of governmentality, which produces consumer-patriots who are ideologically controlled through their devotion to the country. The Kremlin's fear of their own political impotency in the face of globalization and liberal values leads them to frame the latter as a threat to Russian civilization, which can be protected by consumer-patriots who are persuaded to shop for Russia.

This Russian consumer patriotism can be seen in the broader context of consumer citizenship, though being distinct from that (Cohen 2003). In this approach, consumers are equated with citizens and purchasing with voting, while consumption is portrayed as an exercise of the individual's civic role and political identity, affirming one's political position and nationality (McGovern 1998, 43). Just as white American identity in the 1930s turned from production to consumption, Russian post-1991 society became a haven for neoliberal economics, where consumption became the primary mode of Russian identity. Ironically, in official and public discourses, this is exactly what the Russians are trying to distance themselves from, while in fact using neoliberal tools and strategies. Russian patriotic consumption in the time of sanctions and economic crisis can be seen as equivalent to *responsible* American or British consumption during World War II, where the good citizens were imagined as disciplined consumers who invested their money in defense and victory (Cohen 2003).

Taking into consideration the latest concerns about young people's patriotic education and the all-encompassing nature of the new program on patriotic upbringing of Russian citizens,[11] the Set' patriotic citizenship campaigns in Russia should enable and enlist many to assert their economic and political rights and side with the *correct* patriotism. Following Antonina Shapovalova, who made a rather visible impact with her patriotic T-shirts, the new designer brands bet on conquering the mass market by creating casual wear with patriotic prints. Cheap chic, which embraces the idea that fashion should be attainable at lower, mass-market prices and allow anyone who wishes to be stylish, becomes the main platform for political indoctrination and a handy tool to exercise control over the population.

By embracing patriotic design, both Russian fashion producers and consumers are supposed to help safeguard national security by increasing birth rates, going into war, leading healthy lifestyles, and what Foucault (1988) calls subjectization or the cultivation of the self. Biopolitics exercised through patriotic fashion design "deals with population, the population as a political problem … , a biological problem, and as a power problem"

(Foucault 1976, 245). Mass-market fashion allows doing that on a mass scale, and hence affecting the population as a whole.

The interrelated processes of self-fashioning and self-care become linked to patriotism and care for the nation, where women and men are to sacrifice their bodies for the well-being of the nation. Russians are mobilized not only to publicly display their economic patriotism to the West, but also to show their enduring allegiances to the Russian state and will to sacrifice their lives as their eternal debt. Through patriotic fashion design, the Russian state tries to "rule a multiplicity of men to the extent that their multiplicity can and must be dissolved into individual bodies that can be kept under surveillance, trained, used, and, if need be, punished" (Foucault 1976, 242).

Kremlin designers via their garments and discourses reinforce the production of hegemonic masculinities and hegemonic femininities by displaying attractive and beautiful young models dressed in clothes promoting the Russian state. These politicized gender representations served, as Valerie Sperling pointed out, to attract "young men and women into activism" (2012, 252).

Nevertheless, even if the state is so active in taking over Russian popular culture and making use of fashion consumption and production in order to promote its "conservative modernization" (Trenin 2010), it is still an open question whether it can unite the Russian population in a single sense of national identity through these patriotic fashion designs. There is a chance that these patriotic brands might be successful only at the level of display and spectacle, and do little or nothing to change the underlying structures of society. Despite the regime's attempt to consolidate and regulate the social body in a centrifugal mode, an opposite, centripetal force is constantly at work. Some young designers who are not supported by the state are actively contributing to Russian fashion, reaching out to young citizens through their own online stores and fashion fairs.

Notes

1. Nashi, the "Youth Democratic Anti-Fascist Movement," claimed to be independent but in fact received financial and administrative backing from the Kremlin (see Atwal and Bacon 2012, 2009).
2. For more information about the brand see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xBrDCL4mHlI.
3. For more information about the brand see: https://www.facebook.com/pages/Putinversteher/923254937704512.
4. This is indeed a subject for profound discussion, which should be investigated through the study of specific practices and deserves particular attention. In this paper, I use in-depth interviews to try to shed light on the designers' perspective on the role of their fashion. Nevertheless, I realize that the opinions they reveal to me might be subject to the positions we had during the interview – the designers could withhold some information as well as use me to promote their agendas.
5. For more information about the brand visit its official website: http://www.denissimachev.com.
6. Similar unisex ideals, often but not exclusively inspired by Scandinavian design, can be found among collections of Moscow and St. Petersburg street-fashion brands, such as Buttermilk Garments, Perversus, and Husky.
7. For more information about the brand visit its official page: http://shapovalova.ru/.
8. For more information on Set' movement, visit their website http://проектсеть.рф/
9. For information about the brand, see www.konasov.com.
10. For information about the brand, see www.anyavanya.ru. The website also provides an extensive review of media coverage of the brand. The reviews are mostly positive and claim that the brand has had enormous success.
11. For more information, see the official website: http://www.fadm.gov.ru/directions/patrioticheskoe-vospitanie/.

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