Nationalities Papers (2020), 48: 4, 752–767
doi:10.1017/nps.2019.14

ARTICLE

The Symbol of the Motherland in the Legitimation and Delegitimation of Power in Contemporary Russia

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Abstract
The article dwells upon the use of the symbol of the "Motherland" in the legitimation and delegitimation of power. The Motherland symbolizes the matters that are essential for legitimacy-seeking: the unity of Russia, its territory and sacredness of its borders, the most important events of its history, the "authentic Russianness," and multi-ethnic peace in the country. The author argues that the Motherland serves as an important factor of the legitimation of power in contemporary Russia, which allows the authorities to have high popularity both in domestic and foreign policies. This symbol is also actively exploited by the opposition; one mode of the delegitimation of power through using the symbol of Motherland (the "populist" mode) implies the symbolic struggle for possessing this symbol, or for the right to speak on behalf of the Motherland, while another one (the "liberal" mode) implies the desacralization of the "Motherland" and deconstruction of the practices of employing the symbol by the authorities.

Keywords: symbol of the Motherland; political symbols; legitimization of power; Russian nationalism; contemporary Russian politics

"The Fold of the Motherland"

"The Motherland opens out her arms and welcomes you into her home as her own daughters and sons," the president of Russia said to the inhabitants of Crimea during his visit to Sevastopol on May 9, 2014 (Putin 2014).[1] Apparently, these words of Vladimir Putin were aimed, first, to justify Russia's policy on Crimea, explaining it as a maternal gesture and the duty of protecting her "children," and, second, to legitimize the actions of the Kremlin, which was represented thereby as a spokesperson for the interests and desires of the Motherland.

Putin's popularity remains high, which was reflected in his landslide victory during the presidential elections 2018, and scholars suggest various explanations for why the current political system enjoys such legitimacy in the eyes of the majority of Russian voters, often emphasizing the role of nationalism in the legitimation of power. In order to contribute to the examination of the modes of nationalist legitimation, I analyze the ways in which the authorities use the symbol of the Motherland.

The "Motherland"/"Mother Russia" has been one of the most important symbols of Russian history for many centuries—an element of the myth-symbol complex of Russian culture. Starting with its appearance as "Mother Earth" in pagan times, the mother image of the country has been present in Russian culture (literature, philosophy, arts, etc.) throughout its whole history (Riabov 2007). The data of sociological surveys testify to the importance of the symbol in the eyes of contemporary Russians. As All-Russian poll of ROMIR (September 29, 2015) showed that out of 1,500 participants to the question what they associated the Homeland with, 26 percent of respondents answered "with the image of mother," 19 percent with "a Russian woman," and

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https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2019.14 Published online by Cambridge University Press

11 percent with the woman's image from Iraklii Toidze's poster "The Motherland Calls!", which was created at the beginning of the Great Patriotic War in 1941 ("Obraz Rodiny – v nature" 2015).

Significantly, the researchers of theoretical issues of nationalism addressed the mother image of Russia in their works (Anderson 1983, 172; Smith 1997, 46). The first prominent research focused on this image was published 30 years ago: Joanne Hubbs' *Mother Russia: The Feminine Myth in Russian Culture* (1988) has aroused considerable debate and at the same time provided significant impetus to study the symbol. Since then the symbol has been examined in works on history, linguistics, art, philosophy, philology, and women's studies (Ebert 2003; Engström 2017; Gill 2011; Hemenway 1997; Riabov 2007; Rutten 2010; Sandomirskaya 2001; Wilkinson 2018; and others); an attempt of a comparative analysis of mother allegories of European nations deserves a special mention (Edmondson 2003). However, the symbol has not been explored with regard to contemporary Russian politics, and essential questions referred to political science have not been investigated yet. What place does the Motherland symbol occupy in the political symbolism of post-Soviet Russia? How is it employed in the legitimation of power? What role does it play in contesting the dominant narratives, and how does the use of this symbol by opposition discourses differ from the Kremlin's use? What specificity of the power legitimation does the use of the Motherland symbol reveal? The article aims to respond to these research questions, and to examine how political actors use the symbol of the Motherland both in the legitimation of power and its delegitimation during Putin's time.

Consequently, the article is divided into five sections. The first section considers approaches to researching the mothering of the nation in the legitimation of power. The next section examines how the mother symbol of Russia is exploited in maintaining the legitimacy of power. The third part discusses the use of this symbol to delegitimate power by the political opposition. The fourth section analyzes the case of Alexey Navalny, an opposition politician, who was accused of desecrating the Motherland symbol in 2017. Finally, in conclusion, I consider how the use of this symbol reflects the specific features of the legitimation of power in contemporary Russia and what characteristics of political culture it informs.

Mothering a Nation and the Legitimation of Power

As Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1995) note, the purpose of legitimation is to explain and validate the existing institutions so that their presence is seen by individuals as subjectively plausible and acceptable. Though the concept of legitimation cannot be limited to the sphere of politics as such, it occupies a particular place in the issues of political power. Yet all political systems need legitimation; it has special significance in the case of hybrid regimes (Mazepus, Veenendaal, McCarthy-Jones, and Vásquez 2016) that combine some democratic and some autocratic elements in significant measure (Hale 2011, 34; Russia's political system as a hybrid regime is discussed in Colton and Hale 2014; Hale 2011; and Mazepus et al. 2016).

Max Weber's ideas marked the beginning of a descriptive approach to legitimacy as the belief in the authorities' right to rule (see Beetham 2013, 6). In Johannes Gerschewski's (2013, 8) view, legitimation is seen as the process of gaining support through an empirical form of legitimacy belief. Rodney Barker went even further pointing out that "there are not two separate things, 'legitimacy' and 'belief in legitimacy'" (2001, 19). (On discussions on relationship between normative and descriptive approaches, see Beetham 2013.)

In creating this belief in legitimacy, symbols plan an important role: legitimation may imply active exploitation of manipulative techniques—the appeals to symbolic and expressive aspects of power (Eriksen 1987). Symbols are essential for political legitimation because they are connected with power relations. There are various forms of mutual influence of politics and symbolism. Political symbols can help to elevate some ideologies over others, and, conversely, can be used to challenge dominant national narratives, either by amending them or by outright replacing them with alternative ones (Nieguth and Raney 2017, 89). In the process of challenging the direction of

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nations, existing symbols are replaced, discovered, re-discovered, constructed, re-constructed, invented and re-invented (Elgenius 1991, 20). In addition to promoting own one's symbols, discrediting an opponents' symbols also serves as an essential practice of legitimation. That is why contesting for interpretation of symbols serves as a necessary element of symbolic politics; this struggle for interpretation is facilitated because, in Anthony Cohen's (1985, 15) opinion, symbols do not so much express meaning as give us the capacity to make meaning. As Gabriela Elgenius (2011, 16) observes, symbols are effective precisely because they are ambiguous and imprecise, and their meanings are subjective without undermining their collective nature.

Among other characteristics of symbols that make them especially convenient for political actors, one should note, above all, their ability to serve as tools of inclusion and exclusion. Symbolism is by nature "boundary-creating" (Elgenius 2011, 13); every symbol contributes to bind an in-group and juxtaposes it to out-groups (Phillips DeZalia and Moeschberger 2014). Besides that, symbols connected with the principal values of a community and eventually related to myths are able to trigger a big emotional response (Phillips DeZalia and Moeschberger 2014). Finally, symbols offer a relatively inexpensive way to challenge or justify particular political agendas (Nieguth and Raney 2017, 89–90).

Regarding the role of symbols in the legitimation of power, let us turn our attention to those that relate to family and gender relations. A gender discourse has a broader relevance and significance beyond the scope of sexual relations, because it contributes to maintaining the collective identity, establishing social inequality, and providing political mobilization.

First, a gender discourse plays a role in the politics of identity. Building on Fredrik Barth's (1969) ideas, Nira Yuval-Davis has suggested that gender symbols should be interpreted as such "symbolic border guards" that, alongside other markers, identify people as members or nonmembers of a given community (1997, 23). Symbolic border guards of this kind are especially effective because stereotypical views on the qualities of men and women and the picture of relations between the sexes can easily be correlated with an individual's personal experience. As a result, they lend themselves to being presented as obvious, understandable, and thus legitimate (Blom 2000, 6). To provide the feeling of identity, political actors juxtapose images of men and women of "us" to men and women of "them," exaggerate the differences between "us" and "them," and evaluate the former more positively than the latter.

An equally significant factor is the role that a gender discourse plays in the interpretation of power and subordination. As Joanne Scott has noted, gender is both "a constitutive element of social relationships … and … a primary way of signifying relationships of power" (Scott 1986, 1067). The hierarchical relations between the sexes are used as a matrix that legitimates other forms of social inequality. Thus, the use of gender metaphors serves as an effective mechanism to produce power hierarchies.

Last, gendered imagery is an essential part of political and war mobilization. The image of man as a defender of women contributes prominently in constructing the canons of masculinity and femininity. In particular, representing warriors as protectors of women and children makes war an attractive option—along with the cult of heroism, strength, and ruthlessness as masculine attributes (Tickner 2001, 57; Yuval-Davis 1997, 15). Joshua Goldstein asserts that "gender identity becomes a tool with which societies induce men to fight" (2001, 252). That is why images of women's suffering and sexual violence over them—as well as an image of dishonored nation—are widely used in discourse of political and war mobilization as an appeal to the gender identity of men (Yuval-Davis 1997, 94).

A special place in mobilization practices belongs to the image of the country as a suffering, violated, desecrated mother. The mythological beliefs that the earth is a source of fertility and abundance are widespread among many cultures. The mother image of a country became especially popular in the time of Modernity that was connected with the emergence of nationalism. It is precisely this that explains the broad dissemination of female, and especially mother, national personifications ("Britannia," "Mother Svea," "Germania," "Marianne," "Mother Serbia," "Mother

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Latvia," and others; Bracewel 2000; Edmonson 2003; Gailite 2013; Landes 2001; Major 2012; Mosse 1985, 23, 64).

An essential role that is played by gendered imagery in nationalism are noted by many researchers. According to Katherine Verdery's definition, nationalism is a classifying discourse that uses a nation as a basic operator in a widespread system of social classification (Verdery 1993). This classification is ensured with the help of various markers, including gendered ones.

The intersections of gender and nationalist discourses provide mutual support and legitimation: comparing the nation to the family is an effective way to position a given community as an organic one and to reify and naturalize a nation. The authors of an article that focuses on the role of the motherland image in national anthems express a remarkable opinion that the metaphor of an "imagined family" is a more useful concept toward understanding the nation than that of an "imagined community." The former helps to highlight links between gender and nationhood as family relations in four ways: (1) providing a clear, hierarchical structure; (2) prescribing social roles and responsibilities; (3) being linked to positive affective connotations; and (4) reifying social phenomena as biologically determined (Lauenstein, Murer, Boos, and Reicher 2015).

Thus, the image of the country as a mother is widespread not only in Russia. As a political symbol it serves as a means to legitimate a given national community as well as authorities who speak on behalf of it, contributes to political and war mobilization, and provides citizens' readiness to defend their country and sacrifice their own lives. At the same time, one should consider additional factors that make the image especially significant in Russian culture. Above all, the leading Russian thinkers (Fedor Dostoevsky, Nikolai Berdyaev, Vasilii Rozanov, Ivan Il'in, Alexey Losev, and many others) believe that the mother image of the country is one of the main symbols in Russian culture that influences Russian mentality and Russian history significantly (Riabov 2007). They consider the mother image of Russia as a source of the country's uniqueness; in other words, it functions as a diacritic—a symbolic border guard. In addition, since placing emphasis on the Russia's difference from the West has played an essential role in various versions of politics of national identity for several centuries, the country is attributed with the traits that are alternative to the characteristics of the imaginary West (individualism, rationality, secularity, and arrogance). The symbol of Russia as a woman—of Russia as a mother—serves as one of the symbols of this juxtaposition, being considered as an embodiment of the traits that are marked as feminine [*sobornost'* (all-togetherness), irrationality, humility, unselfishness, religiousness] (Riabov 2007). Laura Edmondson pointed out that "in the intense debates over Russia's destiny and its 'essential' difference from 'the West,' the image of 'Mother Russia' (*Matushka Rus'*) has become a commonplace, with both positive and negative connotations, depending on the viewpoint of the writer" (2003, 53). Finally, the mother image of the country has been used in juxtaposing to not only the West but also the Russian state. Starting with the *narodniks* (revolutionary populists), the opposition considered the state as essentially alien to Russian people and Russian soul, and employed the symbol of Mother Russia as a tool of criticizing the authorities. That is why it was used during domestic political conflicts—for instance, in the time of revolutions and the civil war of the 20th century (Hemenway 1997; Riabov 2017). Sometimes this distinction of two principles, the "land" and the "state," takes a form of juxtaposing the "Motherland" (*Rodina*) and the "Fatherland" (*Otechestvo*). According to data of a sociological survey on social views, contemporary Russians also differentiate the "Fatherland" from the Motherland: the former is associated primarily with state, ideology, army, politics, and mind; meanwhile the latter is rather linked with nature, culture, language, family, and heart (Riabov 2007, 247–248).

The Symbol of the Motherland in the Legitimation of Power

Since the symbol of the Motherland so important in Russian culture, it would be surprising if political actors did not seek to capitalize on it in political discourse, including issues concerning the legitimacy of power. The mother symbol of the country has been exploited in the legitimation and delimitation of power in all periods of Russian history (for detailed history of "Mother Russia,"

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see Riabov 2007). The symbol of the Soviet Motherland occupied a central place in the symbolic order of the USSR, and the dissolution of the country was accompanied by the deconstruction of Soviet symbols, inter alia the Motherland.

In the 1990s, the word Motherland virtually disappeared from the official vocabulary. It is worth noting that Boris Yeltsin tried to avoid using it; in particular, the word had never been employed in his six Presidential addresses to the Federal Assembly in 1994–1999.[2] In this period, the image of Mother Russia was largely a part of the left-wing and patriotic left rhetoric. It must also be pointed out that during the events of the 1993 Russian constitutional crisis, the National Salvation Front named its manifesto "The Motherland Calls!" which aimed to overthrow Yeltsin's "pro-American regime."

The "rehabilitation" of the symbol occurred during Putin's presidency. It was not by accident that the authorities turned to this symbol exactly at that time; that was determined by the character, ideology, and goals of the Russian political system, and it apparently corresponded with Putin's personality and beliefs. There are a number of factors that shape the Kremlin's interest in this symbol. During his first two presidential terms, Putin faced the challenge of preventing the disintegration of the country and to form the new Russian identity that would connect all periods of its national history (Cannady and Kubicek 2014, 6). The "Motherland" features as one of the symbolic resources of the interethnic unity; the metaphor of kinship associating the country with a mother implies natural and thereby inextricable ties among the ethnic communities of the Russian Federation.[3] To shape Russian identity, the Kremlin restored many elements of the Soviet political semiosphere that the Communist party usually employed (Sil and Chen 2004); for instance, the authorities resurrected the melody of the Soviet anthem as the national anthem of the Russian Federation. The Motherland symbol is from the same series of symbols, and Putin turned to it in his first presidential campaign in March 2000 (Riabov 2007, 234–235).

One more element of the Soviet semiosphere, the symbol of the victory in the Great Patriotic War, was also employed in the shaping of the Russian identity. Nikolay Koposov (2014) suggested that the narrative about the war became a "foundational myth" of Putin's Russia. Meanwhile the image of the Motherland occupies a very important place in both the war propaganda and the practices of commemoration in the postwar era. It is no wonder that according to the survey conducted in 2010 by VCIOM, 69 percent of Russians called the monument "The Motherland Calls!" on Mamayev Kurgan in Volgograd the main symbol of the Soviet people's struggle against Nazism ("Pochti 70 % rossiian …" 2010).

The next stage of increasing the Kremlin's interest in the symbol was determined by worsening relations between Russia and the West in 2007–2008. Since then, various political actors have emphasized anti-Western connotations of the Motherland symbol noted above.

Finally, one more impact is connected with a so-called conservative turn that fell on Putin's third presidential term. The protest movement in 2011–2013 that was labeled as the pro-Western "fifth column" caused the official discourse to start also exploiting the Motherland symbol in the domestic political confrontation and against the liberal opposition.

Therefore, the symbol became a significant element in symbolic politics of the current authorities, and one can discern several legitimation strategies[4] that have turned to it for help: (i) legitimating the national community on behalf of which the authorities speak; (ii) equating the authorities with the state and the state in its own turn with the Motherland; (iii) legitimating the ruler through promoting the idea of his particular relations with Russia; (iv) positioning the authorities as defenders of the Motherland from external enemies; and (v) representing the political opposition as internal enemies of the Motherland.

The first strategy relates to the politics of Russian identity regarding pursuing the goal to legitimate the community on behalf of which the authorities speak; thanks to this, citizens imagine it as natural and legitimate. The politics of Russian identity shapes the feeling of belonging to Russia, promotes solidarity, and strengthens external symbolic boundaries. Let us examine in detail how using the Motherland helps the nation to carry out identity politics in these directions.

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Above all, the Motherland contributes to shaping the feeling of belonging to Russia. Positioning Russia as a mother implies that the ties between the country and her citizens are organic in nature; thereby these ties are declared everlasting and based on not free choice or contractual relations but on kinship. In addition, this loyalty is evaluated as the supreme loyalty of an individual. Since the native land is a source of fertility and abundance, and she feeds all her children, they are in irredeemable debt owed to her.

Then, the symbol is exploited in forming solidarity within the country; Russia is portrayed as a mother for representatives of all ethnic groups in the state. As Andrey Makarychev and Alexandra Yatsyk (2017) note, the key biopolitical metaphor widely used in the Kremlin's rhetoric is the family. In the same context, the mother symbol is often employed in regional politics, contributing to the legitimation and inclusion of a region in the single political community. This can be illustrated using discourse analysis of the legitimation of Crimea joining the Russian Federation. The use of this symbol is aimed to exemplify the idea that Crimea belongs to Russia: a mother allegedly has special rights to her child who was born and raised by her. Thereby Russia's intervention into the situation on the peninsula is characterized as not only her right but also her obligation due to the commitment, which every mother has to her own children under threat.[5] In addition, representations of the country as a mother allow it to mobilize instantly the meanings which the mother symbol has received in the history of the world culture: Russia is a kind, peace-loving, and selfless country whose politics is guided by the care of life. To represent one's country with images of pure, chaste womanhood is a common practice of war propaganda, intended to demonstrate both the purity of state intentions and the rightness of its participation in the conflict (Mosse 1985, 90).

Finally, using the mother symbol of Russia strengthens external symbolic boundaries, highlighting the differences between "us" and "them." Current study on Russian nationalism interprets Russians' treatment of their country as the mother, as specific characteristics of Russian culture, a diacritic. For instance, Americans are characterized as individuals who lack sense of a motherland: being a nation of immigrants, they can never understand Russians in this aspect (Riabova and Romanova 2015). Russians' devotion to the Motherland becomes more and more alien to citizens of the European Union, where values of family and national identity are destroyed purposefully now. The hegemonic discourse in Russian media presents the EU as "*Gayropa*," as a degenerate civilization, and the changes in gender order (such as the legalization of same-sex marriage, the destruction of traditional roles of men and women, the growing influence of feminism, and the crisis of the traditional family unit) are characterized as clear evidence of this (Riabov and Riabova 2014).

The second strategy equates the authorities with the Russian state, and the state is equated with the Motherland. Besides the famous monuments at Piskaryovskoye Cemetery in St. Petersburg or on Mamaev Kurgan in Volgograd, dozens of Motherland sculptures have been erected as war memorials in big cities and small villages, and the participation of officials in commemorative practices serves as a means to associate the authorities with the Motherland. These rituals contribute to positioning them as representatives of the Motherland and to creating ways for the population to express support for them. Another way is the practice of using leaflets and posters that contain the images of the Motherland to call on citizens to vote for the "ruling party" in election campaigns (see, for example, "Rodina-mat" 2015).

The third strategy is connected with the legitimation of a ruler of the country through promoting the idea of his particular relationship with Russia. The concept of hierogamy—the sacred marriage between the ruler and his or her land—has been well-known in political mythology since the ancient Near East times (Kantorowicz 1957). In Russian medieval texts, the prince was considered as the defender of Russia's land and keeper of her honor (Chernaia 1991). The image of the sacred marriage was exploited as a resource of the legitimation of power in the Muscovite Rus, the Russian Empire, and in the USSR (Hubbs 1988, 188–189; Riabov 2007, 118–120, 129–130; Riabov 2017; Riabova 2008, 11). Currently, the idea of the "sacred marriage" seems too exotic, and if it is articulated, then it is in a half-serious manner: for instance, after the president's divorce in 2013,

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Iosif Kobzon, a Russian singer and influential State Duma deputy, said that "Putin married Russia" ("Iosif Kobzon …" 2015). However, this idea continues to be employed indirectly—for instance, in a statement like this: "Russia is a woman; today she needs a reliable husband" (quoted in Riabova 2008, 156–158). It is not surprising that emphasizing the traits of a "real man," above all, in regards to Putin, is widespread in political rhetoric. The image of Putin as a defender and savior of Russia-woman is an essential part of his charismatic legitimacy. In this context, the eroticization of his image, discussed in a number of works, contributes to legitimating his power (Riabov and Riabova 2014; Sperling 2015; Wood 2016).

The fourth strategy is portraying the Kremlin as a defender of the Motherland from external enemies. The mother image of Russia has served as a very important part of representations of war in Russian culture for several centuries. The "Motherland" is characterized as vulnerable, suffering, calling for help, mighty, and invincible; one may note that employing such female allegories of nations is widespread in the war discourse in many cultures. The discourse of "Mother Russia" has a tremendous mobilization potential: a person is called to sacrifice his or her own life as well as lives of others in the name of the Motherland defense. The image plays a significant role in practices of commemoration: a figure of mother who mourns the loss of her sons and daughters occupies a notable place in memories of wars.

Though the Motherland image is mobilized in wartime to the highest degree, the current confrontation with the West draws an attention to this aspect of the image once again. It is noteworthy that the Kremlin considers the defense of the symbol of the Motherland itself as the imperative, particularly those versions of the symbol that are connected with memories of the Great Patriotic War. That idea manifests itself in the authorities' reaction to including the Volgograd monument "The Motherland Calls!" in the list of "the most absurd buildings of the Soviet era that are still standing" by *Business Insider* in 2015. Journalists and social network users expressed their outrage over the magazine's decision; the leading "United Russia" politicians (for instance, Minister of Culture Vladimir Medinsky) made strong statements against this US news website (Riabova and Romanova 2015).

The defense of the symbol of the Motherland has became a part of the Kremlin's politics of memory that is directed against the attempts to revise the views on the World War II made in the last decade—the attempts which understandably make a painful impression on the majority of Russians. The Immortal regiment march, which related to this to a great extent, received a special resonance in the situation when the leaders of the Western countries (including US president, British prime-minister, France's president, and the German chancellor) denied attending the Victory Day celebrations in Moscow in 2015 because of situation in Ukraine. It is significant that these representations of the Immortal Regiment march widely employ the Motherland symbol. For instance, the article named "'The Immortal Regiment': The Russian People are Rejoicing, the State Department Is Going Crazy" contained some indicative accusations of betrayal of the Motherland addressed to those political forces within Russia that were critical to the march:

> Washington's paid lickspittles … started wailing, competing [with] one another, that it is all "a staged fake action of twelve million rent-a-crowds." Apparently, they judge everyone by themselves—they do not bat an eyelash without money. They live in accordance with liberal and libertarian principle "dog eats dog" and so they do not love anybody at all—nor the Motherland or their relatives. They cannot understand how a person is able to feel ties to ancestors, how it is possible to worry about the Motherland and to place her interests before private interests. Their propaganda places emphasis that the Russians' living conditions have worsened … not realizing that to a great number of people that is a small price to pay for liberating their Motherland from the external dependence. (Ovchinnikov 2015)

Thus, representations of the political opposition as traitors of the Motherland—as her infidel children, and authorities as her defenders from them—are another legitimation strategy. The opposition is characterized not only as the opponent of the Kremlin but also as the accomplice

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of external enemies of Russia. Obviously pro-Western liberals are ideally suited to this role in the situation of the current tensions between Russia and the West. This strategy has become especially prevalent since the beginning of the protest movement in 2011. Right after the earliest street actions, the Kremlin started accusing protest organizers, and sometimes their participants, of being the paid agents of the West (Rutland and Kazantsev 2016). Putin, on the rally at Luzhniki Stadium (February 23, 2012), told protesters "not to look abroad, not to scuttle to the side, and not to betray the Motherland" (Putin 2012). Pro-Kremlin actors represented the protests as a break of the moral obligation toward the country, stressing that the opposition did not fight against "United Russia" but against Mother Russia.

The symbol was involved in the practices of mobilization for rallies in support of Putin that took place in February 2012. It is significant that the images of the Great Patriotic War were widely utilized; this contributed to portraying the protests as organized by external enemies and thereby quite dangerous for the very existence of the country. In January 2012, while preparing for the meeting named "For Russia—Against the Orange Revolution!" which took place on Poklonnaya Hill on February 4, the Chairman of the Union of Orthodox Citizens of Russia suggested, "Now it is a matter of the dismemberment of Russia. This is the aim of the today's Orange revolution! The Motherland, Russia is calling us!" (Lebedev 2012). The "Motherland" called for the rally on the Vorobyovy Gory, which was to take place in February 2012. The rally leaflet contained the Toidze's image and the words:

> Are you going to join the enemies and to help them in betraying the Motherland? … Yes, we are dissatisfied with the authorities. We are fed up with "United Russia." However, we cannot protest together with the "oranges." Because their goals are opposed to our goals.… We want to live in the strong and prosperous country—they want to break up Russia and deprive us of the Motherland. (Agumava 2012)

This image was used in a remarkable context on a demotivator, "Russia Has Made the Choice," that got popularity among users of the Russian Internet. The picture was devoted to one of the remarkable events of the parliamentary campaign of 2011: in November, shortly before the elections, an Orthodox shrine, a part of the Cincture of the Theotokos, was held in the Cathedral of Christ the Savior. Pro-Kremlin media interpreted Russians' wide interest in it (more than 3 million believers had come to touch the Cincture) as both loyalty to the Orthodox faith and support of the authorities. The demotivator contains Toidze's image of the Motherland that acquires the features the of Mother of God. Meanwhile liberal opposition leaders—Boris Berezovsky, Boris Nemtsov, and Alexei Navalny—are portrayed as the "agents of the State Department" and the enemies of the Motherland and Orthodox Christianity ("Rossiia sdelala vybor …" 2011).

The matter of the feminist punk-rock group Pussy Riot, who protested at the Cathedral of Christ the Savior on February 21, 2012, became a more remarkable event of the protest movement. In covering this action, the author of the article entitled, "Let Us Tear Away Mother Russia's Skirts!", which was published during the trial preparation period, employed the image of desecrated Motherland. He stated that this action had manifested the Pussy Riot members' scorn to Mother Russia, just like that manifested in the action of Lazar Kaganovich, who "had exploded the Cathedral of Christ the Savior with the words: 'Let us tear away Mother Russia's skirts!' They tried to 'tore it away' as it had been done by the Bolsheviks in the past …" (Gavrov 2012). It should also be mentioned that these words, which had allegedly been said by Kaganovich, were interpreted as a euphemism for the "rape of Russia" in nationalist media (Riabov 2007, 231–232).

The Symbol of the Motherland in the Delegitimation of Power

Thus, the Motherland symbol serves as one of the pillars of the legitimacy of power; that is why the opponents of the authorities have paid serious attention to it as well, throughout Russia's history.

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One can discern two different modes of the delegitimation of power in Russia through the Motherland symbol, which I have suggested defining conditionally as the "populist" mode and the "liberal" one.

The former mode implies the symbolic struggle for possessing this symbol—for the right to speak on behalf of the Motherland. While in the discourse of the authorities the "Motherland" is equated to the state, then in the populist discourse it is equated to the "people." The opposition represents Russia as a mother suffering from the Kremlin's violence and themselves as her loyal children who want to save her from it. This probably dates as far back as the 16th century, in connection with the appearance of the concept of Holy Rus'. Prince Andrey Kurbsky wrote of the allies of Ivan the Terrible, "They have gnawed through the belly of their mother, the sacred Russian land, who gave birth to them and raised them, to her own misfortune and ruin!" (Kurbskii 1986, 319; see also 271).

Various populist discourses employ the Motherland symbol using their own delegitimation strategies. The Russian ethnic nationalist movements represent Russia as a mother of exclusively (or above all) ethnic Russians. Ethnic aliens are characterized as the threat to the Motherland (this is particularly true for anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim discourses). The Kremlin is accused of ignoring the difficult situation of ethnic Russians and supporting non-Russian ethnic groups (Rutland 2010). The authorities consider the use of the symbol by ethnic nationalists to be a danger for the country; it is reflected in the fact that the Federal List of Extremist Materials includes photo and leaflets named as follows: "The Motherland calls again to fight! Join the fighters against the alien occupants! Russia is for ethnic Russians!," "The Motherland," "I am a patriot. This land is mine! This is my Motherland! Wake up, Slavic people! The Motherland is in danger! The Motherland needs your will!" ("Federal'nyi spisok …" 2017).

The different meanings are attributed to the symbol in the rhetoric of another oppositional force —the Communist Party—that bitterly criticizes the authorities for the "anti-people social policy." This policy is sometimes called the "rape of the Motherland."[6]

The loyal conservatives from the Izborsk club position themselves as proponents of a strong state (*gosudarstvenniki*). They support the president but criticize Dmitry Medvedev's government, accusing it of liberal politics and "anti-people decisions." In their rhetoric and graphics, the image of Russia as a woman serves, on one hand, as a symbol of statehood (*derzhanovst'*), might, and glory of the country, and on the other hand, as the Motherland's suffering from the liberal politics of the pro-Western elite (see, for example, Izborskii klub 2014; Prokhanov 2018). The declared aim of the Izborsk club activity is to unite Red and White ideas of Russia; it is remarkable that its leader, Aleksandr Prokhanov, promotes the idea of a monument to Red–White reconciliation, which would feature a woman symbolizing the Motherland and two soldiers at her feet: a Soviet one and a tsarist one (Laruelle 2016, 635–636).

Prokhanov is also close to the party named "The Motherland" (*Rodina*), whose political evolution is typically for left-wing opposition in Russia. Though the party appeared in 2003 allegedly as the Kremlin's project, with the goal of drawing support away from the opposition Communist Party, it, in positioning itself as a champion of ethnic Russians, started challenging the authorities and criticizing them for social inequality and interethnic policy (Rutland 2010, 127). As a result, in 2005 it was banned from taking part in the Moscow regional elections on the charge of inciting ethnic hatred (Goode 2012, 13).

In 2012 the party reappeared; now it represents itself overtly as "the President of Russia's system party" (and even the "President's special forces") and condemns the liberal opposition's protests as a "nihilistic riot" (Zhuravliov 2012). The party "Manifesto" contains the following words: "The party unites active and courageous people who are ready to work for Russia and fight for the Motherland —for the future of our children" ("Manifest partii 'Rodina'" 2012).

The "liberal" mode of the delegitimation of power implies the desacralization of the Motherland and deconstruction of the Kremlin's practices of employing the symbol. The representatives of the liberal opposition disparage using the symbol because it is allegedly exploited by the authorities for justifying irresponsibility of the state, for promoting lack of respect for individuals, and for ignoring

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the value of human lives. They declare that associating the country with a mother and the citizens with children is irrelevant for understanding social relations in Russia and is dangerous for democratic values. This mode makes the case to promote not a family, but contractual relations between the state and its citizens.[7]

Let us consider the "liberal" delegitimation strategies with the help of the symbol. Above all, such deconstruction is provided in the context of condemning patriotism, which is supposedly opposed to human rights and incites xenophobia and chauvinism in Russian society. A prominent representative of the protest movement claims that even the very word "motherland" should be labeled as "socially dangerous"—like the word "patriotism" and unlike, for instance, the word "freedom" (Turkova 2012).

In addition, the discourse of the opposition stresses that the "motherland" is just a metaphor that is cynically exploited by the Kremlin to manipulate the citizens' feelings (see, for example, Pussy Riot 2016).

Besides that, this symbol helps the authorities in legitimacy-seeking and dressing up the true character of the treatment of Russia's citizens by the contemporary state. In the eyes of the liberal opposition, since the state is completely alien and hostile toward its citizens, the image of Russia as a stepmother is more suitable for the country. This image became especially popular in the context of the so-called "Dima Yakovlev law" (2012), which banned the adoption of Russian children by foreign citizens (Loskutova and Agranat 2012).

Finally, the use of the symbol excuses the absolute power of the state and violation of human rights, making the people believe in the inevitability of self-sacrifice. For instance, in 2015 in criticizing Russia's policy in Ukraine, Dmitry Bykov, an opposition journalist, published a poem in which he had created the image of the Motherland as a symbol that the Kremlin uses to manipulate Russians' feelings and to claim new victims: "The Motherland is sacred for all eternity, is always justified by tombs of ancestors, even flip-flopping time after time, even devouring her children" (Bykov 2015). This motif is particularly notable in the actions of St. Petersburg art group "The Motherland." The members of the group declare that the main purpose of their activity is the deconstruction of the symbol of the Motherland. In their opinion, the "Motherland" is a goddess of death, corpses, earth, and the underworld, and the service to the Motherland is a veiled desire for death (Savelieva 2017).

The Motherland in the Legitimation and Delegitimation of Power Today: The Case of Alexei Navalny

The methods of legitimation and delegitimation of power in today's Russia became evident quite significantly in the case of opposition politician Alexei Navalny and his team in March 2017. Organizing the anticorruption rally that took place on March 26, Navalny made a cross-country tour to open presidential campaign headquarters in Russian cities. When in one of the cities, a critic of the Kremlin was doused with a green topical antiseptic known as *zelyonka*, the critic's team decided to use this incident for PR, turning a green-colored face into a sort of a calling card of Navalny's supporters. Preparing for the politician's arrival in Volgograd, his supporters photoshopped the main symbol of the city, the monument "The Motherland Calls!," and published an image in which the face and a hand of the woman in the sculpture were colored green.

This prompted a negative reaction among some of Volgograd's inhabitants. On March 23, a civil petition was posted online, in which the "veterans and residents of Volgograd and Volgograd Oblast" demanded to bring to responsibility "the culprits of the mockery of the monument" ("Rossiane prizvali …" 2017). On the day of an anti-corruption rally, pro-Kremlin activists picketed the Prosecutor General's Office in Moscow with demands to punish the supporters of Navalny for "desecrating the monument" ("Grazhdanskie aktivisty trebuiut …" 2017), and in May the criminal proceedings were initiated on the charge of the "rehabilitation of Nazism" ("Iz-za kollazha s 'Rodinoi-mater'iu' …" 2017). All these events received wide coverage in the Russian media: dozens

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of publications in national and regional media, giving rise to hundreds of commentaries, allow us to identify a spectrum of views on what place the symbol occupies in today's Russia.

First, let us analyze the perspective of those who blamed the action. They considered it as disrespectful to the monument and a mockery of the memory of the defenders of Stalingrad (the sculpture is a central figure of the memorial where there are the remains of more than 34,000 fallen warriors), and the Great Patriotic War in general. Moreover, that was interpreted as a demonstration of negative attitudes to the history of Russia since the Volgograd monument is one of the main symbols of the country. These critics emphasized that this action had not been accidental for the Navalnists. At best, it displayed their alienness to the country and non-understanding it (Grishin 2017; "Volgograd vstal na dyby" 2017;). At worst, this testifies to their hatred of Russia (Grishin 2017). As previously mentioned, the idea that liberals are promoting Russophobia is widespread, and stigmatizing the Navalnists as pro-Western liberals helped to represent them as the fifth column. Significantly, many authors drew parallels between this action and the Pussy Riot performance in the Cathedral ("Rodina-mat' v zelionke …" 2017). A special role in ostracizing the action was played by framing it as an attempt to change the interpretation of the World War II that is supported by majority of Russian citizens. In this regard, Eduard Limonov stated, "The Navalnists who desecrated the Motherland monument are on an equal footing with Polish, Ukrainian, and Baltic barbarians who continue to desecrate the Soviet soldiers' graves" ("Eduard Limonov …" 2017). It is notable that many authors and commenters tried to explain this action by referring to Navalny's political biography: at one time he had been linked to the Russian ethnic nationalist movement, so this fact was exploited in attributing neo-Nazi beliefs to him. In particular, Vladimir Soloviev, a famous political journalist, characterized him explicitly as a "Nazi" (Medialeaks.ru 2017), and the author of the article published in *Komsomolskaia Pravda* called him a "Fuehrer" (Grishin 2017); one month later Gennady Zyuganov, the leader of the Communist Party, stated that the new Fuehrer had appeared in Russia ("Zuganov zaiavil o poiavlenii …" 2017).

As for those who supported the action, it is noteworthy that only a few social network users criticized the Volgograd monument from a "liberal" point of view, demanding to expose the Soviet propaganda myths, while an absolute majority of authors and commenters did not question the grandeur of the monument or the importance of the event that it symbolizes. Navalny and people from his camp denied the participation of the sympathizers in the picture posted online. It is notable that Navalny himself, upon his arrival in Volgograd, visited Mamaev Kurgan, took a photo near the monument, and Tweeted it with the words, "I went right to look at it. What a power! The great monument to the great events" (Navalny Twitter 2017). Summing up the results of his visit, he wrote in LiveJournal that "The Motherland Calls!" was in poor condition because the funds aimed for its repair had been stolen by corrupt officials: "For many years the main Victory monument has been in a state of disrepair.… Everyone is invited to participate in the rally on March 26! Let's get our stolen money back and restore the Motherland" ("Volgograd: ochen kruto" 2017). In other words, he positions himself as a defender of the Motherland—both the monument and Russia—from the authorities' corruption. Many of his supporters voiced the same opinion in the Comments: "The Motherland calls. March 26" (Anton Griboedov, comment on Navalny Twitter 2017). Another commenter wrote: "The Motherland is a symbol of the people's fighting against the occupants. Navalny is fighting against the crooks and thieves who are the today's occupants of our country" (Yevgenii Danilchenko, comment on "Volgograd: ochen kruto" 2017). Navalny's supporters resented that the authorities had tried to hijack the Motherland "opinions" and "evaluations"; for example, "Why do these idiots decide for the Motherland, whose side is she on? … She is for Navany!" (Echo of Moscow 2017).

Therefore, Navalny's case demonstrates that today the Motherland symbol is exploited by both the Kremlin's supporters and its opponents who compete for the right to interpret its meanings. The contemporary political discourse attaches significant importance to the symbol. The Kremlin and loyalists employ it for drawing symbolic boundaries, both external and internal; in this matter, the non-system opposition is labeled as pro-Western and associated with external enemies. In the

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opposition discourse, the symbol is exploited in the delegitimation of power. One can discern in this delegitimation, on one side, criticism of the monument as a tool of the authorities' propaganda, and on the other side, representations of the Kremlin as a threat to the Motherland and the opposition as her champions.

Conclusion

The "Motherland," one of the most important symbols of Russian culture, is used in various discourses (national, ethnic, war, imperial, and gender), inter alia in a political one. Among political actors who participate in producing the discourse on the Motherland are the President, "United Russia" and other political parties and organizations, representatives of the leading religions, and regional leaders; it is provided through institutes of education, science, army, church, and media on regional, national, and global levels. Political actors actively exploit this symbol, including issues of the legitimacy of power. The "Motherland" symbolizes these issues, which are essential for the claims to legitimacy: the unity of Russia, its territory and sacredness of its borders, the most important events of its history, "authentic Russianness," and multi-ethnic peace in the country. The Kremlin widely employs the symbol, pretending to be the only representative of the Motherland and her champion. One more legitimation strategy which current tensions between Russia and the West make more effective is portraying the liberal opposition as the pro-Western fifth column—as renegade children of the Motherland.

Since this symbol is so important in maintaining the legitimacy of power, the opposition pays serious attention to it as well. The "populist" mode of the delegitimation of power implies the symbolic struggle for possessing this symbol—for the right to speak on behalf of the Motherland. The opponents of the authorities represent Russia as a mother who has suffered from the Kremlin's violence and themselves as her loyal children who defend her. The "liberal" mode implies the desacralization of the "Motherland" and deconstruction of the practices of the Kremlin exploiting the symbol. The representatives of the liberal opposition criticize them because these practices allegedly help the authorities in justifying irresponsibility of the state, promoting lack of respect for individuals, and ignoring the value of human lives.

What impact does the use of the mother symbol have on the specificity of power legitimation in Russia? As noted, many symbols are related to myths. Murray Edelman enumerated three universally recognized master myths: the omnipresent conspiratorial enemy; the valiant and wise leader who saves the people from that enemy; and the people who in times of great need unite behind their leader to deliver their country from the gravest danger (Edelman 1977, quoted in Petersson 2017, 238). In Russia all these master myths are directly relevant to the Motherland symbol; using it contributes significantly in mythologization of Russian political culture. Apparently, this type of legitimacy is far from the rational-legal one. Employing the Motherland symbol diminishes the importance of a legal component because it accompanies appeals, not to formal rules or law, but to moral argumentations, to "*pravda*" (truth). It moves the focus of argumentation from the rational choice, and considers values more important than interests. That does not mean that Russians do not care about their material well-being; "eudemonic legitimation" plays significant role in Putin's popularity (Holmes 2015). But at the same time the issues of the Motherland's honor are very important.

For instance, it manifested itself in discussing the issue about Russian sportsmen's participation in Winter Olympic games 2018 when the national flag and anthem were banned to demonstrate because of accusations of Russian team in statesponsored doping. While arguments for the participation appealed to practical interests in the development of Russian sport, the case against it was connected with rhetoric about the Motherland's honor and inadmissibility of disgracing her. Vladimir Mamontov, the head of the Govorit Moskva radio station, condemned those who had supported the participation; according to him, for them "the Motherland turned into an old lady (*starushentsiia*) whom one can forget …" (Gusev 2017). Many researchers have noted the role of Putin's charisma in legitimation of power (see, for example, Cannady and Kubicek 2014, 5; Holmes

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2015, 229; Petersson 2017), and this charisma in contemporary Russia to a significant extent is related to the degree to which a politician is considered to be a defender of the Motherland's honor.

Besides that, appeals to the national history, particularly the war history (and, first of all, the Great Patriotic War), acquire a special importance for maintaining the legitimacy of power. It should be borne in mind that in Russians' collective memory, the war conflicts of the nation's history are considered as largely defensive wars, while the main threat to Mother Russia usually comes from the West. External pressure on Russia contributes to positioning the Kremlin as a champion of the Motherland and helps to unite society around the authorities.

Another important facet is that employing the symbol of the Motherland in the legitimation of power shifts emphasis from the issue of each person's good to the issue of common good—of care of a collective national body. The Motherland is not equal to a sum of all Russia's citizens, and defense of the Motherland does not necessarily imply care for each separate person.

Thus, using the Motherland symbol has a major impact on the legitimation of power in contemporary Russia: it facilitates evaluation of the authorities through a prism of appealing to informal, not to formal, rules; it focuses rather on the past, than on the future; and elevates the priority of the collective good over individual human rights. In order to answer the question of whether it is determined by the specificity of Russian political culture or by the common regularities of a gendering nation, a comparative study is necessary.

Financial Support. This article was supported by the Russian Foundation for Basic Research (15-03-00010) and the Russian Science Foundation (18-18-00233).

Disclosure. Author has nothing to disclose.

Notes

1 Putin referred again to this image during his visit to Sevastopol in the 2018 campaign: "Thanks to your decision, Sevastopol and Crimea returned to their homeland, to the home of our mutual Motherland, to the home of our Mother Russia" (Vesti.ru 2018).

2 Meanwhile Putin used the word "Motherland" 14 times in his 14 Presidential addresses (2000–2018) ("Ezhegodnye poslaniia Prezidenta RF …" 2018).

3 Peter Rutland (2010) correctly notes that though forming Russian civic political nation has been declared as the aim of interethnic politics, in fact it is far from civic nationalism in the Western sense since it was not connected to individual rights and democratic participation.

4 Legitimation strategies can be defined as authorities' attempts to promote their vision of what is right for the country and, in principle, are aimed at producing voluntary transfer of power to the authorities (Mazepus et al. 2016, 354).

5 For instance, in March 2014, local authorities all over the city of Omsk set up billboards named "We Take Care of Our Own!" which contained the images of woman as an allegory of Russia and a boy who symbolized Crimea (Shmidt 2014).

6 On using the image of raping Mother Russia committed by Yeltsin's pro-Western regime, see Suspitsina (1999) and Riabov (2007, 230–233). That is remarkable because it demonstrates how mythology of hierogamy may be exploited for the delegitimation of power: a ruler is represented as a rapist, but not as a legal husband of Mother Russia; thereby he is disqualified to speak on her behalf. This image previously appeared in the 19th century Russian social thought: characterizing Peter the Great's reforms, a Slavophil Ivan Aksakov labeled them as a rape of the Russian land by the tsar (Aksakov 1992, 265–266).

7 This mode also has historical traditions in Russian political discourse. Thus, many thinkers of the Russian Silver Age wrote that the cult of Russia as a mother was dangerous since it "prevented development of the principle of individuality" in Russian society (see, in detail, Riabov 2007, 140). The desacralization of Mother Russia served as a means of the delegitimation of power in the satirical journals of the 1905 Russian revolution (Riabov 2017).

https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2019.14 Published online by Cambridge University Press

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Cite this article: Riabov, O. 2020. The Symbol of the Motherland in the Legitimation and Delegitimation of Power in Contemporary Russia. *Nationalities Papers* 48: 752–767, doi:10.1017/nps.2019.14

https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2019.14 Published online by Cambridge University Press