

The ‘Politics of Loneliness’: Demasculinizing Narratives of Russian Sovereignism

Dr. Sergei Akopov

This research project analyses how Russian political discourse connects masculinity/femininity with macro and micro levels of loneliness to legitimize ‘Great Russia’ nationalism. The research problem then could be formulated as follows: Modern Russian sovereignism and nationalism can be significantly legitimized and fuelled through silenced masculinity and ‘loneliness anxiety’; their impact can be identified through a more systematic analysis of domestic, foreign, and transnational dimensions of Russian affairs and political discourse.

At the heart of my project lies the following research question: Why and to what extent do notions of ‘masculinity’ and ‘loneliness anxiety’ contribute to explaining the legitimization of Russian sovereignism and gendered nationalism in domestic and foreign affairs. This research is not about a monocausal argument. The framing of this question suggests that, besides masculinity and loneliness anxiety, there can be other factors that contribute to explaining the legitimization of Russian nationalistic sovereignism. However, I will concentrate on the research goal to look at the ideological discourse of sovereignism as a tool for patterning difference and domination through the management of masculine loneliness anxieties in modern Russian society. Here, not only do I contend that states can talk on behalf of their people when state discourse on sovereignty directly or implicitly appeals to a nationally or civilizationally defined ‘loneliness anxiety’ of the people (so-called ‘politics of loneliness’). Moreover, in societies like Russia, dominated by the ‘male gaze’ on politics, the exploitation of loneliness anxiety leads to sovereignism becoming a ‘masculine organized loneliness’.

This project will start with 1) outlining the psychological research on loneliness and then 2) unpack how this relates to political theory and international relations. 3) I will explain the link between ‘loneliness’ and ‘nationalist sovereignism’ and 4) justify the choice of Russia as a case. I will proceed to explaining why demasculinization of narratives of Russian sovereignism is impossible without analysis of silenced ‘gendered nationalism’ dimension of ‘politics of loneliness’ in Russia. Lastly, I will juxtapose and compare Russian ‘gendered nationalism’, ‘vertical’ ‘politics of loneliness’ with horizontal, transnational practices of managing loneliness by ‘Global Russians’ on a micro level, thereby demasculinizing the former.