

“He Carried Himself Like a Man”: Gorbachev and Yeltsin’s Masculinities

By

Lindsay Sovern

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Introduction

There is little doubt that the two men who most influenced the collapse of the Soviet Union were Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev and Russian President Boris Yeltsin. Historians have considered their individual personalities and relationship with each other as instrumental in dismantling one of the greatest superpowers of modernity. Historian George W. Breslauer calls both Gorbachev and Yeltsin “Event-Making Men,” meaning that they were both responsible for events that brought about the disintegration of the Soviet Union.¹ However, Breslauer does not interrogate the gendered implications of that term, or even acknowledge that the term defines agency in masculine terms. In fact, no historians have explicitly considered the gendered aspects of Gorbachev and Yeltsin’s public images. This thesis explores the transfer of political power from Gorbachev to Yeltsin in 1991, as one that transpired between two men with at times similar, but distinct masculine images.

Why consider the gendered aspects of Gorbachev and Yeltsin’s public images at all? In her explanation of gender history and why it matters, historian Naoko Shibusawa argues that gender is worth studying because of its role in shaping hierarchy—that is to say, “Presumptions about male superiority, however, have been so ingrained that it has appeared ‘natural’ that men should rule, while women should be ruled.”² Gender histories challenge the naturalness of male domination, and this project is no different. It is difficult to imagine two Soviet or Russian women holding as much power as Yeltsin and Gorbachev did at the turn of the twenty-first century. Despite Bolshevik rhetoric

¹ George W. Breslauer, “Evaluating Gorbachev and Yeltsin as Leaders,” in *Gorbachev*,
² Naoko Shibusawa, “Gender and American Foreign Policy” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of American Military and Diplomatic History*, ed. Paul Boyer et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 404.

mandating women's liberation, sexism and restrictive gender roles prevented and continue to prevent Soviet and Russian women from entering the political sphere. Evidently, *some* form of masculinity is essential to Soviet and Russian leadership, yet much Soviet and Russian historiography leaves that masculinity unmarked. In dissecting Gorbachev and Yeltsin's masculine images, I establish that both men understood their gender as a natural foundation for their political power. Despite their many differences, both Gorbachev and Yeltsin considered politics to be a masculine practice, and used their gender as a qualification for leadership.

My analysis both denaturalizes that maleness should precede political power and forces reevaluation of Soviet collapse beyond Gorbachev and Yeltsin's personalities. If Breslauer designates Gorbachev and Yeltsin as "Event-Making Men," my thesis puts the emphasis on the word "Men."

But what is masculinity? Western gender theorists argue that masculinity, like all gender, is a social construction, meaning that it is not biologically determined, but instead forms according to social norms.³ In her seminal text *Gender Trouble*, theorist Judith Butler argues, "'persons' only become intelligible through becoming gendered in conformity with recognizable standards of gender intelligibility."⁴ A person does not conform to or transgress those standards of gender intelligibility by simply "being" a man or a woman.⁵ Rather, a person becomes recognizable as a gender "through the compulsory ordering of attributes into coherent gender sequences": a person "is" not a

³ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 10.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 30.

gender; a person “does” a gender.⁶ Actions that communicate maleness according to a culture’s standards of gender signify masculinity. Butler developed her gender theories in a Western context, but the notion that a coherent gender expression exists translates to analysis of late Soviet gender.

Dominant gender discourses during Gorbachev and Yeltsin’s late Soviet context positioned gender as fixed. Historians Anna Temkina and Elena Zdravomyslova argue that rather than defining gender along a series of attributes, Gorbachev and Yeltsin’s generation viewed gender as categories, “that is, as communities or classes of individuals endowed with specific biological and psychological characteristics”—men and women.⁷ Although my analysis conceives of gender as mutable, non-binary, and produced through “doing,” rather than “being,” I attend to Gorbachev and Yeltsin’s perspective of gender as categorical and binary.

Temkina and Zdravomyslova further argue that for Gorbachev and Yeltsin’s generation, masculinity encountered crisis. Temkina and Zdravomyslova argue that the “crisis of masculinity” in the 1970s and 1980s in the Soviet Union arose out of political restrictions—property ownership, individual freedoms, and other social circumstances—that prevented men from fulfilling their traditional gender role as they understood it. Historian Gail Bederman protests the notion of masculine crisis in nineteenth century American history:

...to imply that masculinity was in crisis suggests that manhood is a transhistorical category of fixed essence that has its good moments as well

⁶ Ibid., 33-34.

⁷ Anna Temkina and Elena Zdravomyslova, “The Crisis of Masculinity in Late Soviet Discourse,” *Russian Studies in History* 51 (2012): 15, accessed March 16, 2014, doi: 10.2753/RSH1061-1983510201.

as its bad, rather than an ideological construct which is constantly being remade.⁸

For Bederman, masculinity does not fall into crisis, but rather shifts in meaning and modes of expression. But most late Soviet men were not historians or gender theorists. Zdravomyslova and Temkina argue that late Soviet men did not view their masculinity as “an ideological construct which is constantly being remade,” just as they did not view gender as Judith Butler does. For Gorbachev and Yeltsin’s generation, masculine crisis constituted a discursive fact—“a universally acknowledged proposition of late Soviet critical discourse.” Whether or not their masculinity was actually in crisis, late Soviet men believed that it was.⁹

For the purposes of exploring Gorbachev and Yeltsin’s gendered public images, the late Soviet “crisis of masculinity” matters. As late Soviet men defined their own masculinities as unsuccessful, they did so in comparison to various “successful” normative gender models. Temkina and Zdravomyslova outline four dominant models of late Soviet masculinity: Traditional Russian Masculinity, Western Hegemonic Masculinity, Soviet Femininity, and Hegemonic Soviet Masculinity. Traditional Russian Masculinity includes two variants; the first variant is that is of the Russian peasant, the second that of the nobleman or aristocrat. This model was mostly literary and, as the name suggests, formed before the Soviet Union.¹⁰ Although Traditional Russian Masculinity shifted and became a part of Soviet culture, its clash with Bolshevik ideology kept it out of the mainstream.

⁸ Gail Bederman, “Remaking Manhood Through Race and Civilization” in *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 11.

⁹ Temkina and Zdravomyslova, “Crisis of Masculinity,” 16.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 24.

Western Hegemonic Masculinity is personified in the cowboy who stands for faith in individual freedom and personal autonomy.¹¹ Because of the lack of political autonomy available to Soviet men in comparison to Western men, for Soviet men this model was largely restricted to symbolic expression in alternative cultures.¹² Soviet femininity supposedly counterbalanced Soviet masculinity, although the “Soviet woman” experienced her own “crisis of femininity,” as the state wavered in defining her role.¹³ Temkina and Zdravomyslova’s final model of masculinity, Hegemonic Soviet Masculinity emerges as the gendered ideal for men in the late Soviet period.

Of these models, Hegemonic Soviet Masculinity best matched the state’s discourse of what constituted a good man.¹⁴ Realization of this model depended on generational connection to the romanticized Soviet industrialization of the 1930s or the Great Patriotic War. The defining qualities of Hegemonic Soviet Masculinity included paternalism, service to the state as a basic duty, working-class aesthetics, the psychological traits of a soldier, and fidelity to one’s principles.¹⁵ Historian Karen Petrone also explores this militaristic model of masculinity and names its embodiment the “soldier-hero.”¹⁶

If a soldier-hero’s primary defining characteristic is his participation in war, Gorbachev and Yeltsin’s generation was out of luck. The most significant war in Soviet

¹¹ Ibid., 25.

¹² Ibid., 26.

¹³ Ibid., 27.

¹⁴ Ibid., 23.

¹⁵ Ibid., 22.

¹⁶ Karen Petrone, “Masculinity and Heroism in Imperial and Soviet Military-Patriotic Cultures,” in *Russian Masculinities in History and Culture*, ed. Barbara Evans Clements et al. (New York: Palgrave), 173.

history, the Great Patriotic War, had ended before they were quite old enough to fight.¹⁷ Temporal distance from the Great Patriotic War colluded with other social forces, like women's changing roles in the workforce, to produce masculine uneasiness: men could no longer fully measure up to the soldier-hero ideal, nor could they realize other masculine ideals, including Western models.¹⁸ Both Gorbachev and Yeltsin were born in 1931, and so both were babies during industrialization and in their early teens during the Great Patriotic War. Gorbachev was the first Soviet General Secretary of his generation and so was the first in a line of old guard leadership who could not incorporate patriotic service into his gendered public image.

The struggle to realize Hegemonic Soviet Masculinity in the face of these obstacles, along with the recurrence of masculine crises in Soviet and Russian history, suggests that the crisis became integral to the ways that Soviet men understood their genders. Put differently, a culture of compensatory masculinity emerged out of the "crisis of masculinity," creating a new discourse of Soviet men's realities. For the purposes of this project, the distinction between the soldier-hero as an unachievable ideal and real lived masculinities informs my analysis of how Gorbachev and Yeltsin created masculinities using existing signifiers of gender.

My first chapter explores how Gorbachev presented his gendered public image and argues that, parallel to his pluralization of what had been a single-party state,

¹⁷ The Great Patriotic War was the Soviet (and now the Russian) term for what Americans call World War II. Because approximately 20 million Soviet people, mostly men, died in the Great Patriotic War, it was one of the most significant events for Soviet people in Soviet history. Sociologist Iurii Levada's 1999 study, "Soviet Man Ten Years Later" asks Russians what the most significant events of the twentieth century were: victory in WWII outranks both the 1917 Revolution and the collapse of the USSR. Iurii Levada, "Soviet Man Ten Years Later," *Russian Social Science Review* 41 (2001), 4-28.

¹⁸ Zdravomyslova and Temkina. "Crisis of Masculinity," 13-34.

Gorbachev expressed plural masculinities. Although Gorbachev attempted to embody aspects of Hegemonic Soviet Masculinity, he regularly contradicted that image by distancing himself from other Soviet men through policy and appearing closer to Western political leaders.

My second chapter tracks the progression of Gorbachev and Yeltsin's relationship and explores two significant events and their aftermaths—Yeltsin's speech at a Communist Party meeting in 1987 denouncing Gorbachev, and the August 1991 Coup—as events that both men gendered. More specifically, I argue that Gorbachev attempted to undermine Yeltsin's criticisms by portraying him as a masochistic, overly emotional, and therefore effeminate figure. But ultimately, in the midst of Gorbachev's *perestroika* and *glasnost* reforms and the resulting changes in Soviet discourse, Yeltsin's emotionality facilitated his popularity as a man-of-the-people.

My final chapter argues that as his position changed from dismantler of the Soviet system to Russian nation-builder, Yeltsin created a gendered public image that included aspects of Hegemonic Soviet Masculinity, but more closely resembled the masculinity of a much older Russian folk literary epic hero: the *bogatyř*. In a moment of great political uncertainty, Yeltsin appeared as a modern-day *bogatyř*—a figure known for defending Kievan Rus, the cultural ancestor of Russia—and used this masculinity to reassure voters about the future of the Russian Federation.

Both Gorbachev and Yeltsin's gender presentations intersected with Russian ethnic supremacy. According to Petrone, who focuses her analysis on the first half of the twentieth century, race was a component of soldier-heroism, since Soviet soldiers made

distinctions between Russian and non-Russian masculinities.¹⁹ Similarly, the *bogatyr* defended Kievan Rus from the Mongol invasion, and Russian culture certainly depicted the Mongols in racist ways. Because both Gorbachev and Yeltsin were Russian, their ethnicity did not serve as an obstacle to embodying either Hegemonic Soviet Masculinity or the *bogatyr*'s masculinity. Race also does not serve as a point of contrast between the two men. Although racism shaped the masculine ideals I discuss, in-depth discussion of Russian ethnocentrism is beyond the scope of this paper. Much of my analysis derives from closely reading sources in which Gorbachev and Yeltsin reveal their understandings of their own and each other's gender. These sources rarely, if ever, refer to either man's ethnicity, further demonstrating how privileged racial identities go unmarked: the dominance of Russianness, like that of whiteness in American culture, went without saying. Had either man been of another ethnicity, discussion of his race would have likely appeared more frequently in the primary sources I use to understand their gendered public images.

I do not contend that masculinity alone deconstructed the Soviet Union and constructed the Russian Federation in its place, nor do I argue that Gorbachev and Yeltsin took great care in planning and articulating powerful masculine images. The question of "intent," that is—to what extent did Gorbachev and Yeltsin *intend* to trade on their masculinities for political power?—is difficult to answer. In the absence of explicit statements from either man about engineering and executing masculine public images, it would be dangerous to assume any such intent existed. But there is no doubt that both

¹⁹ Karen Petrone, "Masculinity and Heroism in Imperial and Soviet Military-Patriotic Cultures," in *Russian Masculinities in History and Culture*, ed. Barbara Evans Clements et al. (New York: Palgrave), 181.

Gorbachev and Yeltsin attempted to create winning public images during a historical moment when a successful politician appeared strong, and strength appeared masculine. Exploring how Gorbachev and Yeltsin understood their own and each other's gender elucidates the changing relationship between gender and power during Soviet collapse and emergence of the Russian Federation.

Chapter One

“It’s Time You Became a Real Man!”: Gorbachev’s Masculinities

Introduction

On March 11, 1985, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union unanimously voted Mikhail Gorbachev General Secretary. At 54 years old, Gorbachev was the youngest General Secretary ever, and his youth was particularly striking in historical context. His predecessor, Konstantin Chernenko had been General Secretary just over a year before dying and he had spent some of that time in a coma.¹ Chernenko’s predecessor, Yuri Andropov had become bedridden after three months in office, but managed to serve as General Secretary for two years before also falling into a coma and dying.² Andropov’s predecessor Leonid Brezhnev served as General Secretary for eighteen years, from 1964 to 1982. However, Brezhnev’s health began to deteriorate as early as November of 1974, when he suffered a stroke. He continued as leader, even while drooling on himself on television.³

Gorbachev’s youth set him apart from a recent history of decrepit leadership, and the Communist publication *Pravda* called attention to his healthy body in particular as a capable vessel for political power. The day after his election, *Pravda* announced Gorbachev’s appointment and introduced him to the public. In contrast to past *Pravda* issues heralding a change in leadership, *Pravda* presents Gorbachev in the very same issue that it announces Chernenko’s death. Typically, the notification of a General Secretary’s death merited its own issue of *Pravda*. A black square would frame the front

¹ Stephen Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse, 1970-2000* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 53.

² *Ibid.*, 52.

³ *Ibid.*, 50.

page of the newspaper to signify an important death in the Soviet Union. The bulk of the issue would consist of articles and speeches glorifying and memorializing the dead leader, and his successor would not be named until the next issue. But in this issue, Gorbachev's election overshadows Chernenko's passing. *Pravda* memorializes Chernenko, but the black square enclosing his obituary only appears on the second page of the paper.⁴ By announcing Gorbachev's appointment in the same issue as Chernenko's death, *Pravda* contrasts Gorbachev's ascension to political power with Chernenko's physical decline.

Reinforcing this juxtaposition, *Pravda* includes a short biography of Gorbachev celebrating his vivacity. Among other positive personal traits, *Pravda* describes Gorbachev's selflessness and service both to Lenin's goals and to the interests of the common people.⁵ It highlights the fact that Gorbachev joined the Communist Party in 1955, having spent the last thirty years devoting his "initiative and energy" to the Party, and earning awards for his service.⁶ Gorbachev appears poised to tirelessly continue his youthful pursuit of Communist goals.

In historical context, Gorbachev's initial energetic image carries masculine undertones. Paradoxically, Gorbachev's youthful strength both sets him apart from Brezhnev, Andropov, and Chernenko's generation, and draws him closer to it. Youth and energy had long left the "old guard" generation's failing bodies, but at an earlier time, the physical strength that typically accompanies youth and vigor defined their generation. Brezhnev, Andropov, and Chernenko were members of the generation that fought in the

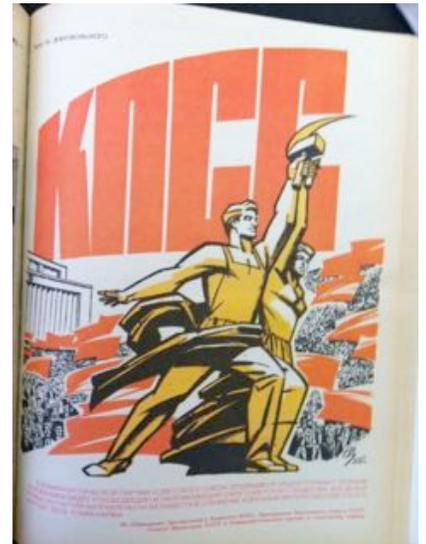
⁴ *Pravda* No. 71. March 12, 1985.

⁵ "Mikhail Sergeevich Gorbachev" *Pravda* No. 71. March 12, 1985. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations in this thesis are my own.

⁶ *Ibid.*

Great Patriotic War and, consequently, the generation that in many ways defined the Hegemonic Soviet Masculine ideal for Gorbachev's generation. Historians Anna Temkina and Elena Zdravomyslova argue that this masculine ideal against which Gorbachev's generation measured themselves depended on participation in the Great Patriotic War.⁷ As a generation that defended the Soviet Union, the old guard inherited and developed the masculine archetype that historian Karen Petrone refers to as the soldier-hero. Emerging out of World War I, the soldier-hero demonstrated his complete devotion to Soviet Communism with his physical sacrifice in battle.⁸ Portrayals of Gorbachev as full of youthful enthusiasm for Communism then simultaneously evoke the strength and dedication of the preceding generation of men, and stand in contrast to that generation's physical decline.

The state-sponsored satirical magazine *Krokodil* similarly emphasized Gorbachev's vitality, but with more explicit gendering. In its issue announcing Gorbachev's appointment, *Krokodil* published the cartoon shown on the right. In the image, one well-muscled masculine figure eclipses another as he takes on and raises the torch of leadership in the Communist Party.⁹ His prominent muscles represent powerful leadership. Although the cartoon does not literally depict Gorbachev's body, *Krokodil* uses



⁷ Anna Temkina and Elena Zdravomyslova, "The Crisis of Masculinity in Late Soviet Discourse," *Russian Studies in History* 51 (2012): 22, accessed March 16, 2014, doi: 10.2753/RSH1061-1983510201.

⁸ Karen Petrone, "Masculinity and Heroism in Imperial and Soviet Military-Patriotic Cultures," in *Russian Masculinities in History and Culture*, ed. Barbara Evans Clements et al. (New York: Palgrave), 173.

⁹ *Krokodil* No. 9, 1985.

an indisputably strong and masculine body to symbolize Gorbachev's assumption of power.

But Gorbachev's initial image as an energetic leader receded over the course of his leadership, and his gender expression was certainly more complex than *Krokodil's* brawny cartoon man suggests. In this chapter, I explore how Gorbachev shaped his gendered public image. I argue that, although Gorbachev's public persona included elements of Hegemonic Soviet Masculinity, Gorbachev was inconsistent in communicating that image to the public. He also at times expressed his gender in western masculine terms. Just as Gorbachev pluralized Soviet politics through political reforms, he also pluralized his masculinity by alternately drawing and deviating from aspects of dominant Soviet and Western gender scripts.

It might be tempting to impose some teleology on Gorbachev's gendered public image. That is to say, it is alluring to claim that Gorbachev built his initial image using Soviet masculinity traits and then progressed towards western masculinity traits. But such an argument oversimplifies Soviet understandings of gender and problematically echoes the popular western fantasy that the Soviet Union was inevitably advancing towards western ideologies and norms. But because Gorbachev expressed his gender using varying masculine ideals both throughout his career and in memoirs published long after his resignation, Gorbachev's gender expression actually was consistent in its degree of inconsistency during his time as a public figure.

The Great Patriotic War

As *Pravda* introduced Gorbachev to the public following his election, Historian Mark Sandle notes a significant omission in Gorbachev's biography that would have

likely stood out to readers: *Pravda* skips over the Great Patriotic War. Unlike his three predecessors, Gorbachev did not serve in the military, and certainly did not fight in the Great Patriotic War.¹⁰ *Pravda* writes, “Soon after the Great Patriotic War, 1941-1945, at the age of 15 [Gorbachev] began his work activities. He worked as a technician in a machine-tractor station.”¹¹ In this way, *Pravda* excludes the Great Patriotic War—one of the most significant events in Soviet history—from Gorbachev’s personal history, and instead underlines Gorbachev’s factory work. Despite this omission, in this section, I argue that Gorbachev understood warfront service in the Great Patriotic War as masculine and admirable. Although Gorbachev could not claim military service, he and the Soviet media worked to establish other connections between Gorbachev and the war, associating him with Hegemonic Soviet Masculinity.

The year 1985, when Gorbachev assumed the role of General Secretary, also marked the Great Patriotic War’s fortieth anniversary. Less than two months following his appointment, on May 8, Gorbachev delivered a speech at the Kremlin commemorating Soviet victory. The speech was later published in 1986 and 1987, both in Russian and in English. As he celebrates the Soviet Union’s victory in World War II, Gorbachev implicates himself in the Soviet triumph and positions his burgeoning leadership as a continuation of the Great Patriotic War’s legacy in preserving the union.

Gorbachev’s speech genders Soviet participation in the Great Patriotic War. With his appreciation for women’s supportive role in the war, Gorbachev demarcates the battlefield as a site for men:

¹⁰ Mark Sandle, *Gorbachev: Man of the Twentieth Century?* (London: Hodder Education, 2008), 13.

¹¹ “Mikhail Sergeevich Gorbachev” *Pravda*. *Pravda No. 71*. March 12, 1985.

With a profound feeling of thanks, we discuss the heroism of Soviet women. Of course, the face of war is not feminine... Millions of fighters owe their lives to the bravery and compassion of women.¹²

For Gorbachev, women's contributions to the war effort were restricted by the natural limitations of their gender. War is ugly and difficult and, of course, outside the abilities of even heroic women. By excluding women, Gorbachev defines the battlefield as a homosocial male space, that is, in this case specifically, a site that men inhabit without women, where they share the collective experience of battle, rightfully assigned them by their gender.¹³

Gorbachev's linguistic choices in this speech further differentiate between masculine and feminine wartime contributions. When describing women's bravery, Gorbachev uses the femininely gendered word *otvaga*. But when describing the male soldiers' bravery on the front elsewhere in the speech, Gorbachev opts for *muzhestvo*.¹⁴ Though linguistically neuter, *muzhestvo* can also be translated as manhood, and derives from the word *muzh*, a common root meaning "man." In choosing words for bravery with differently gendered connotations, Gorbachev further draws a division between women and men's respective roles and experiences during the Great Patriotic War, as women's bravery stands linguistically apart from that of men.

¹² Mikhail Gorbachev, "Bessmertnyi Podvig Sovetskogo Naroda" in *Izbrannye Rechi i Stat'i Tom 2* (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo Politicheskoi Literaturi, 1987), 192.

¹³ Western queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick discusses homosociality in greater depth in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985). Not to be confused with homosexuality, the homosocial constitutes the bond that forms between men who are often in competition. Sedgwick argues that homosocial relationships between men produce solidarity that reifies gender hierarchy.

¹⁴ Gorbachev, "Bessmertnyi Podvig" 192.

In this separation, Gorbachev’s speech parallels World War II songs. Historian Suzanne Ament argues that songs composed during the Great Patriotic War reflect a shift to more “traditional” understandings of gender from earlier Soviet rhetoric espousing gender equality.¹⁵ Ament notes that as the songs express nostalgia for the wartime experience, they also draw from stereotypical images of “loyal, passive, and gentle women... notwithstanding women’s active participation in all spheres of military activity, including front-line combat.”¹⁶ Even though some women did fight at the battlefield during World War II, wartime songs erased this participation in favor of reinforcing the image of the brave and sacrificing soldier as male. Gorbachev confirms this version of history when he thanks women for home front but not warfront service, and with his claim that “the face of war is not feminine.” As Gorbachev’s speech reflects the same understanding of wartime gender roles as wartime songs, Gorbachev participates in wartime culture.

Krokodil joined Gorbachev in remembering the Great Patriotic War. Like Gorbachev’s May 9th speech, the issue of *Krokodil* announcing Gorbachev’s appointment also served as a forty-year memorial for the Great Patriotic War, and as such, republished many of the cartoons *Krokodil* had published during the war. Many of these cartoons, like the one at the right originally published in



¹⁵ Suzanne Ament, “Reflecting Individual and Collective Identities—Songs of World War II,” in *Gender and Identity in Twentieth-Century Russian Culture*, ed. Helena Goscilo and Andrea Lanoux (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2006), 115.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 115.

1945, show soldiers physically demonstrating their masculinity by fighting back invading forces.¹⁷ Images like this center on the male body, and in particular, celebrate its ability to defend the Soviet Union. Like Petrone's soldier-hero, the figure demonstrates his strength as he faces the encroaching dragon. The dragon casts a shadow, but perhaps because of his strong moral character, the hero's body casts none. Although the soldier's face is not visible, his body is clearly male and powerful. His body symbolizes militarized aspects of masculinity that were characteristically manly for Gorbachev's father's generation. Since this issue also includes *Krokodil's* introduction of Gorbachev, the magazine pairs Gorbachev's political rise with the memory of the Great Patriotic War and successful Hegemonic Soviet Masculinity.

Gorbachev's efforts to connect himself to the Great Patriotic War extended beyond the forty-year anniversary of victory. In his 1995 memoir *Zhizn' i Reformi (Life and Reforms)*, Gorbachev emphasizes his father's military service and its role in his transition from boyhood to manhood:

I was ten when the war began. I remember that within a few weeks the village was deserted—all the men were gone... My father bought me an ice cream for the last time and a balalaika (a folk instrument) for a keepsake. By autumn the mobilization ended, and the only people remaining in our town were women, children, and the men who were too old or sick.¹⁸

At ten, Gorbachev was too young to fight in the war. But he remembers the adult male absence in his village, again gendering the warfront as masculine. After relating his own goodbye to his father, Gorbachev explains that the only people who did not fight in the war were women, children, and old or sick men. Because he left to fight, Gorbachev's

¹⁷ *Krokodil* No. 9, 1985.

¹⁸ Mikhail Gorbachev, *Zhizn' i Reformi, Kniga I* (Moskva: Novosti, 1995), 42.

father is not included among those unfit for battle; he is a healthy man who leaves his family to do what men do.

Gorbachev continues: “At home the only newspaper we received was ‘*Pravda*.’ My father subscribed to it. Now I read it. In the evenings I read it out loud to the women—I told them about the bad news.”¹⁹ In his father’s absence, despite his youth, Gorbachev steps up and takes on at least some of his father’s position in the family. As he reads the wartime news to the women, Gorbachev both sets himself apart from the women and positions himself as a conduit between the home front and the masculine warfront.

Assuming his father’s responsibilities during the Great Patriotic War punctuated Gorbachev’s maturation. He writes:

Since father left for the front, I had more responsibilities at home. In the spring of 1942 I also worked in the vegetable patch which provided food for the family... Everything changed. And we, the children of the war, skipped directly from childhood and immediately arrived at adulthood.²⁰

Gorbachev provides for his family in his father’s place. It is because of his gender that Gorbachev shoulders his father’s duties. Despite his youth, he, and not his adult mother, takes on the provider role left vacant by his father’s service. Even though Gorbachev himself did not serve in the Great Patriotic War, the war that removes his father from family life forces Gorbachev to become a man. Gorbachev does not simply skip from childhood to adulthood, but from boyhood to manhood as he fills his father’s shoes.

Gorbachev then describes a deep connection with his father, not as parent and child, but as men. After the Great Patriotic War, Gorbachev’s father returned home. They worked together, and, he writes:

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 43.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 44.

We discussed everything—work, life. Our relationship developed into more than simply a father-son relationship, but a bond between two people who shared a cause and work. Father treated me with respect and we became true friends.²¹

Using his father as an adult male standard, Gorbachev demonstrates that he also matured into a man during the war. As his father returns from the war that would define the Soviet masculine ideal for Gorbachev's generation, Gorbachev measures up as his equal.

Gorbachev works side by side with his father, and together they develop a homosocial bond, like the homosocial bonds Gorbachev envisions between soldiers in his 1985 speech. Petrone argues that these homosocial bonds typified soldier-heroism, as camaraderie in battle united men.²² Gorbachev might not have fought in the war, but the war and his post-war camaraderie with his father turned him into a man, just the same.

Despite his efforts from 1985 to 1995 to establish a clear personal connection to the Great Patriotic War, Gorbachev's leadership could hardly be remembered as militaristic. Gorbachev's refusal to use violence to maintain Soviet power contradicts militaristic aspects of the Soviet masculine ideal. Peacefulness figures prominently in Gorbachev's public image. In his initial speech to the Central Committee, Gorbachev designates the future political course of the Soviet Union as "a course of peace and progress."²³ Under Gorbachev, the Soviet Union saw a drastic decrease in the military structures that Brezhnev had built up.²⁴ Gorbachev opted not to use force when Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia demanded that the Soviet Union remove its troops from

²¹ *Ibid.*, 36.

²² Petrone, "Masculinity and Heroism," 174.

²³ Mikhail Gorbachev, "Rech' General'novo Sekretarya TsK KPSS Tovarishcha M. S. Gorbachev na Plenute TsK KPSS 11 Marta 1985 goda" in *Izbrannye Rechi i Stat'i Tom 2* (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo Politicheskoy Literatury, 1987), 188.

²⁴ George W. Breslauer, *Gorbachev and Yeltsin as Leaders* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 52.

their territories in 1989 and 1990.²⁵ On the international stage, Gorbachev made numerous weapons concessions to dissipate Cold War tensions, and pulled Soviet troops out of Afghanistan that had been there since 1979.²⁶ In 1990, Gorbachev earned a Nobel Peace Prize.²⁷ Still, Gorbachev was not entirely nonviolent. For example, he used force to silence demonstrators in Tbilisi in April of 1989.²⁸ On the whole though, in light of the bloodshed caused both by his predecessors and successors, Gorbachev appears gentle. Gorbachev later cemented his propensity for peace with his inaction when states began to separate from the Union, risking and eventually realizing Soviet disintegration.

Ironically, Gorbachev's disinclination to use military force that distances him from militarized aspects of Hegemonic Soviet Masculinity, can actually be interpreted as a different iteration of that same masculine ideal. At least initially, Gorbachev did not use force to maintain the Soviet Union because he had faith that Communist ideals could prevail without violence, and so he declared that Soviet states had the "freedom to choose."²⁹ This faith in ideals again manifests aspects of Hegemonic Soviet Masculinity that include dogmatism, even as his avoidance of militarism contradicts that same gender script.

²⁵ Ibid., 86

²⁶ Ibid., 55.

²⁷ Sandle, *Gorbachev*, 83.

²⁸ Ibid., 112

²⁹ Archie Brown, "Transformational Leaders Compared: Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin," in *Gorbachev, Yeltsin, and Putin: Political Leadership in Russia's Transition*, ed. Archie Brown et al. (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2001), 20.

Gorbachev's Anti-Alcoholism Campaign

As part of his very first wave of *perestroika* reforms, in May 1985, Gorbachev legislated the most aggressive anti-alcohol policy in Soviet history.³⁰ In contrast to previous Soviet attempts at curbing widespread alcohol addiction, Gorbachev set his sights on total sobriety, and made efforts to restrict Soviet elite alcohol consumption and sway communal public opinion.³¹ Quickly, Gorbachev earned the disapproving nickname *mineral'nyi sekretar'*, or the “Mineral-water Secretary.”³² Very few Soviets supported the legislation. Critics pointed to the alcohol industry's tax benefits for the state and jobs provided, and many people produced their own alcohol in their homes, but Gorbachev maintained the measure until 1988 before adopting a more moderate approach to curbing Soviet alcohol consumption.³³ In this section, I consider the relationship between Gorbachev's anti-alcoholism campaign and his gendered public image. I argue that, despite his minimization of alcohol's importance to late Soviet worker masculinity, Gorbachev's alcohol restriction distanced him from his fellow Soviet men, for whom alcohol served a masculine purpose. Furthermore, as his regime intervened in men's lives to regulate their alcohol consumption, Gorbachev contributed to the lack of control that pushed late Soviet fathers from their homes and into the “crisis of masculinity.”

In *Life and Reforms*, Gorbachev recounts a story from his youth:

...A cruel joke was played on me once by the group of workers. It was 1946. The hard work had ended, and the mechanics decided to celebrate the end of the first post-war harvest with drinks... They bought a case of

³⁰ Daniel Tarschys, “The Success of a Failure: Gorbachev's Alcohol Policy, 1985-88,” in *Europe-Asia Studies* 45 (1993): 8, accessed March 16, 2014, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/153247>.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

³² *Ibid.*, 8.

³³ *Ibid.*, 12, 7.

vodka and somewhere also acquired grain alcohol. We gathered in the wagon and sat, drinking and telling stories. It must be said, that the guys (*muzhiki*) in our group of our workers were all strong and young but experienced—the majority of them had fought at the front. Father at that time was 37, and I was 15. I sat there eating and listening to their conversation.

The team-leader started pressing me: “Why are you just sitting there? The harvest is over. Come on, drink! It’s time you became a real man (*nastoyashchii muzhik*).”

I looked at father. He was silent, but laughing. They gave me a full cup. I thought it was vodka, but they had poured me grain alcohol... The state I was in! The mechanics were all laughing, most of all, my father. I learned my lesson, though—I’ve never felt any pleasure in drinking vodka or spirits.³⁴

At fifteen, a group of “strong and experienced” World War II veterans offered Gorbachev passage to manhood by means of alcohol, and although Gorbachev accepted the challenge to drink, he ultimately rejects the ritual. The episode is remarkably masculine: a group of men gather together, and the leader offers Gorbachev a chance to become a “real man,” prompting Gorbachev to look to his father for guidance. Yet for Gorbachev, his distaste for alcohol does not exclude him from homosocial male worker culture. Even though the team-leader uses alcohol as a necessary steppingstone to manhood (“It’s time you become a real man”), Gorbachev instead focuses on the shared labor and humorous rapport with the group of workers. He frames the episode not as an instance in which he failed to achieve “real” manhood, but as a moment when his coworkers played a practical joke on him, including him in their homosocial fun.

He then describes how the group helped him trick the team-leader in return, also with disguised grain alcohol. But Gorbachev’s joke was less successful: “He just grunted.

³⁴ Gorbachev, *Zhizn’ i Reformi*. 55.

He was a tough man.”³⁵ As the other workers collaborate with Gorbachev to joke at the expense of the leader, they embrace him as one of their own—as much a worker who helped complete the harvest as they are. He might not like alcohol as much as the team, and he might not have served in World War II as they did, but Gorbachev uses their homosocial inclusion to access authentic worker origins and ritualistic passage to manhood.

Even though Gorbachev acknowledges, but dismisses alcohol’s relationship to worker masculinity, other late Soviet men did not reach the same conclusion. Sociologists Brian Hinote and Gretchen Webber argue that because of socioeconomic changes in Russia and the Soviet Union between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, drinking and its associated rituals became increasingly tied to Soviet understandings of what it meant to be a “real worker and a real man.”³⁶ Late Soviet men wrestled with state policies that they believed restricted their political freedoms and prevented them from embodying the Hegemonic Soviet Masculine ideal.³⁷ For example, because of state policies bolstering women’s power in the public sphere, men felt restrictions on what they believed should be their role as breadwinner. At the same time, Soviet courts increasingly alienated men from the private sphere, as they recognized domestic spaces as women’s domain.³⁸ As I explained in my introduction, a crisis of masculinity ensued, as did a culture of compensatory masculinity in which men drank together and could

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Brian P. Hinote and Gretchen R. Webber, “Drinking Toward Manhood: Masculinity and Alcohol in the Former USSR,” in *Sage Publications* 15 (2012): 300, accessed March 16, 2014, doi: 10.1177/1097184X12448466.

³⁷ Temkina and Zdravomyslova, “Crisis of Masculinity,” 16.

³⁸ Zhanna Chernova, “The Model of ‘Soviet’ Fatherhood: Discursive Prescriptions” in *Russian Studies in History* 51 (2012): 36, accessed March 16, 2014, doi: 10.2753/RSH1061-1983510202.

discuss “their plight as workers, fathers, and husbands, and could embody masculinity through heavy drinking.”³⁹

Initially compensation for an unachievable masculine ideal, drinking became inextricable from authentic worker masculinity, taking on its own gendered value. As it became a marker of masculine camaraderie, alcohol enabled an ironic partial embodiment of Hegemonic Soviet Masculinity. Although alcoholism was not a component of the Hegemonic Soviet Masculine ideal, close relationships between Soviet men mattered. As sociopolitical and economic circumstances prevented late Soviet men from enacting aspects of Hegemonic Soviet Masculinity, drinking and its accompanying rituals assumed greater masculine meaning.⁴⁰ Gorbachev’s anecdote about drinking and joking with his fellow workers in the field illustrates alcohol’s importance: even if Gorbachev prioritizes homosocial joking over drinking in his maturation to manhood, there’s no denying that the former facilitates the latter—for the other men in the group, if not for Gorbachev himself. The anti-alcoholism campaign therefore distances Gorbachev from both the camaraderie of Hegemonic Soviet Masculinity and the working-class masculinity that other Soviet men embodied, as they compensated for not reaching the ideal.⁴¹

Despite the overt gendering of alcohol in Gorbachev’s anecdote, the official Communist Party’s anti-alcoholism measures took on more of a moralistic than gendered tone. The Party announced the legislation in its official newspaper, *Pravda*, which reported that the Central Committee of the Communist Party, of which Gorbachev was the leader, had considered the question of alcoholism and drunkenness, and arrived at the

³⁹ Hinote and Webber, “Drinking Toward Manhood,” 304.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 296.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 299.

conclusion that fighting alcoholism was a “social project of great political importance.”⁴² Although the campaign became closely tied to Gorbachev’s personal public image, the measure’s introduction to the public frames it not as Gorbachev’s legislation, but as the Communist Party’s. *Pravda* repeatedly mentions that the party’s pursuit of sobriety derives from concerns about Soviet morality and the economy, and although the newspaper refers to widespread alcoholism as having “demographical...aspects,” the report does not specify which demographics. Despite *Pravda*’s ambiguity about which demographics are most affected by alcoholism, the Soviet public likely understood the Party’s oblique reference to alcoholism’s overwhelmingly adverse consequences for male life expectancy.⁴³

Gorbachev genders alcoholism more openly in his memoirs. In his 1995 memoirs *Life and Reforms*, Gorbachev ascribes alcoholism to men:

There was strong pressure on the Party and government agencies, which were receiving many letters, mainly from wives and mothers. The letters cited horrible examples of family tragedy, industrial accidents, and crime because of drunkenness.⁴⁴

Casting wives and mothers as emotional and physical victims of alcoholism leaves only men to fill the role of alcoholics. With this aside, Gorbachev makes clear which “demographics” the Communist Party had targeted with its alcohol ban and whose alcohol addiction threatened the health of the Soviet family: Soviet men.

Gorbachev’s anti-alcoholism campaign took on a paternalistic and protective stance not only in directing Soviet men away from taverns, but also in directing them towards their families. Published while the legislation was still in effect, Gorbachev’s

⁴² “O Merakh Po Preodoleniyu P'yanstva i Alkogolizma” *Pravda*. May 17, 1985.

⁴³ Hinote and Webber, “Drinking Toward Manhood,” 293.

⁴⁴ Gorbachev, *Zhizn' i Reformi*. 340.

1987 memoirs *Perestroika i Novoe Myshlenie Dlia Nashei Strany i Dlia Vsego Mira* (*Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World*) explained his motivations and hopes for his *perestroika* reforms, including the anti-alcoholism campaign.

Gorbachev writes, “The most urgent social problem for us now, also in the fight against drunkenness, is to improve the health of the family and increase its role in the life and development of society.”⁴⁵ Gorbachev frames his anti-alcohol campaign as more than a measure to improve men’s health but as a means of rehabilitating their families as well. The state similarly promised to intervene to protect the Soviet family in *Pravda*’s initial report in May 1985. In the interests of rehabilitating and protecting Soviet families and future generations from alcoholism, *Pravda* reports that one of the campaign’s “most important projects” will be an “anti-alcoholic upbringing” program for youth.

A certain irony emerges, when considering how Gorbachev’s anti-alcoholism legislation interacted with late Soviet compensatory masculinity. Although the law intended to return alcoholic men to their families as healthy and functioning fathers, as the state enacted legislative control over men’s choice to consume alcohol and designed programs to raise their children, the state further assumed the patriarchal role that historian Zhanna Chernova argues contributed to the late Soviet crisis of masculinity and alienated men from their homes.⁴⁶ According to Chernova, because of many social forces in the late Soviet era, including higher divorce rates, absentee fathering became more common and normal.⁴⁷ Chernova identifies increasing alcoholism among men as a consequence of their alienation from the home, but Gorbachev identifies absenteeism as a

⁴⁵ Mikhail Gorbachev, *Perestroika i Novoe Myshlenie Dlia Nashei Strany i Dlia Vsego Mira*, (Moskva: Izdatel’stvo Politicheskoi Literatury, 1988), 118.

⁴⁶ Chernova, “Soviet Fatherhood,” 36.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 40

consequence of alcoholism. To fix the problem, Gorbachev assumes a condescending position on male alcoholism and fatherhood. He limits the freedom to consume alcohol, and so further restricts male personal autonomy already threatened by masculine crisis. Gorbachev's relationship with alcohol then pointedly illustrates his inconsistent gendered image: he tells childhood anecdotes that foreground his working class origins and homosocial camaraderie, but then as the actual embodiment of the state, Gorbachev violates the masculine norms of that very working class culture.

Women and Raisa Gorbacheva

Gorbachev's attitudes towards women further obscured his partial Hegemonic Soviet Masculine image. His limited and even inconsistent desire to increase women's political power contradicted both the Hegemonic Soviet Masculine ideal that configured women as weak and in need of male protection, and the compensatory masculine culture that resented women's presence in the workplace.⁴⁸ Yet, as Gorbachev takes gender differences for granted, he reinforces that his own masculinity precedes his political power.

According to dominant late Soviet gender norms, women could work outside the home, but they should always defer to men.⁴⁹ Gorbachev disrupts this fantasy and argues for increasing women's economic power. In his explanation of *perestroika*, Gorbachev writes, "Today it is imperative for the country to more actively involve women in the management of the economy."⁵⁰ Not only did the ideal Hegemonic Soviet Masculinity

⁴⁸ Temkina and Zdravomyslova, "Crisis of Masculinity," 22.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Gorbachev, *Perestroika*, 116.

oppose empowering women, but so did popular discourse on late Soviet masculinity.

Chernova writes:

Patriarchal family relations, in which the man exercised virtually unlimited power over his household, were replaced by a hegemonic state that monopolized the functions of “paternal power” and alienated men from that function, thereby divesting them of the very foundations of patriarchal male identity.⁵¹

Even before Gorbachev’s appointment, the Soviet state had already upset the fiction of men’s natural domination over women. As the state, now personified by Gorbachev, conferred political power on them, women threatened male autonomy. In addition to his anti-alcohol campaign that had restricted male freedom to drink, Gorbachev also wanted to increase women’s economic power but not men’s. Gorbachev’s advocacy to empower women further damages his masculine image, because he appears disinterested in returning men their rightful dominance.

Gorbachev also involved his wife, Raisa Gorbacheva, in some limited aspects of his leadership. Gorbachev delineates the boundaries of that participation somewhat vaguely in his memoirs, *Life and Reforms*. Although they were both interested in each other’s work, Gorbachev writes, “Of course, I did not [do my wife’s job], and she did not do my work.”⁵² Even so, Gorbachev describes the general Soviet public’s shock, “But the appearance of the General Secretary and his wife in public had no less of an effect than *perestroika*.”⁵³ The appearance of Raisa’s political involvement, however limited, appeared as groundbreaking as Gorbachev’s *perestroika* reforms. He also describes how some Soviets expressed disapproval, “What is she, a member of the Politburo?!” to which

⁵¹ Chernova, “Soviet Fatherhood,” 37.

⁵² Gorbachev, *Zhizn’ i Reformi*, 418.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 419.

Gorbachev responded, “No, she is my wife.”⁵⁴ During the crisis of masculinity when other Soviet men were dismayed by women’s increasing presence in the workplace, Gorbachev had publicly included his own wife in at least some aspects of his work.⁵⁵ As I will argue in Chapter Two, the Soviet media would later attribute criticism of Raisa’s political involvement to the defiant Yeltsin, making him appear to challenge the inappropriate gender roles in Gorbachev’s marriage.

But even though Gorbachev recognized a special political aptitude in Raisa, it derived not from some gender-neutral political ability, but from her maternal role. In his memoirs, Gorbachev remembers, “[Raisa’s] experience in social research, her work with university youth, and simply her knowledge of the household, her female intuition came in handy.”⁵⁶ Even as he recognizes his wife’s value outside of the home as a researcher, her femininity matches her professional achievements. Gorbachev naturalizes the belief that women are maternal and domestic, as he presumes that a set of skills and inclinations naturally accompanies Raisa’s femininity. Raisa might have participated in Gorbachev’s administration, but she did so explicitly as a woman.

Despite his desire to increase women’s economic involvement and his appreciation for Raisa’s political abilities, Gorbachev was by no means radical on issues of gender. He did not advocate redefinition of gender roles. He writes:

But in the course of our difficult past, we failed to pay attention to women’s specific rights and needs connected to their their role as mother and home-maker, and their indispensable function of raising children.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Chernova, “Soviet Fatherhood,” 36.

⁵⁶ Gorbachev, *Zhizn’ i Reformi*. 294-295.

⁵⁷ Gorbachev, *Perestroika*, 117.

Gorbachev again designates the home as women's domain, and defines political power as male. Further rhetorically alienating men from fatherhood, Gorbachev ascribes the "indispensable function" of raising children to women. The "we" to whom Gorbachev refers is necessarily masculine, and also necessarily powerful, as the "we" is capable of bestowing "rights and needs" onto women. Even as Gorbachev deviates from popular chauvinistic discourse with his belief that women should have political rights, as man and leader, he can define the limitations of those rights. With these words, Gorbachev then recognizes that his gender enables his political power.

Relationship with Reagan and Western Masculine Aesthetics

Beyond his domestic politics, western aesthetics also complicated Gorbachev's gendered image. Sandle argues that much of Gorbachev's extreme popularity in the West, termed "Gorbymania," resulted from "the extent to which Gorbachev was depicted and celebrated in heroic terms."⁵⁸ Gorbachev embodied many aspects of a Western leader; his law degree, for example, typified a Western politician's educational background. In November of 1985, *The Los Angeles Times* reported, "Two Texas hat makers, impressed by Soviet leader Mikhail S. Gorbachev's Western-style dress at the Geneva summit talks, are planning to present Gorbachev with a truly Western hat"⁵⁹ Gorbachev incorporated Western aesthetics in his dress that coded for Western Hegemonic Masculinity while negotiating with American President Ronald Reagan. He did so to such an extent that Texas hat makers would offer him a cowboy hat—a Western Hegemonic Masculine symbol if there ever was one. As Gorbachev employed Western gender codes, he

⁵⁸ Sandle, *Gorbachev*, 93.

⁵⁹ "Texas Hat Makers Plan Gift for Gorbachev" *The Los Angeles Times*, Nov. 26, 1985, accessed March 16, 2014, http://articles.latimes.com/1985-11-26/news/mn-1998_1_texas-hat.

compromised the aspects of his image—his strong and principled devotion to Soviet communism and his connection, however tenuous, to the Great Patriotic War—that had signified Hegemonic Soviet Masculinity.

Gorbachev's bond with President Reagan undermined the authenticity of his already inconsistent Hegemonic Soviet masculine image. Gorbachev increasingly appeared with President Ronald Reagan. Sandle writes, "Glimpses of the relationship between the two leaders also excited the Western media. Reagan... appeared to have met his match in Gorbachev."⁶⁰ As Reagan's "match," Gorbachev was both Reagan's rival and his partner in securing peace during the Cold War. Gorbachev's anti-alcohol campaign and attitudes towards women had distanced him from other Soviet men, while his foreign policy objectives of deescalating Cold War tensions with the United States had publicly brought him closer to Reagan.

Reagan epitomized Western Hegemonic Masculinity. Gender scholar Susan Jeffords argues that during his presidency, Reagan exemplified a "hard body" aesthetic, one that stood "not only for a type of national character—heroic, aggressive, and determined—but for the nation itself."⁶¹ Reagan's image as both a national symbol and a superlatively masculine figure relied on the subordination of those in proximity to him, transforming political opponents into "soft bodies," bodies that were substantially less masculine, often effeminate and nonwhite.⁶²

Compared with Reagan, Gorbachev appeared to possess more of a soft body than a hard one. In his 1997 memoir, *My Years with Gorbachev and Shevardnadze*,

⁶⁰ Sandle, *Gorbachev*, 100.

⁶¹ Susan Jeffords, "Hard Bodies: The Reagan Heroes" in *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era* (New York: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 25.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 25-26.

Gorbachev's interpreter Pavel Palazchenko recalls a dinner shared by the Reagans and Gorbachevs in 1985:

Mrs. Reagan told how after the assassination attempt, a couple of years before, President Reagan had to do a lot of "chest exercises." "His chest and shoulders have gotten so big that his old suits no longer fit," she said. "We have had to buy all new ones."⁶³

Palazchenko's anecdote masculinizes Reagan in contrast to Gorbachev. As she describes her husband's literally hard and still hardening body, Nancy Reagan draws further attention to an event that had already solidified Reagan's masculine "hard body" status. Jeffords contends that two moments, Reagan's survival of his assassination attempt and the invasion of Grenada in 1983, enabled Reagan "to show that incidents that could have defeated a lesser man—or more to the point, a lesser body—were unable to overcome him," since Reagan stood as the only American president (out of five) to survive a bullet. Nancy Reagan's complaint that her husband's suits no longer fit, as if wardrobe anxieties ranked highly among the First Family's concerns, serves as a backdoor reiteration of his manliness.

Palazchenko continues:

Someone joked that, despite the anti-drinking campaign in the Soviet Union, drinking in moderation was still a good idea, particularly for a toast for peace between the Soviet Union and the United States. "Oh yes, it is only drinking without a toast that is called alcoholism," Gorbachev responded with a laugh, and after everyone joined in the laughter following translation, he proposed a toast.⁶⁴

After imposing the strongest restrictions on alcohol consumption in the history of the Soviet Union, Gorbachev proposed a toast not with his fellow workers after completing

⁶³ Pavel Palazchenko, *My Years with Gorbachev and Shevardnadze: The Memoir of a Soviet Interpreter* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 43.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 43-44.

the harvest, but with the American First Family. Palazchenko reports that Gorbachev's toast even included a biblical quotation, "at a time [in the USSR] when religion was still officially 'suspect.'" In sum, Gorbachev sits at a table with President Reagan (whose muscular pectorals the reader can now envision, thanks to Palazhenko's inclusion of Nancy Reagan's complaint), where he—all too eagerly—relaxes his personal convictions about the evils of alcohol, and delivers a biblical quotation. Palazchenko's narrative effectively serves as the antithesis to Gorbachev's earlier anecdote from his childhood. In the earlier anecdote, Gorbachev expresses aspects of the Hegemonic Soviet Masculine ideal through his maturation into manhood during the Great Patriotic War. Pandering to the undeniably masculine Reagan, Gorbachev appears to have abandoned his convictions. With this wavering dedication to his principles, Gorbachev further distances himself from the Hegemonic Soviet Masculine ideal that includes a steely commitment to the betterment of Soviet communism.

Furthermore, while Gorbachev's closeness with Reagan made him appear willing to collaborate and make concessions to deescalate Cold War tensions, Reagan did not reciprocate. Historian George Breslauer argues that even though the U.S.'s invasion of Panama in 1989 and the Gulf War in 1990-1991 did not directly threaten Soviet interests, American escalating militarism on a global stage brought Gorbachev's decreasing militarism into relief. Put differently: Gorbachev's continued closeness with Reagan through his military campaigns both contradicted and highlighted Gorbachev's aversion to using force to preserve Soviet power in Eastern Europe and the Middle East.⁶⁵ Next to Reagan, who expanded American military influence while demanding that the Soviet

⁶⁵ Breslauer, *Gorbachev and Yeltsin*, 85.

Union scale back its own, Gorbachev's commitment to peace appeared as militaristic and political weakness.

Anatoly Chernyaev, one of Gorbachev's personal advisors, more explicitly gendered Gorbachev's relationship with Reagan and other western leaders. In his 1993 memoir, *Shest' Let S Gorbachevym (Six Years with Gorbachev)*, Chernyaev recalled the moments before Gorbachev's resignation speech in December 1991:

Before [his resignation] Gorbachev said goodbye to his colleagues and partners with whom he had laid the foundations of a new world politics. He called them: Bush, Kohl, Major, Mitterand, Andreotti, Mulroney, Gonzalez, and Genscher. I have saved the records from those emotional telephone conversations, filled with warmth, gratitude, admiration, goodwill, strong masculine solidarity (*krepkoy muzhskoy solidarnosti*), and hopes for him not to leave politics. Gorbachev also sent goodbye letters to all of them as well as other national and political leaders, first of all to Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Reagan, and James Baker.⁶⁶

Rather than portraying Gorbachev as a "soft body" in contrast to western leaders, as Palazhenko did, Chernyaev positions Gorbachev as on par with the masculinity of western leaders. After years of political negotiations, they share such emotional bonds that Gorbachev's departure from his office includes a farewell to the men (and Margaret Thatcher, the lone female political figure in Gorbachev's foreign circle) with whom he built masculine solidarity: not Soviet working class men, but powerful western men. Although Chernyaev interprets Gorbachev's closeness and masculine solidarity with foreign leaders as emotional connection, in the next chapter I argue that Gorbachev viewed excessive emotions as effeminate, and used that understanding to emasculate Yeltsin.

⁶⁶ A. S. Chernyaev, *Shest' Let S Gorbachevym: Po Dnevnikovym Zapisyam* (Moskva: Progress, 1993), 517.

Conclusion

Pravda, *Krokodil*, and other Soviet publications shaped Gorbachev's initial public image. These publications highlighted Gorbachev's youthful enthusiasm for Communist ideals, and his service to the party and Soviet people—personality traits that paralleled the soldier-hero's devotion to Soviet principles, demonstrated by his physical sacrifice. Gorbachev also contributed to his partial Hegemonic Soviet masculine image through anecdotes about his working class origins and connections to the Great Patriotic War. His close relationship with his father who had fought on the front demonstrates Gorbachev's own manliness, although he never served.

But Gorbachev clearly strayed from the Hegemonic Soviet ideal. Even though militarism was a central component of Hegemonic Soviet gender codes, Gorbachev frequently avoided using military force. Gorbachev also deserted his fellow men, who engaged with a popular discourse on the crisis of their own masculinity. His aggressive anti-alcoholism campaign and somewhat progressive attitudes about women challenged the popular late Soviet discourse that fostered male camaraderie through alcoholism and restricted female influence to domestic spaces. However, Gorbachev still subscribed to archaic ideas about women: they could not fight in the Great Patriotic War, and even when acting politically, women's natural proclivities would always leave them with domestic responsibilities. Gorbachev condemned Soviet men's alcoholism, absence from the family, and failures to empower women. By forsaking his fellow Soviet men, Gorbachev again breaks with the Hegemonic Soviet Masculine ideal that celebrates male camaraderie. Finally, Gorbachev included elements of Western gender codes into his public image that built a more western masculine image and betrayed his dedication to

Soviet communist principles. Gorbachev recognized his gender as a source of power, but did not express his gender according to a single ideal or discourse.

Chapter Two

“He Carried Himself Like a Man”: Emotionality and Gender in Gorbachev and Yeltsin’s Political Rivalry, 1987-1991

Introduction

Between 1985 and 1991, Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin’s relationship publicly shifted from being collaborative to competitive. On March 11, 1985, Yeltsin partook in the unanimous Central Committee Plenum vote to make Gorbachev general secretary of the Party.¹ Despite his initial dislike for Yeltsin, Gorbachev brought Yeltsin from the small town of Sverdlosk to Moscow to serve as Central Committee Secretary in April 1985.² Following a promotion to Secretary of the Central Committee for Construction and Capital Investment, at the October 1985 Central Committee Plenum, Yeltsin gave a speech that the Plenum had reached an “important step in the [Communist] Party’s matters,” and so publicly praised the Party and Gorbachev’s leadership in the Plenum.³ Gorbachev again promoted Yeltsin in December of 1985, to the position of First Secretary of the Moscow Gorkom (the city committee) of the Communist Party.⁴

Even though their relationship appeared positive in 1985, their rapport deteriorated over the course of the next few years outside of public view. Political scientist and historian Timothy Colton writes that following their “political honeymoon in 1985-1986,” Yeltsin particularly took issue with Gorbachev’s increasingly infrequent communication and conceit. Yeltsin also objected to the fact that Gorbachev’s wife

¹ Timothy Colton, *Yeltsin: A Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 109.

² *Ibid.*, 109.

³ “Povysit' Aktivnost' Kommunistov” *Izvestiia No. 293*, October 20, 1985, and Colton, *Yeltsin*, 113.

⁴ Colton, *Yeltsin*, 113.

participated, though peripherally, in Gorbachev's administration.⁵ Although the public remained unaware, tensions escalated between the two men at the January 19, 1987 Politburo meeting, when Gorbachev ignored Yeltsin's suggestions for improving a report and personally rebuked him for not acting as a team player.⁶

As Yeltsin's dissatisfaction with Gorbachev's leadership mounted, in September of 1987, he sent Gorbachev a letter of resignation. But Gorbachev was slow to respond to the letter, and at the October 21st Central Committee meeting, Yeltsin delivered what would come to be known as his "secret speech," denouncing Gorbachev's reforms and leadership as ineffective.⁷ Historian George Breslauer argues that "Only a speech delivered before the mass public would have been more of a challenge to leadership," but the public learned of the speech within a few days, as *Pravda* and *Izvestiia* both reported the Plenum proceedings, and versions of the speech appeared through unofficial channels.⁸

The events between Yeltsin's October 1987 secret speech and the transfer of power from Gorbachev to Yeltsin in 1991 weave a complex political narrative. After Yeltsin issued two public apologies for his outburst, the Politburo removed him from his post and demoted him to First Deputy Chairman of Gosstroï, the State Construction Committee.⁹ In July of 1988, at the 19th Communist Party Conference, Yeltsin again spoke critically of Gorbachev's regime. Gorbachev then closed the conference with a

⁵ Ibid., 130-131.

⁶ Ibid., 132-133.

⁷ The term "secret speech" draws a parallel to Nikita Khrushchev's secret speech denouncing Stalin's crimes in 1956. But, as Timothy Colton argues, the similarities between the two speeches lie more in audacity than content and form (Ibid., 139,141).

⁸ George Breslauer, *Gorbachev and Yeltsin as Leaders* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 118.

⁹ Colton, *Yeltsin*, 156.

speech lampooning Yeltsin's October 1987 secret speech. Despite censure, over the next few years Yeltsin gained popularity and earned election to various increasingly powerful posts.¹⁰ He quit the Communist Party in July 1990, won the Russian Presidency in early 1991, and began publicly pressuring Gorbachev to resign.¹¹ In August of 1991, during the brief overlap when Yeltsin was Russian President and Gorbachev was Soviet President, a group of conservative Soviet officials attempted a coup while Gorbachev vacationed at his *dacha* (country house).¹² Gorbachev resigned in December 1991, and with the deterioration of the Soviet Union, Yeltsin took over as President of Russia.¹³

In this chapter, I examine two significant events and their aftermaths: Yeltsin's secret speech and the August 1991 coup, to show that Gorbachev and Yeltsin narrated their rivalry to the public in gendered terms. In the first section of this chapter, I argue that, with his treatment of an event following the secret speech, Gorbachev portrayed Yeltsin as masochistic and therefore effeminate. My second section analyzes Gorbachev's framing of the secret speech itself. Because of Gorbachev's understanding of emotionality as feminine and the broader cultural discourse that feminized excessive emotionality, as Gorbachev draws attention to Yeltsin's emotionality, he participates in Yeltsin's emasculation. I then demonstrate how Gorbachev's *glasnost* reforms changed Soviet discourse, allowing for Yeltsin's emergence as a voice for the people and enforcer of more traditional gender roles. Finally, I explore how Yeltsin and the Soviet media presented the coup as a gendered attack on Mother Russia. I argue that Yeltsin emerged

¹⁰ Boris Yeltsin, *The View from the Kremlin*, trans. Catherine Fitzpatrick (London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 1994), Xiii.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, xiv.

¹³ *Ibid.*, xiv.

as a masculine protector, in part because of his emotionality that Gorbachev had denigrated.

The Scissors Incident and Masochism

Yeltsin's secret speech caused him great distress. On November 9, 1987, less than three weeks after his secret speech, Yeltsin stabbed "the left side of his rib cage and stomach with office scissors" in his office.¹⁴ Because Yeltsin used scissors rather than a more threatening weapon, and because his injuries were superficial, Colton argues, "it was a howl of anger, frustration, and perhaps self-hate rather than an act of suicide."¹⁵ Following a hospital visit, Yeltsin recanted his secret speech three days later for the second time at a Party plenum meeting.¹⁶ Colton also notes that Yeltsin offered little information about the incident, but in his memoirs attributes his injury to a breakdown caused by physical and emotional duress, the consequences of his secret speech.¹⁷

Yeltsin did not divulge much about his "Scissors Incident,"¹⁸ but comparatively, Gorbachev did. In this section, I consider how Gorbachev framed Yeltsin's Scissors Incident in gendered terms. More specifically, I argue that Gorbachev sought to foreground the masochistic nature of the Scissors Incident, and that in Soviet discourse masochism coded for Russian and Soviet femininity. For this analysis, I employ a psychoanalytic definition of masochism: "any behavioral act, verbalization, or fantasy that—by unconscious design—is physically or psychically injurious to oneself, self-

¹⁴ Colton, *Yeltsin*, 148.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 150

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 148

¹⁸ I have named the episode the "Scissors Incident" for convenience.

defeating, humiliating, or unduly self-sacrificing.”¹⁹ In this interpretation, masochism constitutes more than simply pleasure derived from pain, but a pursuit of pain, including self-inflicted pain.

Gorbachev took advantage of the Scissors Incident to portray Yeltsin as masochistic. Yeltsin stabbed himself on November 9, and Gorbachev announced the news to the Politburo that same day “to spare [Yeltsin] the unpleasantness of [recounting] what happened,” strategically portraying himself as Yeltsin’s protector.²⁰ Under the guise of shielding Yeltsin, Gorbachev generously discloses the story that he notes Yeltsin’s doctors had tried to keep from going public.²¹ Gorbachev again discusses the Scissors Incident openly in his 1995 memoirs, *Zhizn’ i Reformi*:

Yeltsin, using office scissors, had simulated an attempt at suicide; it was impossible to interpret his action otherwise. In the opinion of the doctors, there was little danger for his life – the scissors, slipping over his ribs, had left only a bloody trace.²²

Although Colton contends that the superficiality of Yeltsin’s wounds suggests that the Scissors Incident was not a suicide attempt, Gorbachev is unequivocal that Yeltsin attempted to kill himself, but failed. Implicit in Colton’s argument lies the question: if Yeltsin had wanted to kill himself, why would he opt for office scissors, and not a less painful method with a higher likelihood for success, like a gun? Gorbachev’s argument contains his answer: Yeltsin opted for office scissors because he intentionally sought pain. Moreover, despite emphasizing that the Scissors Incident was not fatal, Gorbachev

¹⁹ Daniel Rancour-Laferriere, *The Slave Soul of Russia: Moral Masochism and the Cult of Suffering* (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 7. Rancour-Laferriere quotes psychoanalyst Anita Weinreb Katz’s definition of masochism.

²⁰ Mikhail Gorbachev, *Zhizn’ i Reformi, Kniga 1* (Moskva: Novosti, 1995), 374.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

includes quite gory depiction of Yeltsin's physical pain, as he describes the path of Yeltsin's office scissors. In framing the Scissors Incident as a botched, but excessively painful suicide attempt, Gorbachev defines the Scissors Incident as an act of masochism.

In contrast to the western white masculinity that has used masochism to reify male control over women, in a Russian and Soviet context, masochism signifies femininity.²³ Russian cultural scholar Daniel Rancour-Laferriere argues that through its magnitude and reoccurrence in Russian and Soviet history, suffering has become central to a Russian "Slave Soul," or Russian identity more broadly.²⁴ Rancour-Laferriere then argues that this "Slave Soul," is gendered as female, in particular, as a Russian mother. Because of prevalent Russian and later Soviet family norms, the prototypical Russian peasant mother suffers masochistically, just as the "Slave Soul" of Russia has historically.²⁵ Rancour-Laferriere claims that in Imperial Russia, wife beating became so normalized, that wives felt unimportant and unloved if their husbands did not abuse them.²⁶ He clarifies:

This is not to say that the Russian peasant woman was continually masochistic in all contexts, but that she was at least capable of on-again, off-again masochism to deal with her mate's intensely ambivalent feelings toward her, as well as to deal with her own emotional needs.²⁷

²³ David Savran, *Taking it Like a Man: White Masculinity, Masochism, and Contemporary American Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998). Savran uses psychoanalysis to argue that white American men at times emphasize their victimhood to regain a lost control they feel owed them by their gender.

²⁴ Rancour-Laferriere, *The Slave Soul of Russia*, 3.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 144.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 153.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 155.

Within this Russian paradigm, the active perpetuation of violence became masculine, while the passive experience of that violence, feminine.²⁸ Rancour-Laferriere then continues his analysis into the 20th century, and argues that masochism remained feminine, as the Soviet state provided ample opportunities for women to suffer.²⁹ Gorbachev highlights that Yeltsin welcomed suffering, a masochism historically understood as feminine in both Russian and Soviet cultures.

Beyond simply recounting the Scissors Incident, Gorbachev also carefully corrects circulating narratives that contest his version of events. Gorbachev writes:

There appeared versions: Yeltsin was sitting at a table in his bedroom, lost consciousness, and fell against the table, accidentally cutting himself with scissors that he held in his hand. But that legend did not suit Yeltsin, and a couple years later he put out a different side—according to which at night on the street he had been attacked by two hooligans with knives. He, of course, fought them off like kittens, but he still received a knife wound. How heroic this legend appears. By that time, I already knew Yeltsin’s ability for fiction.³⁰

Gorbachev ridicules Yeltsin’s growing “heroic,” image as self-imagined and manufactured. As I discuss in my next chapter, Yeltsin crafted a masculine image as a modern day Russian folk literary hero called the *bogatyr*, and used that image for political gain. Yeltsin had certainly established himself as a *bogatyr* by 1995, when Gorbachev published this memoir. As Gorbachev describes and refutes fictional versions of the Scissor Incident that challenge his own masochistic spin, he recognizes that those versions hold power, as they merit his attention and rebuttal. The second version

²⁸ Ibid., 157.

²⁹ Ibid., 159, 174. Rancour-Laferriere refers specifically to Lynne Attwood’s theory of the Soviet woman’s “double burden”—duties both in and outside the home, as well as the guilt accompanying such hefty responsibility.

³⁰ Gorbachev, *Zhizn’ i Reformi*, 374.

explaining the Scissors Incident, Yeltsin's version, particularly threatens Gorbachev's framing of the Scissors Incident in gendered terms.

Had this second "fictional" version of the Scissors Incident been publicly accepted as true, Yeltsin's body would have appeared more masculine according to the Hegemonic Soviet Masculine ideal. As I discussed in my introduction and first chapter, late Soviet men believed themselves to have fallen victim to a crisis of masculinity because of their inability to embody Hegemonic Soviet Masculinity.³¹ Personified by the soldier-hero, Hegemonic Soviet Masculinity developed out of the militaristic culture first of World War I, and then more significantly, the Great Patriotic War. Sociopolitical circumstances, including the lack of substantial connection to the Great Patriotic War and restrictions on political freedoms, prevented late Soviet men from measuring up to the soldier-hero's masculinity.³² In the second version of the story, Yeltsin carries not self-inflicted scars, but battle wounds like the soldier-hero. Historian Ethan Pollock describes how men surveyed other men's bodies at the *bania*, or public baths, in search of the battle wounds that marked a man as masculine:

As many Red Army soldiers understood, there were officers and grunts who had not been brave and medals that had not been earned justly. The trick was to figure out another man's worth without resorting to state-sponsored markers of heroism. In the *bania*, with all the insignia and regalia removed and with party membership cards left behind, the bodies alone made their contributions known.³³

³¹ Anna Temkina and Elena Zdravomyslova, "The Crisis of Masculinity in Late Soviet Discourse," *Russian Studies in History* 51 (2012): 22, accessed March 16, 2014, doi: 10.2753/RSH1061-1983510201.

³² *Ibid.*, 16.

³³ Ethan Pollock, "'Real Men Go to the Bania': Postwar Soviet Masculinities and the Bathhouse" in *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 11 (2010): 55, accessed March 21, 2014, doi: 10.1353/kri.0.0138.

If hooligans had wounded Yeltsin's body in a failed mugging, his body would attest to his heroism. He would have bravely fought off assailants, "justly" marking his body as masculine in battle, consequently endowing Yeltsin with a "man's worth." But Gorbachev anxiously wards off this conclusion by repeatedly mocking it as falsehood. Through this derision, Gorbachev leaves room only for one truth: that Yeltsin masochistically attempted suicide with a pair of scissors, and later sought to reposition himself as a more masculine hero.

Emotionality and Feminization

Even though Gorbachev uses masochism to undercut Yeltsin's image as a hero, he does grant Yeltsin some small masculine praise following the episode. On November 12, just three days after the Scissors Incident, Yeltsin appeared at the Communist Party's Plenum meeting in Moscow where he retracted his secret speech. Gorbachev writes in his memoirs, "At the plenum, Yeltsin exhibited self-control; I would say he carried himself like a man (*muschina*)."³⁴ Gorbachev praises Yeltsin's restraint as manly, and so defines masculinity in opposition to emotionality.

Gorbachev's belief that men should demonstrate self-control reflected larger late Soviet understandings of masculinity. As I have discussed, though unreachable for many men in Gorbachev and Yeltsin's generation, the soldier-hero's physical and personality traits remained exemplary for successful masculinity. Among other characteristics, historian Karen Petrone contends:

A critical masculine quality that the ideal soldier also possesses is self-control. He must be able to control his will and his passions as he sacrifices himself for the cause. In depictions of the ideal soldier, hysteria

³⁴ Gorbachev, *Zhizn' i Reformi*, 375.

and fanaticism, both the results of an excess of passion, are belittled as feminine and negative traits.³⁵

The soldier-hero must experience emotions, but he also must be able to control them. A gender binary then emerges, in which the control of passion signifies masculinity, and excess passion femininity.

With his praise for Yeltsin's manly restraint at the plenum, Gorbachev suggests that until Yeltsin controlled his emotions, he was not carrying himself like a man. In this section, I argue that Gorbachev emphasized the excessive emotionality of Yeltsin's secret speech to undermine his masculinity. As Gorbachev uses emotionality as a signifier of femininity, he participates in what theorist Sara Ahmed refers to as a "metonymic slide," in which terms with closely related meanings become effectively interchangeable in usage.³⁶ Similar to how masochism signified femininity in late Soviet context, excessive emotion coded for insufficient masculinity, or femininity. The term "emotional" slides in meaning to emasculate Yeltsin. Gorbachev uses hysteria to frame Yeltsin as unfit for politics.

Gorbachev overstated Yeltsin's emotionality. At the 19th Party Congress on July 1, 1988, almost a year after Yeltsin delivered his secret speech, Gorbachev delivered a closing address that was later published in an updated edition of his *Perestroika* memoirs. In the speech, Gorbachev criticizes Yeltsin's October 1987 secret speech:

What do I think is inside Comrade Yeltsin's drama of political work? At the stage when it was necessary to decide practical matters, he didn't have

³⁵ Karen Petrone, "Masculinity and Heroism in Imperial and Soviet Military-Patriotic Cultures," in *Russian Masculinities in History and Culture*, ed. Barbara Evans Clements et al. (New York: Palgrave), 173.

³⁶ Sara Ahmed, "Affective Economies," in *Social Text*, Vol. 22, No. 2. (2004) 117-139.

enough strength, and so he strayed to loud statements and abuses of administrative authority.³⁷

Gorbachev equates Yeltsin's political work with drama. Unlike the soldier-hero, Yeltsin falls victim to passion, blurring politics with emotionality. Yeltsin's emotions are so uncontrollable that he lacks the "strength" to "decide practical matters." Using emotionality, Gorbachev demeans Yeltsin's criticisms of his leadership—Yeltsin's outburst derived not from political thought, but from his feminine submission to feelings. Yeltsin is too weak to control his excessive emotions.

Gorbachev then continues to embarrass Yeltsin for his unseemly eruption by quoting the transcript of Yeltsin's first apology:

Gorbachev: Do you have enough strength to continue in [political] matters?

Voices [present at the meeting]: He isn't able. It's impossible for him to remain at his post.

...

Yeltsin: I said that I let down the Central Committee of the Party, the Moscow Party Organization. I will repeat what I said: "I ask to be relieved of my membership to the Politburo and of leadership in the Moscow City Party Organization."³⁸

Gorbachev again posits emotionality against political clear-headed thought that requires strength. Gorbachev includes the "Voices" in his recounting of events because their insistence on Yeltsin's unfitness for work demonstrates that the magnitude of Yeltsin's hysteria was observable by all present, and that Yeltsin stood alone. Yeltsin's apology shows both that he has regained the political calm he lost during his outburst, and his submission to Gorbachev's unemotional authority.

³⁷ Mikhail Gorbachev, "Rech' Pri Zakrytii Vsesoyuznoy Konferentsii KPSS" in *Izobrannye Rech' i Stat'i* (Politizdat, 1989), 414.

³⁸ Ibid.

But why did Gorbachev recount Yeltsin's political gaffe in such detail on July 1, 1988, almost a year after the incident? Following his secret speech, Yeltsin had been demoted and banned from the Moscow media. During the July conference, Yeltsin sent Gorbachev two notes requesting to speak, before Yeltsin finally spoke on the last day of the conference.³⁹ This speech, unlike his October 1987 speech, was planned and not hysterical. He cogently argued in defense of his criticisms of Gorbachev's leadership in his secret speech, and so effectively rescinded his public apologies given in October and November of 1987.⁴⁰ Gorbachev's speech closing the conference reminded the Communist Party and the public not only of Yeltsin's un-soldier-heroic previous hysteria, but that even if he stood by his outburst now, he himself had already acknowledged the error of his emotionality. Gorbachev's repetition of Yeltsin's apology restates that Yeltsin's secret speech was a hysterical outburst of an inferior man unable to control his emotions.

Although Gorbachev finds little place for Yeltsin's emotions in politics, Ahmed offers a more complex theorization of emotionality. Emotions are not psychological dispositions and do not simply reside in people, but operate both within and between people, binding individuals to larger collectives.⁴¹ Because shared emotions often align groups of people, they do not oppose, but rather contribute to that which is political. Ahmed's more nuanced understanding of emotionality and politics helps explain how Yeltsin's political image and masculinity remain untarnished despite Gorbachev's charges of excessive emotionality. Like gender, politics and emotion are non-binary. As I

³⁹ Colton, *Yeltsin*, 157.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 158.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 119.

will argue in the remaining sections of this chapter, it is partially for this reason that Yeltsin later garners popularity not in spite of his emotionality, but through it.

The Initial Press Coverage and Fabricated Versions of the Secret Speech

Just as in Gorbachev's July 1988 speech, the initial press coverage of Yeltsin's October 1987 speech characterizes Yeltsin as overly emotional. Because of Gorbachev's *glasnost* reforms that allowed the media some limited new freedoms, the press notified the public of Yeltsin's outburst, but only in vague terms and from a perspective favorable to Gorbachev. In this section I maintain that Gorbachev challenged Yeltsin's masculinity by emphasizing his emotionality, and argue that because of *glasnost's* role in changing public discourse, Yeltsin's emotionality worked in his favor. Yeltsin appears not as an overly emotional and effeminate politician, but as a heroic voice of the people capable of reinstating more conservative gender roles.

Glasnost opened up the Soviet media enough for the press to cover Yeltsin's secret speech, but not enough for the press to do so in detail. On November 13, 1987, the Soviet state's official publication *Izvestiia* commended the Party's, "ethos of openness and principle of freely exchanging of ideas," a statement that now appears somewhat empty, given Gorbachev's relative intolerance for Yeltsin's criticisms.⁴² *Izvestiia* then explained that although the Party was of one mind in considering questions of *perestroika*, Yeltsin brought "dissonance" when he announced that he could not fully support the Party's decision.⁴³ While the rest of the Party believed that *perestroika* was proceeding appropriately, Yeltsin stands alone as the only dissident.

⁴² "Energichno vesti perestroiku" *Izvestiia*, November 13, 1987.

⁴³ Ibid.

Emphasizing that Yeltsin was the lone voice contradicting the Party lends the Party legitimacy, or at least safety in numbers. As the solitary disagreeing voice, Yeltsin appears irrational. The article then notes Gorbachev's response: "That on the whole, Yeltsin's speech was politically immature," and was based not on "analysis and facts," but on "the essence... of a soapbox in content and character."⁴⁴ Just as in his later 1988 speech, Gorbachev emphasizes that Yeltsin's emotions motivated his speech. The charge of political immaturity suggests not only that Yeltsin failed to consider facts and analysis, but also implies that he was not capable of doing so.

Despite this indictment of Yeltsin's deficient rationality, *Izvestiia*'s vague coverage of Yeltsin's secret speech actually worked to Yeltsin's advantage. Gorbachev did not release the October Plenum 1987 transcript until March 1989, and in the meantime Yeltsin's outburst took on mythical qualities.⁴⁵ One false version of the speech appeared in Moscow's daily paper, *Moskovskaya Pravda*. Colton writes that journalist Mikhail Poltoranin was not of high enough rank to access an actual transcript of Yeltsin's speech, so instead he published, "the one he would have wanted Yeltsin to make."⁴⁶ The public's vague understanding that Yeltsin had opposed Gorbachev produced his reputation as Gorbachev's foe. The speech's specifics became malleable to suit public interest. As Poltoranin attaches Yeltsin's reputation not to a speech he actually gave, but to a speech he wanted him to make, Yeltsin's name represents more than himself. He personifies the increasing public disapproval of Gorbachev's leadership.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Colton, *Yeltsin*, 153.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

It's difficult to imagine such a free press prior to Gorbachev's *glasnost* reforms that opened the Party to criticism. In his *Perestroika* memoirs, Gorbachev frames *glasnost* as "greater openness in all spheres of life and society," necessary for the preservation of Communism in the democratizing Soviet Union.⁴⁷ Instituted in 1985 as part of Gorbachev's broader *perestroika* reforms, *glasnost* facilitated both public critiques of Gorbachev's regime and Yeltsin's secret speech. For the first time in Soviet history, Yeltsin did not have to wait for Gorbachev's death or ouster to deplore his leadership.⁴⁸ At a moment when the Soviet public gained unprecedented, but still limited, freedoms to censure Gorbachev's increasingly unpopular regime, Yeltsin emerged as a charismatic voice for those opinions.

Yeltsin may have been the lone voice of dissent within the Party, but he was not alone in criticizing Gorbachev's reforms. Just a few months before his secret speech, the Soviet magazine *Ogonek* published an article called "Life by the Brick," criticizing Gorbachev's failure to equalize wealth disparities between the elite Party members and "'svoi' people."⁴⁹ *Svoi* is a Russian pronoun meaning "'us,' 'ours,' or 'those who belong to our circle.'"⁵⁰ Understanding *svoi*'s meaning in *Ogonek* in 1987 requires brief explanation of its earlier meaning. Anthropologist Alexei Yurchak describes the concept of *svoi* as a form of "public," or normative discourse, prior to Gorbachev's appointment as General Secretary in 1985:

⁴⁷ Gorbachev, *Perestroika*, 72.

⁴⁸ Nikita Khrushchev did not make his infamous 1956 secret speech denouncing Stalin's crimes until after Stalin's death.

⁴⁹ "Zhizn' Za Kirpichom" *Ogonek*, No. 16. April 18-25, 1987.

⁵⁰ Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 103.

Unlike a counterpublic, the public of *svoi* was self-organized not through an oppositional counterdiscourse of one's "interests and needs" ... Explicit opposition just like explicit support [of the state] was avoided.⁵¹

Before Gorbachev's *perestroika*, a person who was *svoi* neither dissented from, nor showed active investment in the Soviet Union. A *svoi* person simply lived normally, as "one of us."

Yurchak argues that Gorbachev's *perestroika* reforms produced a "rupture of this discursive regime."⁵² That is to say, as Gorbachev changed the message the state sent to its people, he facilitated a change in their discourses as well. *Ogonek* demonstrates this change with its use of *svoi* in 1987 showing decided disapproval of Gorbachev's leadership. Incongruent with Yurchak's earlier definition of *svoi*, this new understanding of *svoi* was recalibrated to include dissidents like Yeltsin, but not Party apparatchiks like Gorbachev. *Svoi* discourse could now include attacking the Party. Because of this rupture, open dissent from Gorbachev's regime that previously might have excluded Yeltsin from the public of *svoi*, now not only allowed for his inclusion, but also enabled his transformation into a leader who was "one of us."

As the voice of the new *svoi*, Yeltsin appears in Poltoranin's made-up speech as an enforcer of normative gender roles. Colton notes that Poltoranin, "[Knew] how unloved [Gorbachev's wife] Raisa Gorbacheva was, [and so] he put into Yeltsin's mouth words about how she had telephoned him with peremptory instructions on Party business."⁵³ Poltoranin's Yeltsin reflects the wider Soviet perception I described in Chapter One of Raisa as improperly involved for a General Secretary's wife. Poltoranin's

⁵¹ Ibid., 117

⁵² Ibid., 291

⁵³ Colton, *Yeltsin*, 153.

invented Yeltsin then condemns not only Gorbachev's leadership, but also the blurred gender roles in his marriage that allowed for Raisa's political involvement. In fact, although he did not include it in his speech, Yeltsin did take issue with Raisa's role, and perhaps for that reason did not repudiate Poltoranin's fabrication.⁵⁴ Although made-up, Poltoranin's speech demonstrates how Yeltsin came to personify the public's discontent with Gorbachev's leadership, and how gender played into that process: Poltoranin's Yeltsin reinstates the appropriate gender boundaries missing from Gorbachev's marriage. As he does not refute Poltoranin's speech, Yeltsin becomes complicit in creating that self-portrait.

As an enforcer of gender roles, Yeltsin contests the crisis of masculinity. As I explained in my first chapter, many late Soviet men believed that women's increasing autonomy in the public sphere threatened their own masculinity.⁵⁵ Because Yeltsin does not protest when Poltoranin uses his voice to criticize Raisa's political power, Yeltsin allies himself with men who would rather restrict women's power in the public sphere to preserve their own. In the media coverage of the secret speech, Yeltsin's political struggle against Gorbachev becomes, at least to some extent, a battle to maintain male political supremacy over women, the dominance threatened by the crisis of masculinity.

In his 1995 memoirs *Life and Reforms*, Gorbachev ridicules Yeltsin for not repudiating the fabricated versions of his speech. Gorbachev writes that as fictitious versions of Yeltsin's speech appeared, Yeltsin did not refute them because, "He

⁵⁴ Ibid., 130.

⁵⁵ Zhanna Chernova, "The Model of 'Soviet' Fatherhood: Discursive Prescriptions" in *Russian Studies in History* 51 (2012): 36, accessed March 16, 2014, doi: 10.2753/RSH1061-1983510202.

obviously began to consider himself a ‘hero of the people.’”⁵⁶ Yeltsin could have publicly denounced the illegitimate versions of his speech, just as he denounced Gorbachev’s leadership—doing so would have drawn him closer to Gorbachev’s administration. He again mocks Yeltsin’s choice to appear as “a hero of the people,” undermining Yeltsin’s broader heroic image.

The Coup, Mother Russia, and Mourning

Despite suffering political punishment for his secret speech, Yeltsin won election to the new legislative body of the Russian Federation in March of 1990. As a member of the Russian parliament, Yeltsin opened a public referendum to create a Russian Presidency.⁵⁷ He ran for Russian President and won in a landslide in June of 1991.⁵⁸ Shortly thereafter, in August of 1991, Gorbachev left Moscow for vacation in the Crimea with the understanding that, upon his return, he would sign a new Soviet Union Treaty.⁵⁹ The new Treaty was unpopular among conservatives in the Communist Party because it significantly weakened the Union, and in fact had been precipitated by the three Baltic states separating entirely from the Union.⁶⁰ A conservative group of eight top Soviet officials who called themselves the State Emergency Committee appeared at Gorbachev’s *dacha* (country house) and asked him to declare martial law and reassert Soviet control, or to claim illness and allow them to take over temporarily.⁶¹ He refused all their requests, and so they placed him under house arrest and returned to Moscow where they

⁵⁶ Gorbachev, *Zhizn' i Reformi*, 373.

⁵⁷ Breslauer, *Gorbachev and Yeltsin*, 124.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 124. In my next chapter I discuss Yeltsin’s presidential bid in depth.

⁵⁹ Stephen Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse 1970 – 2000* (New York: Oxford, 2008), 99.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 97.

announced that Gorbachev was ill, that they would stand in for him, and sent troops into Moscow. Although the members of the State Emergency Committee were adamant that they had acquired power legally, during an open press conference it became clear that they had actually attempted a coup.⁶²

In this section, I consider how the media gendered the coup and contributed to Yeltsin's heroic image. I argue that both the media and Yeltsin took advantage of the militarism of the coup's violence to frame it as an attack on "Mother Russia," a woman with sons, in need of protection. Gorbachev's absence enabled Yeltsin's emergence as both a hero, who fought off invaders in the heart of "Mother Russia," and a paternal figure. Although I delay full analysis of Yeltsin's heroic image until my next chapter, in this section I show that even though the Soviet Union was deteriorating, aspects of the Soviet soldier-hero's masculinity remained relevant for Yeltsin's gendered public image.

The circumstances of the coup offered Yeltsin an exceptional opportunity to demonstrate his manliness, and the Soviet media helpfully showcased that masculinity. While Gorbachev was stuck on house arrest at his *dacha*, in a move that would become definitional to his early public image, Yeltsin mounted a tank outside the White House and denounced the coup.⁶³ His speech emphasized that Gorbachev had been away on vacation, and that although Russia had squashed the coup, the Soviet Union had done nothing to stop it.⁶⁴ Historical sociologist Victoria E. Bonnell and Russian cultural scholar Gregory Freidin have traced how the television program *Vremia* covered the

⁶² Victoria E. Bonnell and Gregory Freidin, "Televorot: The Role of Television Coverage in Russia's August 1991 Coup," in *Slavic Review* 52 (1993): 818, accessed December 27, 2012, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2499653>.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 823.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 835.

three-day coup, and argue that *Vremia* was more than a passive observer, but an active participant in directing both public perception and the course of events. Bonnell and Freidin consider camerawork integral to forming Yeltsin's heroic image atop the tank:

... the crowd around Yeltsin and the tank was quite small, virtually lost in the vast space of the White House driveway... One can easily imagine a long shot through a telephoto lens from atop the high banister. Such an angle and frame could have easily diminished Yeltsin's considerable physical stature to a visually unimpressive human figure flailing impotently...⁶⁵

Because of camerawork, Yeltsin appears both physically large and popular. His stature evokes the soldier-hero's image, as the tank serves as a militaristic symbol, and his towering physical form signifies physical strength.

But Yeltsin strayed from the soldier-hero ideal in a significant respect. Standing on top of a tank outside the White House, Yeltsin's appearance was, as Bonnell and Freidin note, "reminiscent of Lenin's famous speech on top of an armored car in Petrograd in 1917."⁶⁶ Of course, even if Yeltsin appeared like Lenin, his deviation from Lenin matches his foremost departure from the soldier-hero ideal: Yeltsin no longer fought for the formation and continuation of Communism, but advocated its destruction. As Yeltsin appears like a heroic protector of Russia, he appropriates aspects of Hegemonic Soviet Masculinity to suit the Soviet Union's now imminent transformation into the Russian Federation.

Yeltsin gendered the coup as a threat to young men in particular. At the White House where the State Emergency Committee had dispatched their tanks, three young men died on Wednesday, August 21. At the funeral on Saturday, Yeltsin humbly offered

⁶⁵ Ibid., 824.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

his apology, “Forgive me, for I was unable to protect your sons.”⁶⁷ Although Bonnell and Freidin limit their analysis to television, the print media echoed this sentiment. On Sunday, *Izvestiia*’s front page included enlarged text quoting Yeltsin’s apology, beneath a large photo of the three caskets, and between two photos of grieving women.⁶⁸ With this layout, *Izvestiia* directs Yeltsin’s apology to weeping Russian women. With this single statement, Yeltsin takes responsibility for leadership of Russia, and establishes himself as a paternal figure for all young Russian men. Even though only three sons died, Yeltsin apologizes to all of Russia. The young men who died became the sons of all Russian families.



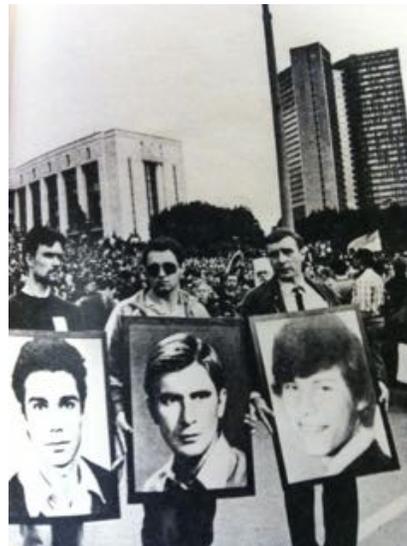
Again contradicting Gorbachev’s separation of emotionality and politics, mourning—a decidedly emotional public display—helped Yeltsin assert his political legitimacy and implicate himself within the Russian collective. Western theorist Judith Butler argues that as it joins people in their shared vulnerability, mourning is inherently political. Mourning overwhelms the individual and, “[binds] us to others... [as it implicates] us in lives that are not our own.”⁶⁹ It is precisely through Yeltsin’s mourning, not in spite of some effeminate emotionality, that he binds himself to the Russian people.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 836. I have changed their translation slightly, from “I have failed to protect,” to “I was unable to protect.” My translation is more literal.

⁶⁸ *Izvestiia* No. 202, August 24, 1991.

⁶⁹ Judith Butler, “Violence, Mourning, Politics” in *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (New York: Verso, 2004), 22.

Yeltsin and *Izvestiia* were not alone in mourning the young men killed. *Ogonek*'s coverage of the coup included an article entitled, "Our Sons Were at the Barricades," with an interview with Aleksander Yarkolev, a Soviet politician whose actual son had not died, although he notes, "My son, a father of three, was at the barricades, along with my daughter and her husband."⁷⁰ Yarkolev draws a connection between the families grieving for their sons and his own family, implying that all Russian families should feel the loss of all Russian sons. *Ogonek* pairs this interview with multiple photos of young men both at the barricades during the coup, and the funeral after. At the barricades, men appear defiant, raising their fists, not so unlike Yeltsin's imposing stature on the tank.



In the images of the funeral, men appear stoic, even while carrying photos of the men who died. In contrast, women appear visibly shaken in their mourning.

⁷⁰ *Ogonek* No. 36, August 31-September 7, 1991.



The latter photo especially merits attention. A woman, presumably of age to have mothered the men killed at the barricades, carries a sign: “Mother Russia! The blood of your sons drenches the soil!” In alignment with Rancour-Laferriere’s characterization of the soul of Russia as a woman who experiences pain, the media coverage of the coup genders Russia as a suffering Mother. Although the Soviet Union has not yet officially disintegrated, nationalism replaces proletarian pride.⁷¹ In the media’s portrayal of the coup, the three men who died did so not for the protection of Communism, but Mother Russia. If those young men represent all sons of Mother Russia, Yeltsin’s self-characterization as their protector also lends him a paternal image: he mourns the sons as if they were his own, claiming responsibility for the deaths of all Russian sons, even though Yeltsin never actually had sons.

As the media framed Yeltsin as a hero during the coup’s crisis, Gorbachev’s absence became noticeable in contrast. On Wednesday, the same day that the three men would later die, *Izvestiia* asks, “Where is the President of the USSR? How is his

⁷¹ It is also worth noting that throughout this issue, *Ogonek* includes images not of the Soviet sickle and hammer, but the Russian tricolor flag, even though the tricolor does not officially replace the Soviet flag until December 1991.

health?”⁷² The accompanying image of Gorbachev shows him not on a tank, but seated and looking worried, with one hand covering his face. As I discussed in Chapter One, the Soviet media had emphasized Gorbachev’s bodily health following his appointment six years earlier. During the 1991 coup, Gorbachev appeared weak in contrast not only to Yeltsin, but also to his former self. Ironically, the rumors that the State Emergency Committee spread that Gorbachev’s had become ill were not only false, but as I will discuss in the next chapter, would have been more accurately described Yeltsin’s health at the time.⁷³ Nevertheless, as Yeltsin heroically fought off invaders in Moscow, Gorbachev was nowhere to be found, with his health, and so physical strength under scrutiny.

Gorbachev did not return to Moscow until Thursday night, the day after the young men died. The next day, both *Pravda* and *Izvestiia* published the photo at the right of Gorbachev’s return.⁷⁴ Caught at an awkward angle, Gorbachev directs an uncomfortable half-smile off camera. With his disheveled and casual dress, Gorbachev appears unprepared to lead, much less



protect young Soviet men. With his inappropriate smile, Gorbachev appears out of touch with reality. Not only did a coup almost remove him from power, but three young men

⁷² *Izvestiia*, August 21, 1991.

⁷³ Colton, *Yeltsin*, 91. Yeltsin suffered rheumatic valvular heart disease and acute angina as early as the mid-1960s, which Colton attributes to his workaholicism.

⁷⁴ *Pravda*, August 23, 1991 and *Izvestiia*, August 23, 1991.

died while he left the Soviet Union (now unofficially Mother Russia) unprotected. If, as Bonnell and Freidin argue, *Vremia* had the option of portraying Yeltsin as “visually unimpressive human figure flailing impotently,” Gorbachev appears as just that.

Gorbachev continued to make public statements about the Soviet Union using communist rhetoric that, given all that had transpired during his vacation and subsequent house arrest, made him appear delusional about the Union’s imminent disintegration. Gorbachev’s devotion to Communism now appears to be a somewhat hollow signifier of his weakening Hegemonic Soviet Masculine image. On Friday, *Izvestiia* published addresses from both Gorbachev and Yeltsin. Gorbachev addresses his, “Dear Citizens,” while Yeltsin address his, “Dear Fellow Countrymen (*sootchestvenniki*).”⁷⁵ But the state to which Gorbachev’s “Citizens” belonged held very little cultural value for the public now mourning the sons of Mother Russia. His insistence on its existence renders him either delusional or ignorant—neither trait becoming for a leader. In contrast, Yeltsin’s address “Fellow Countrymen,” not only references budding Russian nationalism, but also contains notable masculine gendering. The root word for *sootchestvenniki*, is *otets*, the Russian word for father. By referring to his fellow countrymen using a specifically masculine term, Yeltsin connects himself to and builds camaraderie with other Russian men. About four months later, in December of 1991, Gorbachev resigned as the Russian flag replaced the Soviet flag above the Kremlin.⁷⁶

Conclusion

Between 1987 and 1991, two significant events defined Gorbachev and Yeltsin’s political rivalry: Yeltsin’s secret speech, and the August 1991 coup. Through Gorbachev

⁷⁵ *Izvestiia*, August 23, 1991.

⁷⁶ Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted*, 111.

and Yeltsin's framing of these events, I have demonstrated that each man employed popular understandings of masculinity and femininity to compete politically. Both in the immediate aftermath and years after the Scissors Incident, Gorbachev drew attention to what he framed as Yeltsin's masochism. He viewed emotionality as feminine excess that had little place in politics, and then used this gendered understanding of emotionality to feminize Yeltsin, ridiculing him and undermining his heroic image.

But as Gorbachev's *glasnost* reforms altered Soviet discourse and publicized his own lack of popular support, Yeltsin came to embody public dissatisfaction with Gorbachev's regime. Rather than working to his disadvantage, Yeltsin's emotionality bound him to the Russian people. As the Soviet system collapsed, Yeltsin stood at the fore, appropriating aspects of Soviet Hegemonic Masculinity to suit re-emerging Russian nationalism. The very emotionality that Gorbachev used to feminize him enables Yeltsin's emergence as a masculine figure: the paternal protector of Mother Russia's sons. In my next chapter I use Yeltsin's campaign materials to consider his masculine public image in greater depth, and argue that beyond his adaptation of some Hegemonic Soviet Masculine characteristics, Yeltsin crafted a gendered public image in the tradition of a Russian folk literary figure called the *bogatyr*.

Chapter Three “Boris! Don’t Surrender Boris!”: Yeltsin the *Bogatyr*

A poster from Boris Yeltsin’s 1996 presidential campaign describes both Yeltsin and Moscow’s Mayor Yuri Luzhkov, “Yuri Luzhkov and Boris Yeltsin are real men (*muzhchiny*) and real politicians!”¹ The poster uses their masculinities as leadership qualifications. Despite flaunting Yeltsin’s authenticity as a man, the poster defines neither what it means to be a “real” man, nor why that masculinity is a selling point for a politician. In this chapter, I explore the questions that the poster leaves unanswered: what made Yeltsin a real man, and how did his manliness enable his political power? In the last chapter, I argued that both Yeltsin and the Soviet media framed the coup as gendered, and that Yeltsin’s masculine public image included aspects of the Hegemonic Soviet Masculine ideal. Here, I expand on that analysis and argue that Yeltsin sought to convey an image like the archetypal hyper masculine mythical hero of Russian folklore, the *bogatyr*.

In the narration of his political ascension, Yeltsin emphasized traits that match the *bogatyry*. Unlike Gorbachev, whose appointment to the office of General Secretary in 1985 saved him from campaigning, Yeltsin’s popular presidential elections in 1991 and 1996, as well as a referendum to sustain and increase his power in 1993, required purposeful politicking. During a moment of political upheaval, Yeltsin’s image as a *bogatyr* not only reinforced his leadership ability as a man of the people, but also provided the uncertain political moment with a comfortable ending borrowed from

¹ “Za Prezidenta Rossii Borisa Yel'tsina” Hoover Institution Archives. Russian Subject Collection, Box 39.2.

Russian folklore: with Yeltsin as its strong and masculine hero, Russia would survive as it always had.

Before demonstrating how Yeltsin molded his image to that of the *bogatyry*, I must first explain who *bogatyry* were, and what role they played in both Russian and Soviet culture. *Bogatyry* are the epic heroes of a specific body of Russian folklore called the *bylina*. Although it is difficult to pinpoint the *bylina*'s exact moment of origin because they were initially only sung and spread orally, historians believe that *bylina* originated in the tenth through the fourteenth centuries during the period of Russia's cultural ancestor, Kievan Rus.² At the time, Kievan Rus's most important city was Kiev, which today stands in Ukraine and not in Russia. Still, much of Russian ethnic and nationalist identity traces its pride back to Kievan Rus.³

The aspects of the *byliny* that set them apart from other Russian fairytales also render the *bogatyry* an attainable and fitting masculine role model. First, whereas heroes of Russian fairytales often rely on magic, *bogatyry* use incredible physical strength instead of the supernatural.⁴ Second, the genre of the *bylina* carries a pseudohistorical quality that other fairytales do not. The *bylina* is particularly situated during the Kievan period, not some imaginary time and place, and includes specific geographic references to cities that were prominent at the time, including Kiev. Many *byliny* use historical events for plot lines, including the thirteenth century Mongol invasion that subjugated

² James Bailey and Tatyana Ivanova, *An Anthology of Russian Folk Epics* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), Xxii.

³ *Ibid.*, xvii.

⁴ Alex E. Alexander, *Bylina and Fairy Tale: The Origins of Russian Heroic Poetry* (Paris: Mouton, 1973), 56.

Kievan Rus to the Golden Horde.⁵ As a result of these aspects of the *bylina*, the *bogatyr* became believable as more than just a fictional figure, and acquired a realistic image as a pseudohistorical figure with incredible physical strength.⁶ The *bogatyr*'s historical authenticity endows his battle to defend Kiev with actual historical stakes. As a *bogatyr*, Yeltsin aligns his political struggle with other *bogatyry*'s struggle to defend Rus and its cultural descendant, Russia.

The *bogatyr*'s hyper masculinity extends to his genre. Russian literary scholar Faith Wigzell calls the *bylina* "the most obviously male genre in terms of subject matter and hero," both because men primarily sang the *bylina*, and because the *bogatyry* were physically strong male figures who defended Kievan Rus.⁷ Appearing as a *bogatyr* masculinizes Yeltsin, because the *bogatyr* is so indisputably manly that even his genre is masculine.

The most prominent *bogatyr*, Ilya Muromets, serves as a particularly convenient model for Yeltsin. Of the many *bogatyry* who appeared in the hundreds of *byliny* historians can identify, Ilya Muromets appeared in the most *byliny*.⁸ Ilya's biography develops in various different *byliny*. He was born a peasant in the town of Murom where he was unable to walk until a group of peasant men give him a special drink as an adult in his thirties. Upon gaining the ability to walk and realizing his incredible physical strength, Ilya leaves Murom and travels to Kiev, overcoming obstacles en route. There, he meets Prince Vladimir and offers his services to protect Kiev. After a disagreement,

⁵ Ibid., 87, and Bailey and Ivanova, *Russian Folk Epics*, 49.

⁶ Alexander, *Bylina and Fairy Tale*, 88.

⁷ Faith Wigzell, "Nikolai Leskov, Gender and Russianness" in *Gender and Sexuality in Russian Civilization*, ed. Peter I. Borta (London: Routledge, 2001), 109-110.

⁸ Bailey and Ivanova, *Russian Folk Epics*, xxiii.

Vladimir imprisons Ilya until the Mongols invade and Vladimir requests Ilya's help. Casting aside any possible resentment from his imprisonment in favor of patriotism, Ilya faces the Mongols alone until other *bogatyry* agree to help.⁹ Ilya's peasant origins and his overcoming political and physical obstacles to demonstrate his extreme patriotism match Yeltsin's own biography.

Why would Yeltsin cast himself as the descendent of a figure, whether historical or fictional, from the thirteenth century? In contrast to the late Soviet soldier-hero ideal, the *bogatyr* was not wedded to the Soviet state and its various accompanying symbols. Although the *bogatyr* made appearances in Soviet culture and served as a defender of the Soviet Union, his long history that preceded the Soviet Union forecloses his identification as a Soviet figure specifically. When Yeltsin turned in his Communist Party card at the 28th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in July 1990, he publicly split his political fate from that of the Soviet Union.¹⁰ For Yeltsin to build his public image using only Hegemonic Soviet Masculine characteristics—that foremost included loyalty to Communist principles—would have been counterintuitive.

Still, the *bogatyr* and the soldier-hero shared some commonalities. Although the *bogatyr* defended Kievan Rus independently and the soldier-hero collaborated with comrades, militarism and the strength of the male body in service to its country, either Rus or the Soviet Union, shone brightly. Both figures boasted a populist, man-of-the-people aesthetic, as Ilya Muromets was a peasant who sacrifices for his people and the soldier-hero fought alongside other soldier-heroes. Because of this overlap, the image

⁹ Ibid., 26, 49, 50.

¹⁰ George W. Breslauer, *Gorbachev and Yeltsin as Leaders* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 124.

that I discussed in Chapter Two of Yeltsin atop a tank and surrounded by supporters during the coup carries aspects of both the soldier-hero's and the *bogatyr*'s masculinity. However, as I will discuss later, Yeltsin's paternal image before, during, and after the coup contests both masculine models. Neither the soldier-hero nor the *bogatyr* could be called a "family man," although, significantly, Yeltsin certainly was.

Ilya Muromets transcends his supposed thirteenth century context and reemerges with the recurring Russian and Soviet need to defend the homeland under attack.¹¹ His personality looms large in Russian and Soviet culture as a protector (Colton notes, "Every Russian schoolchild knows the tale"). During World War I, for example, Ilya Muromets was the name of a Soviet bomber-reconnaissance aircraft.¹² Siege of Soviet soil again facilitated the *bogatyr*'s relevance in the late Soviet period, when the Soviet Union was recovering from the devastating losses of the Great Patriotic War. During the postwar period, collections of songs about specific epic heroes trended in folklore publication, including one particular to Ilya Muromets in 1958.¹³ Widely popularly and critically acclaimed Soviet director Aleksandr Ptushko also directed two *bogatyr* films in the 1950s: *Sadko* (1952) and *Ilya Muromets* (1956). The Nazi invasion from the west had threatened the Soviet Union just as the Mongol invasion had threatened Kievan Rus from the east centuries before, and enabled the *bogatyr*'s continued importance in late Soviet nationalist and masculine culture. When the State Emergency Committee carried out their coup in August 1991, their decision to send tanks into Moscow constituted another

¹¹ Timothy Colton, *Yeltsin: A Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 302.

¹² Viktor P. Kulikov, "Sikorsky's Fighters" in *Air Power History* 47, no. 4: 37. *Military & Government Collection*, EBSCOhost, accessed March 24, 2014.

¹³ Bailey and Ivanova, *Russian Folk Epics*, xxxii.

invasion of Soviet soil, and so also created the circumstances for yet another *bogatyrskii* revival—Yeltsin’s.

Ilya and Vladimir, Yeltsin and Gorbachev before Soviet Collapse

The beginnings of Yeltsin’s mythical self-image formed before the coup, during his 1991 campaign for Russian President. Yeltsin’s status as a political outcast under Gorbachev was an obstacle requiring strength of character to overcome. Yeltsin’s “*bylina*” casts Gorbachev as the Prince Vladimir to Yeltsin’s Ilya Muromets.

Put mildly, Ilya Muromets’ relationship with Prince Vladimir was personally fraught. In the *bylina*, “Ilya Muromets and Nightingale the Robber,” Ilya travels from his hometown of Murom to Kiev, single-handedly facing an army and defeating the Nightingale robber who had plagued Kiev along the way.¹⁴ Upon arriving in Kiev, Ilya tells Vladimir that he has defeated the Nightingale, and Vladimir responds with disbelief that a “peasant bumpkin” could defeat the formidable robber.¹⁵ Vladimir’s initial ungrateful rudeness to Ilya escalates in “Ilya Muromets and the Kalin Tsar,” when Vladimir leaves Ilya to starve imprisoned in a dungeon. But then when the Mongols later invade, Vladimir calls on Ilya to protect Kiev, and Ilya dutifully complies, despite his imprisonment at Vladimir’s hands. The *bylina* narrates, “[Ilya Muromets] alone could stand up for the faith and for the fatherland/He alone could stand up for the city of Kiev/.../He alone could protect our Prince Vladimir.”¹⁶ Not only was Ilya Muromets loyal to Rus and willing to contribute his vast physical strength to its protection, Ilya

¹⁴ Bailey and Ivanova, *Russian Folk Epics*, 29.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 52-53.

possesses a certain innate special quality that endows him with the ability to defend the fatherland, as “He alone” could protect Rus.

Ilya’s distinctive specialness brings Vladimir’s own inadequacies into relief. Russian literary scholar Alex E. Alexander writes, “In the *byliny*, the more important the state, the weaker and humbler becomes the image of the prince and the mightier the hero.”¹⁷ In the *bylina* “Ilya Muromets and the Kalin Tsar,” Kievan Rus holds great importance, and its vulnerability to Mongol attack serves as plot. Vladimir is so weak that he is forced to call upon Ilya Muromets, whom he had imprisoned to defend Rus. Ilya Muromets, in contrast, appears even stronger. Yeltsin’s *bylina* similarly boasts his own innate specialness, demonstrated by his ability first to overcome political censure and then his performance during the coup, and also highlights his mighty strength in contrast to the weaker, humbler Gorbachev.

At the beginning of Yeltsin’s political *bylina*, as was the case for Vladimir in Ilya’s *bylina*, Gorbachev was far from weak and actually wielded power over Yeltsin. Unlike Vladimir and Ilya, Gorbachev never called Yeltsin a “peasant bumpkin.” For him to do so would have been strange, given Gorbachev’s own peasant origins and the pride with which he described his heritage in his memoirs. But as Yeltsin crafted a narrative of overcoming political persecution, he emphasized the power differential between Gorbachev and himself, and the degree to which Yeltsin had suffered at Gorbachev’s hand. Colton quotes from his interview with Yeltsin fifteen years after his secret speech, “I was all alone against this armada, this bulky and cumbersome communist thing, their

¹⁷Alexander, *Bylina and Fairy Tale*, 81.

KGB system.”¹⁸ With the word “armada,” and dwelling on the size of the Soviet Communist system to convey its political reach, Yeltsin militarizes his political censure, endowing it with a physical quality it actually lacked. Portraying himself as an isolated victim of Communism, Yeltsin emphasizes not only how terrible Communism was, but how great was his own strength in overcoming the massive system.

Yeltsin projected a similar image of being wronged during his campaign for Russian President in 1991. As I explained in my last chapter, following his 1987 secret speech, Yeltsin won public election to the newly created parliament of the Russian Federation in March of 1990. From there, Yeltsin put forward a public referendum to create the office of a Russian Presidency, which he overwhelmingly won in an open election on June 12, 1991.¹⁹ One poster from that campaign read:

Don't believe the words, the schemes of candidates, believe only their actions. In 1987 Yeltsin went against the Party's bureaucrats, against the dictates of the Central Committee, for the **sovereignty of Russia** [not my emphasis], for our right to a better life.²⁰

As it reminds readers of Yeltsin's secret speech and its backlash almost four years earlier, the poster emboldens Russian sovereignty, emphasizing its role in motivating Yeltsin. That Yeltsin would ascend to the Russian presidency, the office with the most promise for preserving Russian sovereignty, appears as a historic inevitability, given all that he sacrificed for Russian sovereignty in 1987. In this way, the poster actually imposes anachronistic meaning onto the speech. At the time, Yeltsin did not stand up for Russian sovereignty distinct from the Soviet state, as at that point Yeltsin was still a member of

¹⁸ Colton, *Yeltsin*, 143.

¹⁹ Breslauer, *Gorbachev and Yeltsin*, 124.

²⁰ “Yel'tsina V Prezidenty Rossii” Hoover Institution Archives, Demokraticheskaia Rossiia Collection, Box 5.7.

the Communist Party arguing for more effective *perestroika*—reform of the Soviet state, not its destruction. Reinterpreting the secret speech as foreshadowing later events—that Yeltsin would later advocate Russian sovereignty, create a Russian Presidency, and run for it—portrays his 1987 stand against Gorbachev and subsequent political isolation as part of a larger narrative in which Yeltsin faces unjustified persecution.

Similarly, another poster asks:

Do you remember how Yeltsin went to the podium three years ago at the Nineteenth Party Conference at the palace of congress? He went to tell the truth about our pains and needs, he went under the painful view of those who are used to leading in the name of the people, giving [Yeltsin] nothing but injustice, humiliation, destitution.²¹

Again, Yeltsin’s campaign emphasizes Yeltsin’s strength in withstanding great personal distress in his dedication to representing the people’s needs. The poster includes a photo of Gorbachev passively seated with other party apparatchiks, his hands comfortably folded, and a photo of Yeltsin surrounded by the people to whom he is devoted. In the image, Yeltsin is caught in the midst of an aggressive hand gesture. Despite his political persecution, Yeltsin appears as ready as ever to tackle injustice:



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²¹ “Narodnogo Kandidata V Narodnye Prezidenty” Hoover Institute Archives, Russian Subject Collection, Box 26.

The poster then frames the 1991 election as a continuation of Yeltsin's struggle: "Five candidates advance against Our [sic] one." Once again struggling as an independent *bogatyr* against daunting odds, Yeltsin appears capable and strong.

Other posters convey a similar message of struggle to rise above the dense party apparatus. One poster from his campaign for the Russian parliament a few months before his presidential campaign includes a list of slogans, among them, "Enough dirt poured on Yeltsin!"²² In emphasizing Yeltsin's suffering, his campaign drew attention to his unwavering loyalty to the Russian people, not unlike Ilya's imprisonment and unwavering loyalty to Kievan Rus. Another poster from his 1991 presidential campaign posits:

Yeltsin first spoke against corruption in the Party, he showed the true face of leaders. They don't want to apologize to him for that. They tried and try to play him from all sides in defiance of the people's opinion.²³

This poster again frames Yeltsin's political travails as ongoing. Yeltsin stands apart from the Communist Party that oppresses him despite his popularity. He not only stands isolated from the massive political apparatus that unfairly targets him, but he bravely challenges its authority on behalf of the people it purports to represent. Yeltsin appears as a maverick, in the same way that Ilya was. His loyalty to the people gives him the strength to defend Russian sovereignty from Communism.

Yeltsin's loyalty to the Russian people composed only part of his larger populist image. Even though both Yeltsin and Gorbachev had come to Moscow from distant rural towns, Yeltsin crafted a clearer populist image than Gorbachev. Colton notes that when

²² "Zakrytyi Vzgliad Pod Otkrytym Nebom" Hoover Institution Archives, Demokraticheskaia Rossiia Collection, Box 2.5.

²³ "Sootechestvenniki! Zemlyaki!" Hoover Institution Archives, Demokraticheskaia Rossiia Collection, Box 5.5.

Yeltsin first arrived in Moscow, he brought a specific “Yeltsineque populism,” consisting of planned rides on public transit and choreographed exchanges in retail stores, workers’ or students’ dining halls—anywhere that a crowd or the press might observe his interactions with the people and their problems.²⁴ Gorbachev had also participated in coordinated “walkabouts” with the people.²⁵ But Yeltsin easily outpaced Gorbachev in populist imagery, perhaps because of what Breslauer refers to as his “legendary charisma,” or perhaps because Yeltsin’s accusations that Gorbachev overindulged in personal privileges undermined Gorbachev’s own populist image, increasing Yeltsin’s in contrast.²⁶

Yeltsin leveraged his populist image in his 1991 presidential campaign, as he incorporated his dedication to “the people” into his *bogatyr* narrative. His campaign posters touted him as “the People’s (*Narodniy*) Candidate for the People’s President.”²⁷ Included among Yeltsin’s slogans were, “Boris – our man (*chelovek*)!” “Boris! Don’t Surrender Boris!” “Boris, who, if not you!” and “Yeltsin – the savior of the Russian village!”²⁸ As “our man,” Yeltsin must not surrender in his fight for the Russian people, because who could replace him? With these slogans, Yeltsin’s campaign both confirms an innate specialness that endows him with a unique ability to protect Russia, and reasserts that his campaign is more than personal promotion, but also doubles as the struggle for Russian sovereignty. In this way, Yeltsin’s populist rhetoric mirrors Ilya

²⁴ Colton, *Yeltsin*, 120-121.

²⁵ Mark Sandle, *Gorbachev: Man of the Twentieth Century?* (London: Hodder Education, 2008), 41.

²⁶ Breslauer, *Gorbachev and Yeltsin*, 126, 130.

²⁷ “Narodnogo Kandidata V Narodnye Prezidenty” Hoover Institute Archives, Demokraticheskaia Rossiia Collection, Box 5.5.

²⁸ “Lozungi” Hoover Institution Archives, Demokraticheskaia Rossiia Collection, Box 5.5.

Muromets' *bylina*. Yeltsin was uniquely capable of representing the people, just as Ilya Muromets was uniquely capable of protecting Rus. Referring to Yeltsin as the savior of the Russian village specifically, and not the Russian city, endows Yeltsin's image with a particular folksy Russian aesthetic, similar to Ilya's, as Ilya was the "peasant bumpkin" who travelled from one village (Murom) to a larger village (Kiev), and served as the savior of both from Mongol invasion. Like Ilya, Yeltsin struggles for the people; his deep populist devotion, for which the slogans offer support in return, motivates his battle against the communist powers that be.

As the people's candidate, Yeltsin aimed to connect with every kind of regular Soviet man. A poster from Yeltsin's 1991 campaign addressed to "Fellow Countrymen! Compatriots!" (*Sootchestvenniki! Zemlyaki!*) issues a more specific address: "Worker! Peasant! Teacher! Writer! Military man (*Voennosluzhashchiy*)! Believer [in Christianity]! [...] If you want to live well, vote for Boris Yeltsin. He is a comrade in arms (*soratnik*), he's OUR [not my emphasis] man (*chelovek*)!"²⁹ The poster reassures a wide variety of countrymen that Yeltsin shares their point of view and will help them all live well. Even men who otherwise might not be so easily lumped together, like a teacher and a military man—although Yeltsin never served in the military or worked as a teacher—find apt representation in Yeltsin. The poster targets men; as I discussed in Chapter Two, the word for countrymen, *sootchestvenniki* appeals to men specifically, because the root of the word is *otets*, or "father,"—*sootchestvenniki* lacks the gender neutrality of other Russian words for citizen. The poster also contributes to militarized aspects of Yeltsin's

²⁹ "Sootchestvenniki! Zemlyaki!" Hoover Institution Archives, Demokraticheskaia Rossiia Collection, Box 5.5.

masculine image, as it enjoins him as a comrade in arms (*soratnik*) who fights alongside the military man, as “OUR man.”

Yeltsin reinforced both his connection to the Russian people and his innate specialness in an open letter to residents of Vladimir on May 25, 1991:

Dear Friends,

From the publication of the newspaper “*Rossiia*” I learned of several difficult moments in your lives as peasants. As if by accident, I became the “godfather” of one of the many perishing Russian villages [...] I desire that all villages be of strong health, friendship, joyful work, happiness, and prosperous lives.

Sincerely yours,
Boris Yeltsin³⁰

As he describes how Russian villages are perishing, Yeltsin positions himself as their natural protector, since he becomes a village’s guardian without even trying (“by accident”). Sharing Ilya Muromets’ inclination towards protecting Russian peasants in danger, Yeltsin follows the plight of the Russian peasantry and shares their tribulations and concerns, even from the cosmopolitan center of Moscow. Significantly, Yeltsin genders his guardianship of Russian villages, calling himself not simply a protector of the Russian village, but its “godfather” (*krest'nyi otets*), casting himself as a pseudo-paternal figure in his care of the Russian people. Referencing a familial relationship actually weakens Yeltsin’s identification with Ilya Muromets, who, as I will demonstrate in my later discussion of Yeltsin’s paternal image more broadly, was a poor father figure. Still, despite Ilya Muromets’ shortcomings as a father to his own child, he successfully protected Russian peasants. Yeltsin promises Russian peasants similar protection.

³⁰ “Dorogie Druz'ya” Hoover Institution Archives, Demokraticheskaia Rossiia Collection, Box 5.10

The *Bogatyr* in Power

With his election to the Russian presidency in June 1991 and the Soviet Union's disintegration in December 1991, Yeltsin shifted in political position from the leader of the opposition to the Communist Party to the primary leader and nation-builder in the newly independent Russian Federation.³¹

Historian George Breslauer writes that Yeltsin's "honeymoon period" as a leader began with his election in June 1991 and amplified after the coup in August, but was short-lived.³² In October 1991 the Russian Supreme Soviet allowed Yeltsin special powers to rule by decree for one year, and during that time Yeltsin instituted his "shock therapy" reforms. Engineered by economist Yegor Gaidar, shock therapy aimed to rapidly deregulate and privatize the Soviet economy in its transition to a free market.³³ Problems quickly arose, and in early 1992 inflation had reached such heights that many Russian citizens lost their life savings and pensions, leading to decreased support for Yeltsin in the Supreme Soviet.³⁴ With inflation at 250 percent at the end of 1991, mass poverty set in, while Soviet-era elites took possession of former state property in a less than scrupulous process of privatization.³⁵ In the spring of 1992, Yeltsin began admitting some mistakes in his reforms and making changes, but in early 1993, Yeltsin blamed the failures of his reforms on the Supreme Soviet.³⁶ Gradually, inflation declined from 2,250

³¹ Breslauer, *Gorbachev and Yeltsin*, 142.

³² *Ibid.*, 142.

³³ *Ibid.*, 153.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 161.

³⁵ Stephen Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse 1970 – 2000* (New York: Oxford, 2008), 115, 119.

³⁶ Breslauer, *Gorbachev and Yeltsin*, 164, 168.

percent in 1992 to 840 percent in 1993.³⁷ In the spring of 1993, Yeltsin announced a referendum on a new constitution that would increase executive reach, and in September of 1993, Yeltsin dissolved the Supreme Soviet by decree and announced that new parliamentary elections would accompany the referendum in December.³⁸ In October, members of the Supreme Soviet refused to abdicate, causing Yeltsin to use military force on the parliamentary building. Despite hundreds of Russian deaths in Yeltsin's parliamentary siege, he won his referendum in 1993, earning more power to rule by decree, and making it exceedingly difficult for the new parliament to impeach him (though that would not stop parliament from attempting impeachment in 1999).³⁹

Despite Yeltsin's successful centralization of power with his referendum in 1993, he continued to face many political troubles. There were some economic improvements (by 1994, inflation had decreased to 224 percent, and by September of 1996, it had fallen to an annualized rate near zero), but unregulated corrupt practices became the norm in both politics and business exchanges. As a result, the already wealthy few became even wealthier while unemployment remained rampant.⁴⁰ The Chechens, an ethnic minority living in a North Caucasus region called Chechnya, posed further problems for Yeltsin. Although Yeltsin had promised a degree of local autonomy to regional groups in Russia, when Chechnya attempted to assert its independence, Yeltsin intervened with military force in a brutal campaign that lasted from 1994 to 1996 and caused the estimated deaths of 25,000 civilians.⁴¹ The failures of his economic reform, the military catastrophe in

³⁷ Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted*, 124.

³⁸ Breslauer, *Gorbachev and Yeltsin*, 169-170.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 170-171.

⁴⁰ Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted*, 124, 127-128.

⁴¹ Colton, *Yeltsin*, 289-291.

Chechnya, and Yeltsin's declining health in the mid-1990s, all made it seem unlikely that Yeltsin would run for re-election in 1996.⁴² But in late 1995, Yeltsin began to feel certain that if he ran for election, despite all his presidential blunders, he would win.⁴³

In his biography of Boris Yeltsin, Timothy Colton notes that Yegor Gaidar called Yeltsin "Our Ilya Muromets" when Yeltsin decided to run for reelection in 1996, even though his popularity had fallen so sharply.⁴⁴ Gaidar viewed Yeltsin's decision to revive his political image after its decline in the mid-1990s as similar to Ilya Muromets' revival after his imprisonment. Colton argues against this view of Yeltsin: "The mythic Ilya Muromets roused himself from his pallet only once, at the age of thirty-three, and never revisited it"—Yeltsin's political ups and downs could hardly be pared down so simply. But I do not argue that the core of Yeltsin's psyche matched that of the mythical folk hero, rather, I analyze the extent to which Yeltsin attempted to appear as a folk hero like Ilya Muromets. In the remainder of this chapter, I consider how Yeltsin's campaign materials for his 1993 referendum and 1996 election created and mobilized his *bogatyrskii* image leftover from his "honeymoon period" following his presidential election in 1991 and victory during the coup.

As president, Yeltsin used his past as an Ilya Muromets-esque political underdog to consolidate power as the Vladimir-esque political top dog. To prepare Russian voters for the 1993 referendum, Yeltsin's campaign released two pamphlets, each of which contained poems and personal essays from Russian citizens explaining their reasons for supporting Yeltsin's referendum, and each of which contributed to his *bogatyrskii* image.

⁴² Ibid., 345, 352.

⁴³ Ibid., 352.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

A personal essay by Boris Vasilyev called “The Big Game in the Corridors of Power and on the ‘Constitutional Platform,’” argued that unlike politicians in Parliament, Yeltsin is a “fighter (*borets*) for the interests of the voters,” and for that reason, can be trusted with power above other more ambitious politicians. Yeltsin’s struggle for the new constitution is not for personal gain, but for the people he represents. Remember that Yeltsin gained election to his office by a majority, while the members of Parliament did not. Parliament challenged Yeltsin, Vasilyev writes, “But the president cannot surrender without a fight: it’s not natural.”⁴⁵ Framing Yeltsin’s parliamentary siege as a necessary use of force to maintain the integrity of Russian democracy, Vasilyev maintains Yeltsin’s image as a populist underdog politician who confronts yet another political machine. Vasilyev’s quip that Yeltsin’s struggle with Parliament is “natural” reiterates the aspects of Yeltsin’s image that show his innate strength and ability to represent the Russian people. Yeltsin’s loyal nature requires his dedication to the Russian people in the face of parliamentary opposition, just as Ilya Muromets’ loyal nature led him to overlook his imprisonment and fight the Mongols.

But during his presidency, even while his referendum materials recreated his underdog image, Yeltsin acknowledged—and even potentially took pleasure in—his development into a dominant political power. Colton writes that during the 1990s, Yeltsin contested his own populist image by portraying himself as a reincarnated tsar. The tsar-esque aspects of Yeltsin’s presidential character included his regal stature and mannerisms, and his centralization of power. Yeltsin also publicly referred to himself as Boris I. But Yeltsin’s peasant origins contradicted his partial-tsar identification, and

⁴⁵ “Tri ‘Da’ Prezidentu” Hoover Institution Archives, Demokraticheskaia Rossiia Collection, Box 11.1. 36-37.

while he was known to refer to himself as a tsar, Yeltsin was also known to ask, “What do you think I am, a tsar?”⁴⁶ With his ascension to Russian President, Yeltsin nominally more closely resembled Vladimir than Ilya Muromets (Vladimir was not a tsar, as the title did not yet exist, but a prince). Yeltsin’s inconsistent identification as tsar complicates his image as a *bogatyr*, since, as I argued in the last section, juxtaposition with the strong *bogatyr* weakens the monarch. However, Yeltsin’s attraction to the tsar’s power does not necessarily negate his usage of a *bogatyrskii* aesthetic. Throughout his presidency, even at the peak of his executive power, Yeltsin continued to legitimize his power using the seemingly contradictory image of himself a political underdog, a *bogatyr* who consistently and single-handedly overcomes great obstacles.

Although Yeltsin often emphasized his struggle against communism as an integral component of his *bogatyrskii* image, critics challenged this framework. As I discussed earlier, when the *bogatyr* appeared in Soviet culture, the Soviet Union did not appear as a threat to Russia, but as Russia’s rightful descendent—for example, World War II era *bogatyr* films encouraged celebration of Soviet soldiers’ bravery in defending the Soviet Union. But as Yeltsin shaped his Russian political context, he managed to subtly undo the *bogatyr*’s loyalty to his Soviet context. The second pamphlet from Yeltsin’s 1993 referendum campaign demonstrates this shift. It explicitly acknowledges Yeltsin’s image as a *bogatyr*, but only in explaining and refuting sarcasm from Yeltsin’s opposition. In his essay “Choice Before the Election,” Aleksandr Gel’man writes:

The main criticism of Yeltsin: he broke up the USSR. What kind of *bogatyr*, though, single-handedly [...] shatters the mighty empire, utterly

⁴⁶ Colton, *Yeltsin*, 324-325.

defeats it. He blew and it crumbled. And that, forgive me, is the stupidity pronounced in parliament.⁴⁷

Gel'man points out that Yeltsin's critics aim to undermine his image as a *bogatyr* by emphasizing his prominent role in Soviet destruction, rather than its protection. As he paraphrases parliamentary criticism of Yeltsin, Gel'man maps the transformation of the *bogatyr* as a cultural figure during the transition from the Soviet Union to post-Soviet Russia. Loosely quoting Yeltsin's opposition, Gel'man reveals the potential dissonance between Yeltsin's image as the *bogatyr* who saves Russia, and the most vocal proponent of Soviet destruction. He then dismisses Yeltsin's critics as stupid, leaving intact Yeltsin's image as a strong *bogatyr* who took on the "mighty empire," and won.

Gel'man then upholds Yeltsin's masculinity and plainly connects Yeltsin's character and leadership ability to his gender. Gel'man writes, "This constancy of character, the nature of a person with all his attractive and repellent qualities, for me is a sign of a certain manly (*muzhskoi*), human reliability."⁴⁸ Like the materials from Yeltsin's 1991 campaign, this pamphlet emphasizes Yeltsin's long-held dedication to his principles, as he maintained "constancy of character" through political highs and lows. For Gel'man, Yeltsin's faults are forgivable, as they attest to Yeltsin's authenticity as a man and human, which in turn demonstrates his reliability as a leader. In this, yet again, Yeltsin resembles Ilya Muromets who remained consistently loyal to Rus, even while imprisoned by its prince. Reinforcing Yeltsin's populist masculine image, Gel'man manages to transform Yeltsin's flaws as a leader into personal strengths.

⁴⁷ "Nash Vybor—Prezident" Hoover Institution Archives, Demokraticheskaia Rossiia Collection, Box 11.1. 29.

⁴⁸ "Nash Vybor—Prezident" Hoover Institution Archives, Demokraticheskaia Rossiia Collection, Box 11.1. 31-32.

Yeltsin's campaign again explicitly referred to him as a *bogatyr* in his 1996 campaign with the release of a book of photos of Yeltsin. One photo showed Yeltsin with the German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, with the caption, "Two *bogatyry*"⁴⁹:



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Although Kohl is not Russian, Yeltsin's campaign generously bestows the title of *bogatyr* on him just the same. Through his friendship with Yeltsin (another photo's caption refers to Helmut as Yeltsin's friend), and presumably his own leadership in reunifying Germany, Kohl becomes a *bogatyr*. Yeltsin is so much the *bogatyr* that he graciously names his friend Helmut a *bogatyr* as well. In sharing masculinity with a friend, Yeltsin also enacts the comradeship that typified Hegemonic Soviet Masculinity, suggesting two significant conclusions. First, although the Soviet Communism that produced the soldier-hero met its demise, other aspects of the soldier-hero aesthetic ideal maintained at least

⁴⁹ "Dva Bogatyrya" Hoover Institution Archives, Russian Subject Collection, Box 39.

some relevance to post-Soviet culture. Second, as I argued earlier, the soldier-hero ideal and the pseudo-historical and literary figure of the *bogatyry*—though in many ways distinct—shared some cultural overlap from the Soviet period that bled into post-Soviet Russian culture as well.

Other prominent foreign political figures, however, did not become *bogatyry*. Another photo from the book features Yeltsin with American President Bill Clinton. Rather than grinning and clapping Clinton on the back as he does Kohl, Yeltsin unsmilingly points, apparently directing



Clinton. The caption reads “It’s not so simple, Bill...” as if Yeltsin is explaining a complex concept to the simpleminded Clinton.⁵⁰ Yeltsin appears both physically and mentally dominant next to Clinton. In this, Yeltsin contrasts sharply with Gorbachev, who, as I discussed in Chapter One, did not appear dominant next to his own contemporary American President Reagan. Unlike the soft-bodied Gorbachev, Yeltsin appears more than capable of overriding western political power.

Masculinization for Voters

Just as Kohl earned the title of *bogatyry* through his political support for Yeltsin, Yeltsin’s campaigns seemed to promise similar masculinization to Russian voters. In his 1991 campaign, an advertisement in the free Moscow newspaper *Znamya Truda* declared: “Dear Voter! You are not a very small person! You are the owner of a whole

⁵⁰ Hoover Institution Archives, Russian Subject Collection, Box 39.

electoral vote [...] [If you vote for Yeltsin,] your descendants will say ‘Thank you!’”⁵¹

As the poster adamantly insists that the voter matters, it reflects anxiety about powerlessness. Although the advertisement does not explicitly appeal to a “man,” but a person (*chelovek*), the poster eases the voter’s anxiety about feeling powerless and small in a historical moment when such anxieties were explicitly gendered as masculine. On the tail end of the late Soviet “crisis of masculinity” in which men felt politically powerless, Yeltsin’s campaign compensates by promising voters political power through their vote.⁵²

Furthermore, by appealing to the voter’s desire to provide for his descendants, Yeltsin invokes a rhetoric that blurs the lines between the fate of the Russian nation-state and the Russian family. In this, Yeltsin again appears similar to Ilya Muromets. Although, as I will discuss later, Ilya Muromets was far from a model father, Russian culture preserved his memory through more than the *bylina* and film. Slavic languages scholar Isabel Florence Hapgood describes an aspect of Ilya’s legacy in her 1916 analysis of the Russian *bylina*:

A race of peasants called Ilya’s peasants (*krestyanye Iliushini*) regard themselves as direct descendants of the renowned *bogatyr*, and it is a noteworthy fact, that, according to local testimony, the people who inhabit the primeval forests of Murom are celebrated for their great stature and strength.⁵³

Ilya Muromets’ ability to provide for his descendants and their supposed physical strength as a consequence of their heritage preserved Ilya’s continued relevance to Russian culture. The poster that promises the voter that his descendants will thank him if

⁵¹ Hoover Institution Archives, Demokraticheskaia Rossiia Collection, Box 5.5.

⁵² Anna Temkina and Elena Zdravomyslova, “The Crisis of Masculinity in Late Soviet Discourse,” *Russian Studies in History* 51 (2012): 15, accessed March 16, 2014, doi: 10.2753/RSH1061-1983510201.

⁵³ Isabel Florence Hapgood, *The Epic Songs of Russia, ed. 2* (New York: Charles Scriber’s Sons, 1916), 263.

he votes for Yeltsin then positions the voter as a *bogatyr*. Like Ilya Muromets, whose descendants proudly boasted their lineage centuries after Ilya supposedly lived, the voter's descendants will be grateful to him.

A poster from Yeltsin's 1993 referendum suggested similar masculinization for voters. The poster features an imaginary voter, who is muscular and male, casting his vote in the referendum. In the background, a tangled mass of microphone and snakes represents the Communist Party. As the male voter points at the snakes accusingly, the caption reads, "He never believed them. My answer: Yes! Yes! No! Yes!"—the responses to the four questions of the referendum that would most strengthen Yeltsin's executive power.⁵⁴ The brawny man never



believed the snake-like, tangled Communist Party, and neither should you. He votes with Yeltsin, suggesting that all strong men should respect Yeltsin's integrity. Voting to substantiate Yeltsin's power becomes masculine.

By suggesting to voters that voting for him is a masculine act, Yeltsin parallels Ilya Muromets in yet another respect. Hapgood writes:

To this day, the peasants of the village of Karascharof, Ilya's birthplace, point out a chapel built upon the spot where a fountain burst forth beneath the hoofs of Ilya's good steed Cloudfall, as did the springs at a blow from the hoof of Pegasus. The chapel is dedicated to Ilya [Muromets]; and "to

⁵⁴ "Im Ne Veril Nikogda" Hoover Institution Archives, Demokraticheskaia Rossiia Collection, Box 11.1.

the fountain fierce bears still come to quaff the waters and gain heroic strength,” so the legend runs.⁵⁵

Ilya’s legend not only continues through his supposed descendants, but through a fountain in his hometown. When people drink from the spring, they gain their own *bogatyrskii* strength. In this way, Ilya’s strength, a significant marker of his masculinity, becomes transmittable to those who seek it. Paradoxically, Ilya’s strength is both unique, and to a degree, shareable. Yeltsin’s campaign mimicked this paradox with his own masculinity. Yeltsin was both uniquely strong and a populist man-of-the-people who, like Ilya, could share the very aspects of himself that were supposed to be innate and special.

Yeltsin the Patriarch

Ilya Muromets’ descendants may have celebrated their supposed *bogatyrskii* lineage, but Ilya was no “family man.” In the *bylina* “Ilya Muromets and Falconer,” Ilya, an absent father, does not even recognize Falconer as his son until they are engaged in battle. Falconer resents his illegitimate birth and seeks revenge, forcing Ilya Muromets to kill his own son. Literary scholars James Bailey and Tatyana Ivanova comment, “In a tragic outcome that is unusual in the Russian epic tradition, Ilya has the choice of defending the Russian land against an adversary or of accepting his son.”⁵⁶ Not only was Ilya an absent parent, but the *bylina* positions Ilya’s son’s fate opposite the fate of Kievan Rus. Ilya can be either an admirable father or an admirable hero, but he cannot be both. In this, Ilya stands opposite Yeltsin whose relationship with his wife and daughters comprised a prominent aspect of his political and gendered public image.

⁵⁵ Hapgood, *Epic Songs*, 263.

⁵⁶ Bailey and Ivanova, *Russian Folk Epics*, 39.

Throughout his political career, Yeltsin appeared to be a happy family man. As I discussed in Chapter Two, Yeltsin emphasized his paternal qualities during the August 1991 coup. But Yeltsin appeared fatherly even before the coup. A poster from Yeltsin’s June 1991 campaign included a short biography, similar to the short biography of Gorbachev that appeared in *Pravda* following his appointment as General Secretary. Unlike Gorbachev’s biography that I discussed in



Chapter One, Yeltsin’s includes specific mention of his family. The biography ends, “He’s married, with two daughters and three grandchildren.”⁵⁷ Similarly, the book of photos from Yeltsin’s 1996 campaign included many family portraits. The poster above entitled “We’re One Family,” also from Yeltsin’s 1996 campaign, includes images of Yeltsin with his grandson, wife, and daughter, and then an image of Yeltsin with a mass of “the people.”⁵⁸ The caption reads “One of the best Russian traditions is the strong, loving family,” and promises to take on the “difficult projects” for Russian children and grandchildren. Yeltsin takes care of his family, and it follows that as president he will continue to take care of all Russian families—after all, “We’re One Family.” Yeltsin’s

⁵⁷ “Za Demokraticeskuyu Rossiyu” Hoover Institution Archives, Demokraticheskaia Rossiia Collection, Box 5.5.

⁵⁸ “My Odn Sem'ya” Hoover Institution Archives. Russian Subject Collection. 39.2.

love and care as a father in his own nuclear family becomes a symbol for the love and care he will provide as a political patriarch.

Yeltsin's campaign also framed voting for Yeltsin as a sign of good parenting for both mothers and fathers. One poster from Yeltsin's 1991 campaign simply declared "Voting for Yeltsin, you are voting for your children and grandchildren!"⁵⁹ Another 1991 poster promised "a happy life for children and grandchildren" if you vote for Yeltsin.⁶⁰ A poster from Yeltsin's 1996 election addressed mothers directly: "Lovely Women! With the support of Boris Yeltsin and the Moscow government, special attention will be paid to you and your children."⁶¹ These three posters all transform the civic act of voting into a way of fulfilling parental duties, since parents who vote for Yeltsin are doing what's best for their children. By addressing women specifically, Yeltsin reinforces the late Soviet view that women's primary domain was the home, and Yeltsin's political sphere appears more masculine in contrast.⁶²

Yeltsin's campaign further framed him as a paternal figure to the developing Russian Federation. One of the pamphlets from the 1993 referendum included an essay that dramatically declared: "Young Russia has not lost faith in you... We cannot allow our children to be passed through the meat grinder of a new gulag!"⁶³ Beyond acting as a father figure to individual Russian children, Yeltsin appears as a paternal figure to the

⁵⁹ Hoover Institution Archives. Demokraticheskaia Rossiia Collection, Box 5.5.

⁶⁰ "Tsenie Goroda i Rayona" Hoover Institution Archives. Demokraticheskaia Rossiia Collection, Box 5.5.

⁶¹ "Za Prezidenta Rossii Borisa Yel'tsina" Hoover Institution Archives. Russian Subject Collection, Box 39.2.

⁶² Zhanna Chernova, "The Model of 'Soviet' Fatherhood: Discursive Prescriptions" in *Russian Studies in History* 51 (2012): 38, accessed March 16, 2014, doi: 10.2753/RSH1061-1983510202.

⁶³ "Nash Vybor—Prezident" Hoover Institution Archives, Demokraticheskaia Rossiia Collection, Box 11.1. 27.

maturing Russian nation-state as a whole. The responsibility to keep the Russian Federation from repeating Soviet mistakes falls on Yeltsin's parental shoulders. Although Yeltsin's clear image as a father set him apart from Ilya's poor parenting, it would be an oversimplification to argue that it distanced him from Ilya altogether. As I argue in the next section, Yeltsin often connected his patriarchal qualities to his militaristic capability, a quality that Ilya Muromets certainly shared.

Yeltsin and Militarism

Yeltsin's militaristic blunder in Chechnya contested his promise to create a bright future for Russian children. During the 1996 election, a poster for Yeltsin's opponent Gennady Zyuganov's campaign documents the Russian deaths under Yeltsin's leadership. Among the many deaths, Zyuganov includes the three men who died during the August 1991 Coup, 1,400 deaths during Yeltsin's 1993 parliamentary siege, and tens of thousands of deaths in Chechnya between 1994 and 1996. The poster then asks, "Has your son died yet? Has your home been destroyed yet?"⁶⁴ Seeking to undermine Yeltsin's image as a protector of Russia, and sons in particular since military service remained masculine, Zyuganov uses Russian deaths to show that Yeltsin has not fulfilled his paternal promises to Russia.

For his part, Yeltsin incorporated the war in Chechnya into his larger militaristic image that was rhetorically connected to his paternal image. Like Ilya Muromets who protected Kievan Rus and paved the way for his descendants in battle, Yeltsin framed his own perpetration of violence as necessary for Russian protection. The very same poster from Yeltsin's 1996 election that promised "lovely women" special attention for their

⁶⁴ "Krovavaya Postup' Yel'tsina" Hoover Institution Archives. Russian Subject Collection. 39.5.

children also proudly boasted, “We declare war, war on Chechnya, crime, and corruption!” drawing a link between Yeltsin’s brutal military campaign in Chechnya and his promises to Russian mothers.⁶⁵ This poster sends the message that Yeltsin’s military action in Chechnya does not contradict his fatherly promises, but ensures their fulfillment.

Yeltsin’s militaristic paternal image was not only directed towards younger and future generations, but also connected him to the past generation that had fought in the Great Patriotic War. A poster from Yeltsin’s 1996 campaign quoted actor Konstantin Raikin, “If my father were alive, he would vote together with me—for Yeltsin.”⁶⁶ Just as Gorbachev sought connections to his father’s generation, so does Yeltsin. Although Raikin does not explicitly disclose that his father fought in the Great Patriotic War, given how many Soviet men from that generation participated in the war, it is likely that his father served. Raikin’s reverence for his father’s political opinion is evident—he takes pride in his belief that he and his father would share support for Yeltsin. That same poster quotes a Marshall from the Soviet Union who appears old enough to have fought in the Great Patriotic War and wears military garb, V.G. Kulikov:

I know Yeltsin is not of words, but of actions. I know his relationship to our army. The coming years will be difficult, but Yeltsin has shown himself to be steadfast, a survivor, and mainly—he’s going in the right direction.⁶⁷

Although Yeltsin dismantled the Soviet Union that Kulikov defended, Kulikov’s political support for Yeltsin maintains political weight and currency in Yeltsin’s 1996 campaign.

⁶⁵ “Za Prezidenta Rossii Borisa Yel'tsina” Hoover Institution Archives. Russian Subject Collection, Box 39.2.

⁶⁶ “Budem Vmeste” Hoover Institution Archives. Russian Subject Collection, Box 39.2.

⁶⁷ “Budem Vmeste” Hoover Institution Archives. Russian Subject Collection, Box 39.2.

Kulikov vouches for Yeltsin's capability to lead Russia's military through difficult times based on Yeltsin's personality traits—that he is steadfast and a survivor—traits that Yeltsin demonstrated following his political censure in 1987 and the coup in 1991, and that Yeltsin incorporated into his *bogatyrskii* narrative. Like Gorbachev who used his home front labor to compensate for his lack of military service, Yeltsin's political battles stand in for actual military experience.

A television advertisement during Yeltsin's 1996 campaign drew similar connections between the Great Patriotic War generation of soldiers and the family. Colton describes an ad in which a veteran says, "I just want my children and grandchildren to finally savor the fruits of the victory we fought for and that they didn't let us enjoy."⁶⁸ Charging the Communist Party with failing to deliver on their promises to the soldiers who sacrificed their lives for the nation and families, the veteran reiterates the often-repeated claims of Yeltsin's campaigns: Yeltsin can do what the Communists couldn't; Yeltsin can provide safety and prosperity for future Russian generations. Yeltsin reconfigures what had been a Soviet victory in the Great Patriotic War as a Russian victory specifically, portraying the Communists as incapable flops. As a result, Yeltsin revises the soldier-hero's history without his loyalty to Communist principles, rendering him more similar to the *bogatyr* who fought for his people and not Marxist-Leninist-Stalinism.

Yeltsin the Sportsmen; Health and Alcoholism

There is no complete discussion of Yeltsin's public image that ignores his amply evident alcoholism. Unlike the other aspects of his image I have discussed—his

⁶⁸ Colton, *Yeltsin*, 365.

populism, his strength and specialness, his paternal and militaristic qualities—Yeltsin did not intentionally present his alcoholism for a political advantage, although it impacted his leadership, appearance, and health. Yeltsin was not always an alcoholic. Colton notes that Yeltsin consumed more alcohol when he arrived in Moscow, but that Yeltsin mostly kept it under control until 1991.⁶⁹ Once Yeltsin became President, however, his drinking increased dramatically and interfered with his leadership. For example, President Clinton timed his phone calls to Yeltsin around times when he did not expect Yeltsin to be drunk.⁷⁰ Yeltsin's drunkenness became public knowledge in 1994 at a ceremony with a band in Berlin with Chancellor Kohl, where Yeltsin took the baton from the conductor and pretended to conduct the band himself for several minutes.⁷¹

Although Yeltsin's health issues preceded his love for the bottle, alcoholism served to his body's detriment. Beginning with valvular heart disease and acute angina in the 1960s, Yeltsin's health deteriorated more sharply due to the stresses of his presidency and alcoholism in the 1990s. He suffered his third and fourth heart attacks in 1995 and 1996 respectively.⁷² The Russian press covered Yeltsin's alcoholism and health problems more freely than it would have before the abolishment of censorship in 1990, despite Yeltsin's efforts to hide his bodily troubles from public view.⁷³ But in contrast to Gorbachev, whose rumored health problems during the August 1991 coup had severely undermined his political power, Yeltsin's health issues did not dramatically threaten his

⁶⁹ Ibid., 310.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., 311.

⁷² Ibid., 91, 315, 372.

⁷³ Ibid., 316.

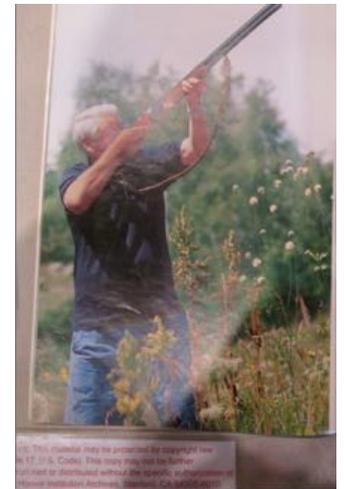
political power—Yeltsin was inaugurated for his second term in 1996 on August 9th, only a couple weeks after his fourth heart attack.

How did Yeltsin's alcoholism and failing health factor into his larger *bogatyrskaa* image that depended on strength? Given the widespread male alcoholism against which Gorbachev inveighed, Yeltsin's drunkenness likely contributed to his populist, man-of-the-people masculinity. But more significantly, Yeltsin was not the first public figure of his generation both to call himself a *bogatyry* and struggle with alcoholism. Historians Julie Gilmour and Barbara Evans Clements argue that 1950s Soviet propaganda presented male Soviet athletes as role models, and specifically marketed them as the modern *bogatyry*.⁷⁴ Although male athletes were supposed to abstain from harmful behaviors like drinking and smoking as models for Soviet children, many professional athletes chafed under the rigid controls on their behavior.⁷⁵ Many successful *bogatyry* athletes, like the boxer Nikolai Korolev and soccer player Eduard Stret'tsov, were well-known not only for their athletic abilities, but also for overindulgent drinking. Male athlete alcoholism muddled state attempts to use their bodies to socialize Soviet youth, and in the process re-appropriated the title of *bogatyry* with which the state had endowed them. These prominent male athletes redefined what it meant to be a *bogatyry* for Yeltsin's generation, allowing for the inclusion of the bottle. Consequently, Yeltsin's alcoholism and resulting health issues, though theoretically opposed to the *bogatyry* as he appears in the *bylina*, did not contradict his image as a *bogatyry* in his late Soviet and then post-Soviet context.

⁷⁴ Julie Gilmour and Barbara Evans Clements, "“If You Want to Be Like Me, Train!”: the Contradictions of Soviet Masculinity,” in *Russian Masculinities in History and Culture*, ed. Barbara Evans Clements et al, (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 212.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 216.

Yeltsin also portrayed himself as an active athlete with a strong and capable body throughout his career. Colton notes how in Yeltsin’s 1990 memoirs *Confessions on a Given Topic*—published before his first presidential election—Yeltsin discusses in depth his love for playing volleyball in college.⁷⁶ Yeltsin’s 1996 campaign boasted support from professional male athletes. In a poster for Yeltsin’s 1996 election, the hockey player Vladislav Tret’yak smilingly declares: “Yeltsin and sports – they are inseparable.”⁷⁷ A postcard-sized poster pictured a soccer team and the caption, “Sportsmen of Russia for Yeltsin!” The same book of photos that included photos of Yeltsin with Kohl and Clinton also included photos of Yeltsin playing tennis and hunting, still a sportsman in his own right.⁷⁸



Yeltsin’s image as an athlete with a healthy body challenged the notion that his body was anything but capable of presidential leadership. Inheriting a cultural legacy from the male Soviet athlete-*bogatyry* who both boozed and competed, Yeltsin’s athleticism further confirms that he is a *bogatyry*.

⁷⁶ Colton, *Yeltsin*, 60.

⁷⁷ “Budem Vmeste” Hoover Institution Archives. Russian Subject Collection, Box 39.2.

⁷⁸ Hoover Institution Archives, Russian Subject Collection, Box 39.

But even Yeltsin's health problems did not absolutely contradict his image as a *bogatyr*, as they lent him yet another opportunity to showcase his populism and an obstacle to overcome. Although Yeltsin often went to extreme efforts to hide his bodily weakness (he once posed as dead in Sverdlosk to avoid appearing visibly ill), Colton describes how Yeltsin behaved following hospitalization in Moscow in 1989: "He built his everyman image by signing himself out of the Kremlin health clinic and into City Polyclinic No. 5."⁷⁹ Unable to control his body fully or at least keep his failing health secret, Yeltsin instead used his hospitalization as an opportunity to reinforce his populist masculinity. Yeltsin's illness also fit nicely in his *bogatyrskaa* narrative, as Ilya Muromets was disabled in his youth. As I noted earlier, Colton quotes Yegor Gaidar, who called Yeltsin "Our Ilya Muromets" when Yeltsin decided to run for a second time in 1996. Yeltsin's will to succeed and faith that he would—despite his bodily failures and unprecedented unpopularity—reminded Gaidar of the Ilya Muromets who was physically unable to walk until his thirties. Although out of chronological order, Yeltsin's political career mirrored Ilya Muromets' life: first Ilya Muromets overcomes physical disability, then political censure—for Yeltsin, the physical disability followed the political censure. Ever the *bogatyr*, even Yeltsin's physical failings could be molded for political benefit.

Conclusion

By narrating his political rise to power in terms that mirrored Ilya Muromets' biography, Yeltsin created an image of himself as a *bogatyr*. Using his former political persecution under Gorbachev, Yeltsin portrayed himself as both a populist representative of the everyman, and a unique force like Ilya Muromets. His realness as a man, like Ilya

⁷⁹ Colton, *Yeltsin*, 92, 169.

Muromets' realness among Russian folk-literary figures, served as evidence that the people should trust him as a leader, even when his flaws became apparent. As a paternal figure, Yeltsin promised to protect Russian children and grandchildren with his military might, borrowing masculinity from other men's military service in lieu of his own. In turn, Yeltsin shared his own *bogatyr*-ness with those who supported him politically—Helmut Kohl and Russian voters. Yeltsin even maintained a degree of power in shaping *bogatyrskaa* masculinity within his new, post-Soviet dominion, as he separated the *bogatyr* from the soldier-hero's commitment to Soviet communism. Yeltsin also benefitted from the Soviet athlete-*bogatyry* who shared his penchant for liquor. Up until Yeltsin's resignation in 1999, when, as I will explain in my conclusion, Yeltsin apologized for his failures as a leader, Yeltsin maintained an image of a *bogatyr* like Ilya Muromets: every political challenge and threat to Yeltsin's health became a testament to his personal bravery and masculinity.

Conclusion

Through tracing Gorbachev and Yeltsin's shifting masculine public images over the course of their leadership and rivalry, I have demonstrated that gender had an intimate relationship with political power through the late Soviet period and subsequent Soviet collapse. My first chapter argues that although Gorbachev included aspects of Hegemonic Soviet Masculinity in his public image, he contradicted that masculinity in both domestic and foreign policy. In my second chapter, I argue that Gorbachev sought to undermine Yeltsin's heroic masculinity using masochism and emotionality, but that emotionality actually helped Yeltsin form a populist masculine image. In contrast, Gorbachev appeared weak and poorly equipped to lead. My final chapter builds on Chapter Two's exploration of Yeltsin's heroic image and argues that Yeltsin projected a *bogatyrskii* masculine persona to acquire and maintain political power.

My narration of Soviet collapse might suggest that Yeltsin usurped Gorbachev's power solely because of his stronger masculine image. I end my chapter about Gorbachev's masculinity by juxtaposing him with the hyper masculine American President Reagan, and I end Chapter Two by again contrasting Gorbachev with the hyper masculine Russian President Yeltsin. But, of course, it would be unwise to endow masculinity with too much causal agency in the Soviet disintegration. Although I have argued that both men attempted to appear masculine in various respects, I have not argued that these efforts overshadowed other contributing discursive shifts in the late Soviet period.¹ I also have offered little analysis of how the Soviet and Russian peoples

¹ As I mentioned in Chapter Two with my discussion of the public of *svoi*, Anthropologist Alexei Yurchak has identified many discursive shifts during the late

received and interpreted Gorbachev and Yeltsin's gendered public images. Masculinity may have helped Yeltsin seize power from Gorbachev, but I cannot measure the degree to which that was true, nor do I claim it was the deciding factor.

Still, both Gorbachev and Yeltsin sought to carry themselves like men, implying that they themselves believed that masculinity would win them political power. Both men connected themselves to their fathers' generation that had fought in the Great Patriotic War before the crisis of masculinity.² Gorbachev strayed from Hegemonic Soviet Masculinity with his anti-alcohol campaign and intimate relationship with the West, but then repeatedly drew attention to how Yeltsin had also strayed from that masculine ideal. Gorbachev ridiculed Yeltsin's heroic image and emphasized Yeltsin's emotionality and masochism to undermine his masculinity. In turn, Yeltsin framed himself as a man-of-the-people *bogatyr* who overcame the stale Communist system using innate strength. He leveraged that image through three separate campaigns to establish and consolidate his authority.

But unlike the *bogatyr* Ilya Muromets who bravely met his demise in the fray, Yeltsin did not end his political career in battle.³ In 1999, Yeltsin considered running for a third presidential term, although by that point the Duma had attempted to depose him by arraigning him for five counts of presidential misconduct.⁴ Yeltsin avoided impeachment, but nevertheless resigned on December 31, 1999, apologizing for his

Soviet period that made the Soviet Union breakdown, a collapse that had previously been unimaginable, appear inevitable.

² Anna Temkina and Elena Zdravomyslova, "The Crisis of Masculinity in Late Soviet Discourse," *Russian Studies in History* 51 (2012): 16, accessed March 16, 2014, doi: 10.2753/RSH1061-1983510201.

³ Alex E. Alexander, *Bylina and Fairy Tale: The Origins of Russian Heroic Poetry* (Paris: Mouton, 1973), 108.

⁴ Timothy Colton, *Yeltsin: A Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 425.

shortcomings as a leader.⁵ The next day, as part of a presidential decree that allowed Yeltsin to choose his successor, should he resign before the end of his term, Vladimir Putin took Yeltsin's place as President.⁶

In the fourteen years since he first came to power, Putin has made his masculinity known. A former KGB agent, Putin hardly has to stretch as Gorbachev and Yeltsin did to establish militarism prominently in his public image. Both Gorbachev and Yeltsin engineered the populist aspects of their masculine images with planned interactions with the people, but Putin upped the ante with staged photos of himself wrestling with snow leopards, riding bare-chested on horseback, scuba diving in the Black Sea, and hang-gliding to lead a flock of endangered Siberian white cranes along part of their migration to Asia.⁷ At the same time, Putin has centralized his power well beyond Yeltsin's 1993 referendum.

Putin's masculinity seems to have become a primary lens through which many perceive his power. Most recently, following his decision to send Russian military units into the Crimea, former Alaska Governor Sarah Palin lamented, "People are looking at Putin as one who wrestles bears and drills for oil. They look at our president as one who wears mom jeans and equivocates and bloviates."⁸ Inflected through his masculine image, Putin's strength as a leader makes him a formidable opponent. Like President

⁵ Ibid., 435.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ John Hudson, "Putin Confesses: Hilarious, Manly Photo Ops Were Staged," *The Wire*, September 3, 2012, accessed March 23, 2014, <http://www.thewire.com/global/2012/09/putin-confesses-hilarious-manly-photo-ops-were-staged/56841/>.

⁸ Natalie Villacorta, "Sarah Palin: Barack Obama Known for 'Mom Jeans,'" *Politico*, March 4, 2014, accessed March 23, 2014, http://www.politico.com/story/2014/03/sarah-palin-president-obama-vladimir-putin-104218.html?ml=po_r.

Reagan whose hyper masculinity brought the masculinities of those close to him (including Gorbachev) into question, Putin's masculinity seems to have inspired American anxieties about President Obama's "mom jeans," and other insufficiently masculine leadership qualities.

Without the power to impose economic sanctions on Russia as the United States, Canada, and the European Union now have, some Ukrainian women have responded to Putin's aggression with a campaign to withhold sex from Russian men.⁹ Locating agency in sexual politics, the women declare on their Facebook page for the campaign "*Ne Dai Russkomu*" ("Don't Give it to Them"), "We need to fight the enemy by any means!" They invite Russian women to join the boycott, "Our [men] are still at home, but here yours are already at war."¹⁰ With this, the women of "Don't Give it To Them" gender Putin's invasion as a war perpetrated by men. I applaud the agency of "Don't Give it to Them." Still, I find it troubling that while the major political players in the Crimean conflict respect masculine markers of power like Putin's choreographed leopard-wrestling, femininity only appears as a source of political power in the bedroom.

Masculinity has marked Soviet and Russian political power. Contemporary political circumstances in Eastern Europe show just how indelible that mark has proven to be. It is my hope that by tracing Gorbachev and Yeltsin's transfer of power through their masculinities, I have contributed to broader feminist projects of denaturalizing not

⁹ Olga Khazan, "Ukrainian Women Have Launched a Sex Strike Against Russian Men," *The Atlantic*, March 24, 2014, accessed March 25, 2014, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/03/ukrainian-women-have-launched-a-sex-strike-against-russian-men/284614/>.

¹⁰ "Ne Dai Russkomu," *Facebook*, last modified March 24, 2014, accessed March 25, 2014, [facebook.com/не-дай-русскому/258847974295098](https://www.facebook.com/не-дай-русскому/258847974295098).

only that men should hold political power over women, but also that the most appealing qualities in a leader should derive from masculinity.

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