

Chapter 1

The Geopolitical Traffic in Gendered Russian Imaginaries

If we cannot escape these discursive patterns, then we must at least acknowledge the staggering force of tradition in shaping national narratives and expose the fictions that pass as history lest we become lost in the myths.¹

Having discussed in the last chapter the four foundational precepts that undergird my research, my focus in this chapter is to demonstrate the salience of these precepts by providing some information concerning the historical development and deployment of gendered, racialized, and heteronormative discursive configurations in both Russian and American nationalisms since the eighteenth century. I then explore the effects and consequences of those deployments, focusing on the depiction of Russia and Russians by/in U.S. media, particularly in film and television, over the course of the last century. I argue that Russia's historically feminized presentation of itself has heavily influenced depictions of Russia and Russians in the U.S. media, particularly in film and television, over the course of the last century—and most definitely after 1991. I also contend, however, that as an integral part of the triumphalist mythscape so central to American national identity, the narrative and visual depictions of Russia and Russians by/in the U.S. media has enabled the creation not only of a gendered (feminized and/or emasculated) *Russian* imaginary that (at least rhetorically) serves to weaken Russia geopolitically, but also of a gendered (masculinized) *American* imaginary that emboldens the (mostly white male) members of the U.S. foreign policy

elite. One result is a form of “imagined” trafficking that, as I demonstrate in chapters two, three, and four, has direct material effects on both U.S. foreign policy toward Russia and on the continued real trafficking of Russian women into the United States for work in the sex industry.

Gendered Russian Nationalism

Russian nationalism—even the concept of a Russian nation—has been and, as argued by any number of scholars, continues to be problematic.² Peter the Great declared Russia an empire in 1721, but it was a land-based imperial power in which the “colonies” were accessible by land travel, and colonial administrative policies were often simultaneously adopted in the metropole. Thus, for Russia, in one of the largest empires in the history of the world at the turn of the nineteenth century,³ there has never been a concept of “over there-ness” as was arguably the case with regard to Britons’ conceptualization of the British Empire at its zenith, and is certainly true with regard to the normative conceptualization in the United States of contemporary American military and economic expansion. As a result, a long history of fluid territorial boundaries that may (or may not) encompass Russia’s colonies as well as constant debates about the inextricability (or not) of Russian national myth from Ukrainian history have made virtually impossible the construction of a Russian nation—even after 1991.⁴

For three hundred years, the Russian Empire operated within a clear familial paradigm in which the *Batiushka-Tsar*’ (Father Tsar), the Christian god’s divine representative on earth, dealt with matters of state and politics, while *Matushka-Rus*’ (Mother Russia) symbolized the intangible, mystical (and mythic) Russian nation.⁵ Not only have Russian women historically been “regarded as ‘the breeders’” and “perceived as the passive symbols of the nation,” there is a long tradition among the intelligentsia to “transform Russia into a feminized subject conceptualized by (mostly male) intellectuals/politicians/nationalists as irresistibly attractive, but at the same time unknown and therefore frightening, thus provoking a simultaneous feeling of love and hatred.”⁶ Literary scholar Eric Naiman, for example, contends that throughout the 1920s, the Gothic literary tradition, which “is rooted in a woman’s (culturally induced) disgust with her own body,” was used widely in the literature, both fiction and nonfiction, of the New Economic Policy (NEP).⁷ Naiman claims that anti-NEP writers of the 1920s created a biologically deviant female body that became rhetorically representative of all that was anomalous in the NEP. He analyzes Bolshevik political theorist Aleksandra Kollontai’s use of language, images, and metaphors in her longest novella, *Vasilisa Malygina* (1923), and in her work with the Workers’ Opposition, accusing her of writing “misogynistic fiction” and of employing images of the female body to personify

the politically and ideologically deviant forces she felt were at work within the Communist Party. Naiman also reads the poetry of Bolshevik supporter Vladimir Mayakovsky to link the NEP's centrality of heterosexual sex—particularly violent sex—that measured the male subject's social significance through his violation of the female Other, with its Silver Age forerunners.⁸

A thorough understanding of Naiman's argument here requires a brief discussion of the period in question, referred to as Russia's "Silver Age." Usually associated with the urban centers of St. Petersburg and Moscow with their large communities of avant-garde artists and intellectuals, the short period between the 1905 February Revolution and the start of the First World War

saw the arts explode in kaleidoscopic splendor, as the most brilliant talents in Russian art, literature, poetry, music, and the ballet combined and recombined their genius to produce a dazzling and ever-changing array of new creations that overwhelmed the senses. There seemed to be no end to the brilliance and variety that Russia's Silver Age could achieve, and no limits to the heights to which its creations could ascend.⁹

But, despite this praise, cultural historians of this period, most notably theatre scholar Spencer Golub,¹⁰ have demonstrated quite successfully the negative use(s) these artists made of notions of biologically essentialized heteronormative femininity. According to Golub, creative (mostly male) intellectuals of the late imperial period co-opted female iconicity (both physiological and psychological) to express frustration with their own artistic and emotional isolation engendered by the dismal failure of the February Revolution and the humiliating defeat of the Russian navy by the Japanese in the Russo-Japanese War, both in 1905. For example, playwrights of the period created female characters that anticipated the Bolsheviks' exploitation of women as simultaneously positive and negative symbols of Russian morality in the 1920s. Golub argues that these theatre artists, "unable to leap out of [themselves] to realize [their] social causes as social change, . . . repeatedly leapt into [their] existential other": Russia-as-woman.¹¹ Their plays' characters "expressed the creative intelligentsia's 'will to death' disguised as beauty, engendered by the conflicting influences of the *fin de siècle* and the delayed *mal du siècle* of 1905." In short, intellectuals and theatre artists of the Silver Age transformed their own social impotence into feminized versions of their former selves, replete with "a hopeful/hopeless metaphysics of passive expectancy."¹² In considering this, it is helpful to envision, as feminist theatre historian Catherine Schuler suggests, *The Seagull's* Nina Zarechnaia and the actress who played her, the Silver Age's most famous *femme fragile*, Vera Kommissarzhevskaja. Kommissarzhevskaja's enormous popularity rested on her

ability to transform the psychological fragmentation of the Chekhovian heroine into a new “modern” version of Russian femininity that, encouraged by the messianic and self-sacrificial themes of Silver Age intellectuals, “required the bearer to project the image of a fragile, ethereal, and rather helpless child.”¹³

In this context, the irony of Golub’s title, *The Recurrence of Fate*, is not lost, for, as he contends, the Bolsheviks “had little tolerance for gender ambiguity and female metaphors,”¹⁴ and the fluidity of gender identity promulgated by Silver Age theatre artists portended a similar fate for them as for the women whose oppressions and stereotyped characteristics they assumed as their own. The transitional period between the end of the Russian Empire and the creation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics “trapped Russians in limbo, between remnants of a discredited past, with its values and hierarchies, and a ‘radiant future’ in the making, inspired by untested theories and faith in perfectibility.”¹⁵ The Bolsheviks sought this perfection, their promised socialist utopia, by utilizing a universal heterosexualized male normative in the creation of the new Soviet citizenry that confirmed the ideological death of woman while, simultaneously, rendering real women, with their physically marked feminine bodies, politically, socially and culturally deviant.¹⁶ During the process of (re)building the nation after the civil war, women were forgotten as direct participants in the revolutionary project, but were deemed necessary to its completion as physical conduits through which to “[define] the life and image of the new Soviet culture.”¹⁷ This project proceeded in two directions simultaneously. The first was informed by the gradual institutionalization and naturalization of Bolshevik educational theorist Nadezhda Krupskai’s notion of “worker-mother,” which emphasized the value of the work women were already doing and sought to improve their educational opportunities and social conditions. This went hand in hand with the Bolsheviks’ desire to universalize its citizenry based on a heteronormative masculinized model.

The second, pervasive among the oppositional intelligentsia, was the equation of women and the female body, specifically female genitalia, with what they, Bolshevik political theorist Aleksandra Kollontai and Bolshevik poet/playwright Vladimir Mayakovsky among them, viewed as the ideologically deviant and conciliatory NEP. Naiman posits that the sex act may have been synonymous with all forms of contamination, and that women’s bodies, in general, and female genitalia, specifically, came to symbolize the lurking specter of politically “deviant” saboteurs against whom leading anti-NEP Bolshevik theorists issued constant warnings. He argues, for example, that Kollontai’s pamphlet, *The Workers’ Opposition*, written just before the Tenth Party Congress in 1921 to demand a party purge of “bourgeois elements” that had allegedly become insensitive to the needs of the working class, charts the gradual moral and physical corruption of the party (*partii*—a feminine noun in Russian) and turns “her” into a “defiled, leaking internal space no longer secure against penetration.”¹⁸

Naiman's argument corresponds well to that of historian Choi Chatterjee, who examines the gendering of Soviet narratives about the two 1917 revolutions—the first in February that ended with the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II, the second in October in which the Bolsheviks came to power. She asserts that the February Revolution (a failure from the Bolshevik perspective), which is generally believed to have started in St. Petersburg when women began rioting to demand bread to feed their families, was feminized in Soviet popular and political culture as an example of how not to have a socialist revolution: “[T]he unruly participation of women” who intentionally strayed from Lenin’s plan for systematic and organized rebellion had, according to the Soviet nationalist governing myth, cost the Bolsheviks a much-desired win. In contrast, the successful October Revolution was gendered masculine and upheld in Soviet popular and political culture as an exemplary revolution.¹⁹

This powerful conflation of gendered and nationalist discourses in the many eras of Russian nation building has a long history and manifests itself in three specific ways: 1) Russia in comparison and competition with the global West, identified by its allegedly different religious, cultural, economic, and political institutions; 2) “Russians as creators and preservers of a unique multi-ethnic community . . . profoundly different from European and Western empires”; and 3) “Russians as members of a community of Eastern Slavs, the origins of which lay in Kievan Rus.”²⁰ Each of these possible approaches to Russian nationalism is explicitly gendered in that it depends on discourses of “progressive” masculinity and “traditional” femininity to construct a single “modern” Russian nation.²¹ For example, by charting “the evolution of the problematic morphology of the new Soviet Woman” and interrogating “the strategies of narration and employment used in Soviet propaganda for women,” Chatterjee exposes the dichotomous, paradoxical, and often contradictory messages provided by the Soviet government during International Women’s Day celebrations throughout the 1920s and 1930s regarding the status and expectations of Soviet women. According to her, Soviet women were discursively transformed from a symbol of the traditional backwardness of Russia into “a cultural marker that broadcast the progressiveness and modernity of the Soviet Union to the world.”²²

This is not to say, though, that the specter of women’s “backwardness” disappeared altogether from Soviet propaganda, but its use as a subtext of International Women’s Day literature should not, Chatterjee argues, be dismissed “as a mere reflection of Bolshevik misogyny. Rather, it served as a counterpoint to illustrate the achievements of Soviet women.” For instance, while women’s presence and participation in work and civil society increased, so did their enrollment in educational institutions of all levels and types. By the mid-1930s, International Women’s Day propaganda was underscored by “the growing pervasiveness of the idea of woman as both a qualified wage earner and consumer,” which served to create the mythological Stalinist heroine, who was both ultramodern

in her financial and emotional independence and decidedly not in her implicit reliance on father-Stalin to reinforce “premodern notions of personal subjection and political subordination.”²³ For the Bolsheviks, the idea was never to dismantle patriarchy, but to replace the authority of local males (husbands, brothers, fathers) with “that of the absent, omnipotent male of socialist patriarchy.” As a means of achieving this goal, the Bolsheviks told the history of women “in the tragic vein familiar to those steeped in the literary traditions” of Russia’s most famous (male) writers, a rhetorical strategy that served as justification for the Soviet government’s self-appointed mission to rescue and rehabilitate Soviet women from their “backwardness.” Thus, the status of women in the U.S.S.R. functioned “as a marker or an index of progressiveness” and, by the advent of the mythological Stalinist heroine of the 1930s, served as proof of the country’s modernity and its “vanguard position among European nations.”²⁴

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, communism was in constant conversation with liberalism and fascism when it claimed to have solved the “woman question,” and Stalin’s “rhetoric of feminist liberation,” asserts Chatterjee, did create a discursive environment in which to publicly express any sexist views (as they were rather narrowly conceptualized in that time, space, and place) that were simply unacceptable. To do so would threaten the legitimacy of Stalin, the Soviet Union, and its policies as it worked to define itself partially in contrast to the freewheeling capitalist West and fascist Germany and Italy. According to Stalinist historiography, then, “Soviet women owed everything to the Stalinist Five-Year Plan” because it managed to convert the backward *baba* into the modern New Soviet Woman and convince men to treat her with respect—at least outwardly.²⁵

Unfortunately, though, as the Soviet system collapsed, so did the façade of gender “equality,” not only materially (in terms of women’s decreased employment opportunities, lack of political participation, and inability to access disappearing social services, et cetera), but also discursively. There has been a marked change in attitudes toward gender, women’s representation in the media, and “the acceptability of blatantly discriminating practices and statements.”²⁶ According to Russian feminist Anastasia Posadskaya, the events of 1991 and the resultant quest for democracy and capitalism in the Russian Federation resulted in the widespread use of women’s bodies as commodities, particularly in pornography and prostitution, and the revitalization of Russian Orthodoxy meant a concomitant “resurgence of traditional attitudes toward gender relations.”²⁷ Binary notions of sexual difference have been adopted, and the post-Soviet belief that domestic and family roles are women’s natural focus has been promoted in opposition to the tenets of Marxist-Leninism. This has included a discussion in the popular media of a national demographic crisis and fertility issues accompanied by pronatalist pressures through government legislation—as well as the utilization of a historicized gender binary in which the state is equated with masculinity, the nation with femininity. According to feminist scholars Gascilo and Lanoux:

For the greater part of three centuries, Russian and Soviet heads of state have fostered a cult of masculinity, epitomized by imperial Russia's all-male cadre of bureaucrats, military schools, and exclusive institutions for nobles, and subsequently by the Soviet Union's ideological founding fathers, New Men, and Stakhanovite workers. By contrast, Russian nationhood historically has assumed female form, whether in the image of Mother Russia (Matushka-Rus', *rodina-mat'*), the Russian literary heroine, or the foreign currency prostitute—all endowed with the traits of irrationality, passion, enigma, submissiveness, and suffering invariably imputed to women.²⁸

These same gender binaries resurfaced in Russian popular and political culture after 1991 as “post-Soviet self-commentary . . . adopted an apocalyptic rhetoric of doom and self-flagellation” not unlike that which was promulgated during the Silver Age,²⁹ and Russian politicians of all ideological perspectives utilized gendered imagery and metaphors, reminiscent of and often directly referencing and/or quoting writers from the late nineteenth-century Slavophile and Silver Age intelligentsia, to advance their particular political agendas.³⁰ Prominent in the decade after the 1991 demise of the Soviet Union, for example, was the routine narrative deployment of the Russian prostitute “in the symbolic battle for Russia's soul.” According to Russian and Slavic studies scholar Eliot Borenstein:

the collapse of the Russian state, the decline of patriotism, and the absence of a workable national idea share center stage in the Russian media and culture industry with tales and images of sexually uninhibited young women offering their bodies and their services to paying clients.³¹

In essence, the historically masculine Soviet state, which gave way in 1991, was geopolitically emasculated and shaped for itself a post-Soviet “victim” narrative in which female prostitution, long used to signify national humiliation in Russian/Soviet national narratives, was configured as metaphorical: Russia itself has been transformed into a feminized “nexus of buying and selling, where everything of value is offered cynically to the highest bidder.”³² Simultaneously, however, Russia's national humiliation is configured as a notably male, rather than female, experience in which men, in particular, have suffered from low life expectancy, depression, and an increase in alcoholism since the demise of the Soviet Union.

Gendered American Nationalism

The demise of the Soviet Union coincided with the culmination in U.S. popular and political culture of a long discursive process that feminist literary scholar Susan Jeffords terms the “remasculinization of America,” “a revival of the images, abilities, and evaluations of men and masculinity in dominant U.S. culture” in the years since the United States’ unexpected and humiliating defeat in Viet Nam.³³ But that Jeffords points to the remasculinization of America after the mid-1970s suggests that gender-as-discourse, particularly attempts to masculinize the state while feminizing the nation, as it has been of Russian nationalism, has long been constitutive of American nationalism.

In what is considered a foundational text of American culture studies, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol*, Henry Nash Smith traces the literary origins and ideological evolution of how and why the American West came to be so integral to American national identity. He argues that during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, there were two simultaneous versions of American empire. One was a maritime narrative that, with its roots in British mercantilism, positioned the new United States as part of a transnational network of global commerce and justified continental westward expansion as a means of forging a passage to India. But the physical migration of Anglo-European peoples westward during the course of the nineteenth century in an attempt to find that elusive trade route to India led to another narrative, one that emphasized an agrarian tradition of settlers making their way through and in the untamed frontier, surviving off the natural resources of “an empty, fertile” continent.³⁴

Smith contends that it was this second narrative which took precedence in the creation of a U.S. empire and the governing myths of American nationalism. A crucial element of the agrarian narrative, however, was/is the notion that the free land offered up for settlement by the U.S. government to those who could not otherwise afford land in the East (i.e., small farmers, immigrants, and later, freed slaves), exemplified the exceptional success of American democracy, thus situating the “taming” of the American West at the very heart of American national identity.³⁵

The late-nineteenth century ascendance of the agrarian narrative over the transnational maritime narrative—and, with it, the notion of American democracy’s “exceptionalism”—turned Americans inward toward themselves, rather than being able to conceptualize themselves as part of a global community.³⁶ The consequence has been a historical tendency in the United States toward a type of geopolitical isolationism that, rather than a desire to withdraw completely from world affairs, enables the United States, as unique among nation-states, to position itself as a reluctant and involuntary participant in the dealings of “inferior foreigners”—as long such dealings do not undermine U.S. national sovereignty. Fueled in recent decades by the United States’ alleged victory over the Soviet

Union in the cold war, the exceptionalism at the heart of American nationalism has been the source of the United States' belief not only that "the default mode of humanity is to become Americans," but that, consequently, the United States has a divinely-inspired duty to spread its vision of "democracy" and "freedom" to the rest of the world.³⁷ This (often explicitly racist) chauvinism legitimates U.S. military unilateralism: Because Other nation-states are always already hostile and inferior, the United States "is free to dictate to them or even conquer them for their own good,"³⁸ a logic that was used to justify the nineteenth century genocide of North American indigenous peoples and, most recently, the March 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq.

Paradoxically, while the United States looks for and embraces opportunities to spread its core values internationally, its neocolonial (and usually military) offensive has long been billed as its best defense against perceived threats of all kinds, whether local or global. A fervent messianic nationalism, made more salient by the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991 and conflated with masculinity through militarization, has historically gone hand in hand with paranoia and a perception of national vulnerability (i.e., threats to "national security") that rely on "an obsession with domestic subversion [and a] belief in an outside world dominated by enemies and potential traitors."³⁹ The maintenance of the cold war in the United States, for example, relied in equal parts on repeated affirmations of America's greatness *as well as* on the notion that communism, whether foreign or homegrown, posed an immediate threat to the singularly American values enumerated above. And, as Lieven rightly points out, an obsession with internal subversion during the cold war largely overshadowed any potential threat by the Soviet Union, resulting in an "anticommunist hysteria [that has] become part of American political culture."⁴⁰

What Lieven's otherwise sound exploration of American nationalism's causes and consequences ignores, however, is the role of gender, race, sexuality, and other dimensions of identity in creating and maintaining its governing myths. For instance, Lieven does point out that American nationalism is dependent for its continued maintenance upon the (his)stories the United States tells itself about its past. Consequently, not unlike many of the nationalist projects explored by feminist and other critical scholars, American nationalism "continuously looks backward, to a vanished and idealized national past."⁴¹ But what he neglects is that this past is not without its identitarian valences; the American past is the gendered, racialized past of colonial conquest and slave labor.

Feminist literary scholar Annette Kolodny's close reading of dozens of American pastoral narratives written by men between the eighteenth and late twentieth centuries implicitly critiques and complicates the work of both Lieven and Smith by illustrating the ways in which the United States' westward expansion, and later industrialization, relied heavily on gendered imaginaries in which the land, unknown and potentially dangerous, was alternatively conceptualized

as either a nurturing mother (the hope and promise of sustenance) or as a passive virgin awaiting domination by the masculinized U.S. state and its (predominantly male) explorers. These gendered imaginaries, Kolodny contends, provided a conceptual framework within which to view the vast expanses of the unknown land in the American West as feminine and, consequently, less alien and threatening.⁴²

Similarly, historian Gail Bederman's analysis of the interconnectedness of American notions of "manliness" with white supremacy and "civilization" during the Progressive Era calls attention to the ways in which white Americans discursively pitted "civilized" white men against "savage" dark-skinned men to argue for U.S. geopolitical hegemony. Driven by Protestant millennialism infused with the evolutionary theories of Charles Darwin,⁴³ the notion of "civilization" became racialized and gendered and relied on the conflation of biology with culture. The argument was that only white races had advanced to a "civilized" stage, leaving behind the inherent "savagery" and "barbarism" of racial(ized) Others such as freed slaves, indigenous peoples, and immigrants. Evidence of this civilized state was provided in gendered terms: Whereas racial(ized) Others seemed not to distinguish between men and women, either materially or ideologically, whites insisted on distinct sociocultural roles and expectations for men and women (i.e., Anglo-European men were self-controlled protectors of women and children, and Anglo-European women were delicate, demure, and dedicated to their homes and children). The existence of distinct gender roles was thus used to legitimate the "civilized," "superior" status of white people and the "savage," "primitive" and "inferior" status of their racial(ized) Others. It followed, then, that white men were in an ideal biological and cultural position to make decisions for the rest of humanity.⁴⁴

The employment of a gender-sensitive lens enriches the work of conventional American culture-studies scholars by pointing to American nationalism's reliance on the discourses of gender, race, and sexuality to sustain itself. What Lieven misses in his discussion of anti-communism and the legacy of the cold war as constitutive of contemporary (i.e., post-1991) American nationalism, for example, is what Dean terms the "ideology of masculinity" in which he contends that U.S. cold-war-era foreign and domestic policymakers were inextricably embedded—thus, affecting in direct and material ways not only the decisions they made, but also the conceptual frameworks within which such decisions were formulated.⁴⁵ Like Lieven, Dean argues of the immediate post-war years of the last century that as U.S. foreign policymakers "began forming a new global imperial alliance under U.S. leadership, in opposition to the Soviet Union," they contributed to the creation of "a 'national security state' dedicated to the containment of communism and the expansion of a corporate capitalist world economic order." They accomplished this task by deploying "alarmist rhetoric to persuade the American public that the Soviets posed an immediate and direct threat to U.S. interests and to world peace." Unlike Lieven, however, Dean goes further. By incorporating a

concern for the manipulation of gender-as-discourse into his analysis, he is able to argue convincingly that “[g]ender, sexuality, and the production and control of sexual secrets played a central role in many political struggles of the Red Scare era.” In their zeal to make a clear enemy of the Soviet Union, U.S. cold-war-era policy elites “depicted the foreign service as a bureaucracy staffed by effete ‘cookie-pushing’ Ivy league internationalist homosexuals and ‘pinks,’” thus “conflat[ing] fears of domestic political subversion and foreign aggression with anxieties about the maintenance of domestic social and sexual order.” Consequently, according to Dean, “[c]ountersubversive rhetoric linked behavior that subverted the ‘natural’ relations between the sexes with behavior that subverted the proper political relations of American society,” and communism:

depicted as an implacable, expansionist, militarily threatening enemy in its external imperial incarnation, was portrayed domestically as an “infection”; a conspiratorial, protean invasion of the boundaries of state and society, undermining national strength from within.

As such, communism, conflated with sexual deviance, could be—and was—easily linked to progressive politics through, for example, pejorative rhetoric about the party girls allegedly sent to enlist young men in the U.S. Communist Party. A conceptual progression from communism to sexual deviance to progressive politics also facilitated the post-war feminization of diplomacy and the foreign service, while serving as a catalyst for McCarthyism, embedded within which was what Dean calls a “sexual inquisition” inside the State Department that was meant to publicly expose closeted homosexuals and other “less masculine” men who, the FBI argued, were easy targets for blackmail by Soviet intelligence. Dean concludes about America’s cold-war-era governing myths that “[g]ender and the politics of sexuality and ‘deviance’ were not peripheral issues; they were central to the operations of power within the state.”⁴⁶

This gender-sensitive analysis of McCarthyism reveals the gendered paradox at the heart of American nationalism: Its sustainability requires the paranoid rhetoric of a national feminized vulnerability to feminized threats of all kinds as a means of legitimating the state’s masculinized, and usually militaristic expansionism, which has been justified by historicized references to the uniqueness of American values. Put another way, America, the feminized nation, must be conceptualized as vulnerable to threats, which are also feminized—making them, by their very nature, both dangerous and easy to defeat. Thus feminized, the nation to be protected and its threats to be eradicated together facilitate the state’s easy justification of its oppositional and often violent, masculinist bellicosity.

Dean concludes, for example, that the ideological origins of the Viet Nam conflict were rooted in attempts by U.S. foreign policymakers to live up to an idealized notion of American masculinity, and waging a war in Viet Nam was

their chance to demonstrate their manhood in opposition to effeminate diplomats and “pink” communists. And feminist literary scholar Susan Jeffords argues that American cultural representations of Viet Nam—most of which were created by white men in the late 1970s and 1980s—signaled the remasculinization of American culture in the wake of the United States’ humiliating and emasculating military defeat. Jeffords’s analyses of several cultural texts, including novels, personal narratives, films, and television series shows that the discourse of the war reequated masculinity and militarization with American national identity by positioning patriarchal figures, usually portrayed as veterans of Viet Nam, as representative of national security, stability, and guidance. In contrast, the U.S. state and its political and active-duty military representatives were feminized as incompetent and ineffectual. This analysis is borne out exceptionally well in *The A-Team* (1983–1987), NBC’s action-adventure series about a group of fictionalized Viet Nam veterans living underground in the Los Angeles area as soldiers of fortune—who, having been accused by the U.S. government of robbing the bank of Hanoi in the final days of the Viet Nam conflict—elude a succession of bumbling and confused U.S. military personnel, while concomitantly working to end injustice and strife wherever and whenever they can. According to Jeffords, *The A-Team* is just one example of a slew of 1980s cultural texts that depicted ex-soldiers, particularly Viet Nam veterans, as “‘victims’ of society, government, and the war itself,” thus “provid[ing] ‘evidence’ of a group of men who were themselves victims, on a par with women, blacks, and other disenfranchised groups.” This evidence made possible the argument that “(white) men were not oppressors but instead, along with women and men of color, themselves victims of a third oppressor, in this case the government,” which was explicitly feminized by virtue of its ineffectuality in and eventual defeat by Viet Nam.⁴⁷

In American political culture, President Ronald Reagan capitalized on this popular anti-governmentality by casting himself as the masculine hero of his own morality tale in which he, as a self-positioned government outsider-made-American President, promised to single-handedly make government bureaucracy accountable for the failures of Viet Nam, first, by promoting the ingenuity and spirit of American individualism, which is in direct and explicit opposition to Soviet communism, and second by

decreas[ing] the size of government itself and cut[ting] unwieldy bureaucracies that had come, according to Reaganites, more to serve the interests of lawmakers and bureaucrats who depend on their budgets than to address the real needs of citizens.⁴⁸

Thus, Jeffords demonstrates the ways in which masculinized, heroic anti-governmentality, represented in American popular and political culture by the “hard [white, male] bodies” of actors Clint Eastwood, Sylvester Stallone, Bruce Willis,

and Ronald Reagan, was narratively and visually deployed in the 1980s to avenge the emasculating failures of Viet Nam.

The ideological reach of this governing myth, already considerable by the end of the 1980s, benefited enormously from contemporaneous developments in Eastern Europe. Having led the United States to its inevitable “victory” over the Soviet Union seemingly overnight, Ronald Reagan, the quintessential icon of a rugged and virile American masculinity, and outpacing his apparently inconsequential sidekick, Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev, became the hero of the cold war. As Schrecker rather sarcastically describes the logic of the triumphalist narrative, “[f]reedom, democracy, justice, courage, and the sheer grit and resolve of the American people triumphed over despotism and darkness.” She argues that this grave misuse of history to justify a post-Soviet national/ist present is “oversimplified and distorted,” leaving “no room for victims (as opposed to losers).”⁴⁹

Russia and Russians in a U.S. Context

Communication theorist George Gerbner contends that U.S. media outlets, because they are largely sympathetic to U.S. government policies, depict foreign countries in the way that the government wants them to, using information gleaned predominantly from government sources.⁵⁰ For instance, linking a November 1985 *New York Times* survey in which 28 percent of those polled believed that the U.S.S.R. was an enemy of the United States during World War II to what media mogul Ted Turner, in the May 17–23, 1989 issue of *Variety*, called “hate films,”⁵¹ Gerbner argues that, because the media is a major producer and provider of images of foreign nationals for American audiences, the knowledge that most Americans have about Russia comes from the media. Consequently, like the rest of us, U.S. foreign policy elites are by no means immune to the geopolitical knowledge, the belief in an often polarized geopolitical imaginary in which the global West and East are diametrically opposed, produced by and through these cultural texts.⁵²

As the single ideologically binding and delimiting geopolitical imaginary of U.S. foreign policy for most of the last century, the cold war served as the primary catalyst for an overwhelming number of cultural texts, many of the most infamous of which are films, that, as historian Harlow Robinson deftly illustrates, narratively and visually depicted the Soviet Union, Russians, and/or communists according to the ebb and flow of U.S.-Soviet relations.⁵³

According to Robinson, before World War II, Hollywood representations of Soviets/Russians in films such as *Tovarich* (1937), *Ninotchka* (1939), and *Comrade X* (1940) were largely negative, but after the December 1941 Japanese attack on the U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor brought the United States into an albeit temporary alliance with the U.S.S.R. against the Third Reich, representatives from

the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration called on Hollywood producers to revision their representations of the Soviet Union and its citizens in order to provide the American movie-going audience with a less negatively valenced understanding of their new ally. Producers were happy to comply, and a number of pro-Soviet films, most notably *North Star* (1943) and *Days of Glory* (1944), quickly made their way through the long production process and into U.S. cinemas. Ironically though, as Robinson notes:

Just how quickly and apparently easily many Hollywood figures adapted to the changed situation is evident in the fact that the same writer, Melchior Lengyel, supplied the original story both for *Ninotchka* (before) and for *Days of Glory* (after). What a difference a war can make.⁵⁴

However, neither the war nor the difference it made lasted much beyond the Yalta Conference in February 1945,⁵⁵ and Hollywood was soon embarrassed by its wartime pro-Soviet sentiment, particularly because, according to Robinson, those films were a primary catalyst that sparked the controversial post-war investigation by the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) into alleged communist influence in American culture and education.⁵⁶ While making note of the precipitous decline in the production of films featuring Russian/Soviet characters and plots between the mid-1940s and 1960, Robinson rightly points out that those fifteen years at mid-century marked the height of the cold war, and the sparse but negative filmic depictions of the Soviet Union during that time were integral to the geopolitical development of that country as the United States' "primary military, economic, and ideological adversary."⁵⁷ This apparent fact of U.S. foreign policy persisted in popular and political culture with precious little relief until the late 1980s, when Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev began the dual processes of *glasnost* (openness) and *perestroika* (restructuring) that, within a few short years, not only enabled the collapse of the entire Soviet system, but also rendered nonexistent Hollywood's chief antagonist—almost.

Although Robinson does briefly mention that "[t]he seduction/ideological conversion of a Soviet woman through American/capitalist fashion and luxury . . . became a standard feature of Hollywood screenplays about the U.S.S.R.,"⁵⁸ what is surprisingly absent from his account of roughly a century's worth of Hollywood filmic depictions of Russia and Russians—including those made after the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991—is any sustained analysis of the implicit sexism, heteronormativity, and orientalism embedded in many of the films he discusses. In contrast, feminist literary critics Valentina Glajar and Domnica Radulescu contend that since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, "women from [Eastern Europe] in particular, have become a favorite and convenient site for the

accumulation of stereotypical images feeding Western lust for the exotic and fear of the “barbaric.” Because they are white and European, Slavic women

are not drastically Other and thus are endowed with an aura of familiarity, or of Europeanness, and yet they are not fully familiar, or European either, as they come from the more remote regions of Europe, perceived as almost Oriental, as almost exotic, yet not fully so.⁵⁹

Feminist scholar Roumiana Deltcheva goes further, asserting that since the fall of the Soviet Union, “the Slavic slut, ready to sell her body and soul for greenbacks, has become as much of a fixture in Western cinema as the Russian villainess used to be in James Bond movies during the Cold War.” Although exotic and Other, Slavic women are white people from albeit peripheral European spaces and are, therefore, easy scapegoats for Western media pundits who interpret “their social downfall . . . as a consciously chosen path, rather than as the result of social/political circumstances imposed upon them.” Pointing to the “perspective of geographical differentiation” of Eastern Europe as articulated “within artistic representations by Western artists,”⁶⁰ Deltcheva contends that post-1991 filmic depictions of Eastern European women fall into three basic categories, or some combination thereof: “the scrupulous slut, the conniving trickster, and the helpless victim.” Each of these three stereotypes “carr[ies] distinct negative connotations that, in their totality, reinforce the idea of Otherness as negation: negation of voice, negation of space, negation of experience.”⁶¹

For example, with a nod to Edward Said, feminist literary scholar Agnieszka Tuszynska offers a critical reading of a film entitled *The Birthday Girl* (2001), starring Nicole Kidman as Nad’ya, a Russian mail-order bride, to argue against the dichotomous notions of Self and Other that occupy Western epistemologies. She points out that “[i]n order to make the process of othering more efficient and unambiguous in its exclusionary implications, the West has employed a rigid system of binary oppositions, which draw clear lines between ‘us’ and ‘them.’” This, of course, is also a statement about who has geopolitical power and the ability to wield it, when and why, a struggle that manifests itself, Tuszynska contends, in *The Birthday Girl* as both the depiction of and the site at which global East and West “confront each other in a much-telling setting which renders the Eastern European woman a commodity and the ultimate ‘other.’”⁶² In the film, Nad’ya’s refusal to speak and her ready willingness to fulfill in complete silence her British husband’s sexual fantasies of bondage and sado-masochism operate as a “microcosm of the modern world’s power structure, in which domination is not always exercised through violence, but more and more often through multidimensional—economic, social, and ideological—oppression.”⁶³ As Nad’ya is both a woman and Russian, her gender, national origin, and ethnicity intersect, making

her white, British (Western) husband feel both like a “man” and a “conqueror”—while her heterosexuality becomes “the aim of modern-day colonialism; her body is invaded and transformed for the purpose of the Englishman’s entertainment.” But then, abruptly, the film’s narrative shifts as Nad’ya, like all typical Hollywood femmes fatales (a common filmic archetype that I will discuss more fully in chapter five, turns out to be not what she seems, and is, instead, “transformed into the cinematographic ‘type’ of the cunning Russian woman-spy, who maims Western men with her deceptive sexuality and uses them for her own ends.”⁶⁴ Not coincidentally, this narrative shift occurs just as Nad’ya begins to express her thoughts and desires verbally—using excellent English-speaking skills that her husband (and the viewing audience) has been led to believe she does not possess. The moment she begins to speak, she becomes an enemy.

Tuszynska contends that *The Birthday Girl* places the relationship between Nad’ya and her British husband within the context of the much-heralded and allegedly inherent differences between the global East and global West in which the East is depicted in Western post-Soviet news media and popular culture as economically devastated and underdeveloped, while the West is discursively constructed as a parental figure to Eastern Europe, suggesting that region’s alleged “infantile nature, and thus its inferiority and inability to govern itself in a responsible and mature manner.” She rightly points out that this “same rhetoric . . . is characteristic of the language used in patriarchal, sexist societies to refer to women,” thereby comparing men’s treatment of women in heteropatriarchal societies to the post-Soviet treatment of Eastern Europe by the industrialized democracies of the global West, a topic to which I will return in the next chapter.⁶⁵

U.S. Foreign Policy and the Triumphalist Mythscape

Given these feminist analyses of the gendered, racialized Hollywood depictions of Russia and Eastern Europe produced since 1991,⁶⁶ it is easy to see now why the advertisement with which I began the Introduction is so problematic. First, the ad unambiguously suggests that a passive, feminized Russia is, geopolitically speaking, available and willing to do whatever the masculinist United States commands—a notion that potentially reinforces not only what U.S. foreign policymakers think they already know about post-Soviet Russia, but also U.S. neocolonial attitudes about the (un)limits of U.S. geopolitical power. Second, the Diesel Jeans advertisement is an example of a disturbing discursive trend in U.S. popular and political culture between the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the U.S. declaration of war on Iraq in 2003, in which post-Soviet Russia was explicitly sexualized and gendered in U.S. popular and political culture. Conceptualized as politically and ideologically backward, the Russian Federation was frequently depicted as a feminized and/or emasculated entity

that was potentially duplicitous, antagonistic, sexually voracious, a threat to U.S. national security, and/or an innocent victim of circumstances beyond its control and, consequently, in need of salvation and resurrection. These gendered Russian imaginaries, as discursive systems of cultural representation and nationalist mythmaking, bolstered a triumphalist American nationalism whose narrative worked to “make belief” about a strong, masculinist U.S. national identity in opposition to that which was Russian/Soviet. Alarming, though, given the “rise in mass abuses and violence against [Slavic women], either as a result of new ethnic wars or of the new social phenomenon of the trafficking of women and girls for sex from East European to Western countries,” Glajar and Radulescu argue that

[W]hat happens to women in society is directly related to the ways in which they are seen and represented in the imagination and in the philosophical and artistic constructions of that culture. This relationship is not seen in terms of one-sided views of mimetic representations of reality but in terms of dialogue and interconnectedness between a culture’s ideological constructs, artistic representations, and its social realities.⁶⁷

The production and operation of the gendered Russian imaginary within the triumphalist mythscape re/inscribes the Russian Federation as a gendered, racialized Other to the United States, thus creating a cultural atmosphere in which the exploitation of feminine and/or emasculated bodies as representative of Russia makes plausible the material traffic in “real” women and girls from Russia into the United States for work in the sex industry. Radulescu contends that the reductive representations of Eastern European women in American culture as embodying some essence of an “exotic” culture fuels the seemingly-boundless desire in the West for “whatever is perceived as ‘exotic’ femininity,” especially that which is not visibly Other. This, she argues, “can easily be translated into the practice of objectifying and treating flesh and blood women as inferior beings” and may well be both cause and consequence of the increasing numbers of Russian and Eastern European women and girls who are trafficked to the West for work in the sex industry.⁶⁸

This link between cultural representations and material reality enables me to consider the ways in which, once the deployment of gender, heterosexuality, and ethnicity in national governing myths works to create gendered, racialized nationalisms, those national performances travel and are then translated and transformed in different spacetimes within and among the circuits of power that constitute this and previous historical moments of globalization. For instance, the Soviet Union’s fashioning of its gendered national identity in the 1910s and 1920s, itself built on a long tradition of gender-as-discourse as it developed in the imperial period,

has been instrumental in forming not only post-Soviet Russian conceptualizations of itself as the world's prostitute, but also U.S.-based knowledges about the Russian Federation since 1991. Consequently, I posit an expanded conceptualization of "trafficking" to connote the exploitative cultural representation of Other gendered, racialized, heteronormative bodies in media and popular culture to justify particular political agendas. If the process of trafficking is "a practice which treats human beings as commodities,"⁶⁹ and the noun *traffic* refers to the movement of an entity through an area or along a route across all kinds of borders, then certainly the depiction of Russia and Russians in U.S.-based English-language media, legislation, and popular culture can be considered a form of "imagined" trafficking that has direct material effects on both U.S. foreign policy toward Russia and on the continued "real" trafficking of Russian women into the United States for work in the sex industry.⁷⁰

While I return in chapter four to a discussion of U.S. anti-trafficking legislation, in the next chapter, I tackle the neocolonial rhetoric at work in 1992's Freedom Support Act (FSA), the legislation that authorized U.S. bi- and multi-lateral assistance to the independent states of the former Soviet Union. Through an analysis of the legislation itself, as well as the congressional hearings convened to discuss the possibilities and permutations of U.S. aid to Russia, I consider why and how U.S. bilateral aid to Russia took the form of technical assistance to the exclusion of all other options. I argue that the assumptions which helped to shape U.S. Russia policy immediately after the demise of the Soviet Union relied simultaneously—and rather incongruously—on the notion of a weakened, feminized Russia in urgent need of assistance, and on the continuation of a cold-war-era conceptualization of the Russian Federation as duplicitous, irrational, and maleficent. I demonstrate that the metaphors and analogies used throughout the hearings to justify and legitimate policy decisions reveal an explicit imperialist hubris embedded in U.S. Russia policy and rooted in racialized, gendered discursive configurations reminiscent of the colonial strategies of past empires.