# Romashko on Gaufman, 'Everyday Foreign Policy: Performing and Consuming the Russian Nation after Crimea'

**Gaufman, Elizaveta**. *Everyday Foreign Policy: Performing and Consuming the Russian Nation after Crimea*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2022. 200 pp. $130.00 (cloth), ISBN 9781526155412 (https://amazon.com/dp/1526155419).

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The political shift toward conservatism in Russia in 2012 and the subsequent annexation of Crimea in 2014 took Western states by surprise, as these were largely unexpected developments in post-Soviet Russia.[1] However, Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 was even more startling. While the surge of nationalism in 2014 was undeniably shocking, what has puzzled many scholars and international observers is the apparent lack of widespread public outcry within Russia in response to this aggressive military offensive against its neighbor.[2] Russian propaganda consistently paints a vivid picture of unanimous support for the "special operation" amidst a growing number of prison sentences for those who oppose it. State and independent opinion polls equally indicate an astonishing 76-80 percent public support for the authorities.[3] This is complemented by a plethora of reports from alternative sources showing Russians in Moscow and St. Petersburg carrying on with their daily lives, seemingly unaffected by the ongoing war, while thousands of soldiers are drafted from the farthest regions of the country.[4]

Some observers attribute these phenomena to normative loyalty, which has a purely instrumental character in expressing support for the authorities in response to increasing administrative and economic coercion.[5] Indeed, a strategy of "defensive consolidation" has

been adopted by large sections of the Russian population, which stays largely passive and apolitical when it comes to mobilization or state decisions.[6] Nevertheless, it would be wrong to see only the repressive side of state-society relations. We must acknowledge that there is a great share of public consent with the conservative regime in Russia. The fundamental question here is one of *interpellation* in the Althusserian sense.[7] In other words, to what extent do people in Russia internalize the values and grand narratives promoted by the Kremlin? This perspective encompasses not only the official level of the conservative formation, that is, how effectively the state promotes its imperial image and colonialist policies, but also how individuals and various communities within Russia respond to, acquiesce with, or challenge them in their everyday lives.

Elizaveta Gaufman's new book, *Everyday Foreign Policy: Performing and Consuming the Russian Nation after Crimea*, masterfully develops this standpoint to explore the evolution of Russian society after 2014. The book demonstrates that the survival of President Vladmir Putin's autocratic regime rests on moral and economic anti-Western sentiments that have been reactivated and remarkably reinforced by Russia's victorious annexation of Crimea and subsequent foreign policy. This study is more relevant than ever to our understanding of modern Russia because it provides an effective analytical framework by bringing together elements of the assemblage theory and poststructuralist international relations literature. Assemblage theory is well placed to take account of the rhizomatic nature of the digital landscape, where popular subjectivities emerge within the interconnected but chaotic and nonhierarchical environment. The poststructuralist approach to foreign policy highlights the instability and contingency of meanings within hierarchical structures of language and power, allowing for the mapping of biological and cultural elements that travel from digital platforms to the kebab shop around the corner. A combination of these approaches enables us to explore Russia's resilient conservatism by delving deeper into the actual dynamics of Russian society and examining its strategies of (de-)politicization and ideological interpellation as they are exposed in corporeal, physical, and digital forms. A detailed description of the data sources, their collection, and the analytical methods as provided in the methodological chapter, could be applied to the analysis of other policy areas or national communities.

In this respect, Elizaveta Gaufman approaches Russia's sociocultural phenomena in a new way. By drawing attention to the politically charged dimension of regular biological needs, cultural norms, and social relations, the author empirically demonstrates how the Russian population reflects, digests, and embodies the Kremlin's geopolitics at the grassroots level. The book's central argument revolves around the idea that the biocultural internalization of official policy is a significant and nuanced aspect of contemporary Russian society. The book addresses Russia's grassroots perceptions of international relations as manifested in the performance of people's discursive, consumer, and bodily practices, which together form what is conceptualized as an "everyday foreign policy assemblage" (p. 8). The study thus shows how the daily routines of ordinary people take on new meanings and significance within the hegemonic articulations of national securitization, geopolitical confrontation, and bilateral sanctions between Russia and the West.

By exploring the intersection of international relations and the everyday, this book challenges traditional notions of foreign policy as something reserved for the realm of high politics. Combining theory, historical context, and contemporary case studies, the author makes a convincing claim for the importance of examining the personal and the banal in the

digital age. An innovative take on “everyday foreign policy as an assemblage of micro-practices and discourses enmeshed across physical and digital spaces” helps the author to map the unique pattern of Russian common sense in its post-2014 state (p. 132). The book captures what was happening in Russian society before the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, illuminating not only the political aspects but also the mundane realm of popular attitudes and activities, evident in habitual actions like eating, shopping, talking, and mating, as influenced by growing geopolitical tensions.

The book is organized around two nodes of popular discursive practices in Russia, namely everyday nationalism and patriotic (non-)consumption, which can be traced back to the point where they were perceived and rearticulated through social media channels. Each of these nodes represents a set of choices, from food to online or offline self-expression, that at a particular moment of a prominent foreign policy event, become attuned to geopolitical conflicts, thus producing new privileged and marginalized subject positions. For example, by examining phenomena such as patriotic (non-)consumption and the gendered dimension of foreign policy, Gaufman offers a nuanced view of how Russian citizens tend to use violence against politically excluded groups, such as women married to Turks (p. 136), in order to compensate for the patriarchal desire to control the female body, on the one hand, and for the material losses and inability to spend the usual holidays in Turkey, on the other. This and other case studies in the book exemplify how the over-politicization of Russian foreign policy events reinforces power relations by justifying forms of hatred or violence, national chauvinism, misogyny, or racism through geopolitical contextualization. Escalated conflicts between states are translated to the level of people-to-people, digested in common sense and reproduced in power relations and new lines of inclusion and exclusion.

Each of the book’s empirical chapters explores a cluster of discourses that have emerged around the most prominent foreign policy events in Russian public opinion polls over the past six years. The chapters “Cult of Personality” and “Trump’s the Man” deal with popular perceptions of leaders who personify major global powers, including figures such as Putin and US presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump. These chapters elucidate the significance of these leaders’ personalities and the practices of (non-)consumption associated with them in the everyday lives of Russians. The performative dimension of Russian national pride is considered in the chapters “Militarisation,” “Sanction me This,” and “Not Going to Turkey.” Each reveals different technologies of constructing a collective identity through the infusion of memories of the great Russian empire or the colonialist Soviet Union. This process is achieved through the patriotic securitization of education and cultural production in Russia. A growing biopolitical securitization of the national body and soul, as well as some residual forms of Russian soft power are discussed in the chapters “World Cup” and “The COVID-19 Pandemic.”

Contextualizing these developments within the framework of everyday nationalism, the author demonstrates how society absorbs the policies and narratives of the Russian leadership, trying to make sense of what is happening and using it for its own purposes and pleasures. Bridging the personal and the political, the author highlights the role of everyday practices in reinforcing power relations and shaping new lines of inclusion and exclusion in Russian society. The concept of everyday nationalism allows for an understanding of the fullness of identity and the pleasures derived from different forms of domination that reinforce the subjectivity of the Russian masses to Putin’s regime.

In summary, Gaufman's book provides a critical inquiry into Russian society, emphasizing the need to recognize differences and micro-developments within society rather than resorting to generalizations. By focusing on how ordinary people respond to foreign policy, the book brings humanity back to the forefront of the study, countering dehumanizing tendencies in the field. It acknowledges its limitations in exploring forms of foreign policy contestation but offers valuable insights into the perspectives of the so-called silent majority.

Furthermore, the book's accessible writing style, humor, and visual illustrations make it a prime example of scientific popularization. Its innovative research methods broaden our understanding of the personal manifestations of foreign policy and the impact of emotions on the meaning-making systems and mental models of political communities. Overall, this book is a fresh and much-needed contribution to the field of international relations, offering a unique perspective on the intersection of the personal and the political in the context of modern Russia.

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Notes

[1]. Aliaksei Kazharski, *Eurasian Integration and the Russian World: Regionalism as an Identity Enterprise* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2019).

[2]. Denis Volkov and Andrey Kolesnikov, "My Country, Right or Wrong: Russian Public Opinion on Ukraine," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, September 7, 2022, https://carnegieendowment.org/2022/09/07/my-country-right-or-wrong-russian-public-opinion-on-ukraine-pub-87803 (https://carnegieendowment.org/2022/09/07/my-country-right-or-wrong-russian-public-opinion-on-ukraine-pub-87803); Svetlana Reiter, "Sociologist Greg Yudin: 'We Are Living in a New Era,'" *Raamop Rusland*, March 4, 2022, https://www.raamoprusland.nl/dossiers/stemmen-uit-de-oorlog/2044-sociologist-%20greg-yudin-we-are-living-in-a-new-era (https://www.raamoprusland.nl/dossiers/stemmen-uit-de-oorlog/2044-sociologist-%20greg-yudin-we-are-living-in-a-new-era); Steve Rosenberg, "Ukraine War: The Russia I Knew No Longer," *BBC*, April 22, 2022, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-61188783 (https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-61188783).

[3]. "Institutional Trust, September 2023,", Levade Center, October 12, 2023, https://www.levada.ru/2023/10/12/institutsionalnoe-doverie-sentyabr-2023/?utm_source=mailpoet&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter-post-title_81 (https://www.levada.ru/2023/10/12/institutsionalnoe-doverie-sentyabr-2023/?utm_source=mailpoet&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter-post-title_81).

[4]. Sergei Chernyshov, “The Majority Never Had It So Good,” *Russia Post*, September 19, 2023, https://russiapost.info/regions/majority (https://russiapost.info/regions/majority); Keti Chukhrov, “Cracks in Theories of Emancipation under Conditions of War,” *e-flux Journal* 138 (2023), https://www.e-flux.com/journal/138/554185/cracks-in-theories-of-emancipation-under-conditions-of-war/ (https://www.e-flux.com/journal/138/554185/cracks-in-theories-of-emancipation-under-conditions-of-war/).

[5]. As discussed by scholars during the roundtable “Performing Loyalty in War: Insight into Regime Support in Russia and Beyond,” presented at the 22nd Annual Aleksanteri Conference “Decolonizing Space in the Global East: Legal Choices, Political Transformations, Carceral Practices,” October 26, 2023, Helsinki, Finland, https://www.helsinki.fi/en/conferences/decolonizing-space-global-east (https://www.helsinki.fi/en/conferences/decolonizing-space-global-east).

[6]. Jeremy Morris, “Russians in Wartime and Defensive Consolidation,” *Current History* 121, no. 837 (2022): 258–63, https://doi.org/10.1525/curh.2022.121.837.258 (https://doi.org/10.1525/curh.2022.121.837.258); Margarita Zavadskaya and Aleksei Gilev, “Kakoj rezhim v Rossii na samom dele? [What is the real regime in Russia?],” *KIT Medusa*, June 2022, https://mailchi.mp/getkit.news/total (https://mailchi.mp/getkit.news/total).

[7]. Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. Trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review, 2001 [1971]), 117.

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