“Your Stork Might Disappear Forever!”: Russian Public Awareness Advertising and Incentivizing Motherhood

Elena Rakhimova-Sommers

This study investigates the rhetoric and imagery employed in the marketing of Russia’s ongoing campaign aimed at incentivizing motherhood.¹ The campaign began in 2006 as a government initiative to fight the country’s decline in population by offering women what were seen as incentives to have more children.² Since visual texts such as advertisements are particularly embedded with cultural and historical context, current Russian public awareness advertising offers a window into the workings of a new pronatalist ideology that focuses on creating associations between fertility, social adequacy, patriotism, and ethnic and national homogeneity.

The fluctuating relationship between the Russian state and “its mothers” is closely intertwined with larger political struggles. The start of a new millennium brought a shift from a retreat to re-engagement on the part of the state in matters of women’s bodies. Women’s fertility began to be considered in terms of the country’s ethnic and political survival, viewed through the lens of anxiety about the influx of immigrants and illegal workers from Central Asia. As Russia introduces a new national idea with a three child model at its center, it finds itself in the awkward business of selling the joys of procreation while also attempting to rebrand its image at home and abroad.

The Birth and Decline of the “State-Mother-Child Triad”

Before we examine the twenty-first century post-Soviet concept of womanhood and motherhood, it is essential to take stock of the history of the Soviet state-mother relationship, which is marked by the state’s anxiety about “the

1 Моиm дорогим Российским друзьям и коллегам: надеюсь эта статья будет воспринята как часть позитивной и продуктивной дискуссии по вопросам, которые волнуют всех кто любит и поддерживает Россию.

2 A version of this paper was published in *From Russia with Love Conference Proceedings April 19, 2013*.

private sphere” and its efforts to control it. A study by Olga Issoupova explores the evolution of the notion of motherhood from the Soviet 1920s to the Russian 1990s by analyzing a cross-section of women’s magazines: the official Soviet state journal *Voprosy materinstva i mladenchestva* (Questions of Motherhood and Infancy), the Russian editions of *Cosmopolitan*, *Good Housekeeping* (*Domashnii ochag*), *Motherhood* (*Materinstvo*), and the two most popular women’s magazines of the Soviet era – *Rabotnitsa* and *Krestianka* (*Woman Worker* and *Peasant Woman*). Issoupova argues that from the 1917 October revolution on, “the state sought to develop a special alliance with mothers” (Issoupova 2000, 31). She defines the nature of this relationship as “the state-mother-child triad,” from which fathers were symbolically excluded, and suggests that in the private sphere “the Soviet State has usurped the role of men ... to such an extent that it had all but ceased to exist” (Issoupova 2000, 31, 50).

Issoupova identifies three characteristic features of the Soviet government’s interpretation of the “women’s question”: motherhood was regarded as a social and not a private matter, as a “natural” destiny of women, and “as a function which was to be facilitated and rewarded by the state” (Issoupova 2000, 32). The authorities’ grip on the institution of motherhood is best illustrated by the state monopoly on all obstetrics services and access to abortions. Beginning with the post 1917 legalization of abortion, the procedure was carefully regulated by the state, which intermittently banned it or reinstated it depending on the demographic climate of the time. The state enacted these policies while failing to supply contraception to its population, making abortion essentially the only option for the majority of Soviet women.³

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the ensuing economic crisis essentially brought an end to the “state-mother-child triad,” as maternity stopped being viewed as a state function. As state support for mothers was reduced and daycare services were shifted to the private sphere, the press placed new emphasis on individual responsibility in family-planning decisions. Issoupova points out that as the state began to “hand women potential control over their bodies,” it faced public criticism of “desertion” (40). The Russians found the post-Soviet state responsible for neglecting its parental responsibilities and

3 Abortions were legalized in 1920 and banned from 1936 until 1955. In 2011, the Russian Parliament passed a law restricting abortion to the first twelve weeks of pregnancy, with an exception up to 22 weeks if the pregnancy is the result of rape. (The procedure can be performed for medical necessity at any point during pregnancy). The new law made mandatory a waiting period of two to seven days to allow the woman time to reconsider her decision.

lamented the lack of state action on issues like child poverty amid a sense of a looming demographic crisis (44).

Demographic Crisis and Maternity Capital

Russia's demographic situation gradually worsened with the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, when the country was devastated by an economic crisis. In 1994, life expectancy fell to 57.7 years for men and to 61.2 years for women (Notzon et al., 1998). The Total Fertility Rate (TFR), the average number of children a Russian woman would bear in her lifetime, fell to 1.17 in 1999 (Rifkin-Fish 2006, 158). My own personal conversations with a cross-section of Russian women all reflect the same sentiment in regards to reproductive decisions during the dire economic climate of Boris Yeltsin's 1991-1999 presidential term. The consensus among the interviewed women is that "under Yeltsin, women stopped giving birth."⁴ To combat the 1990s demographic decline, the State Duma introduced a pronatalist measure, a law establishing government support known as "maternity capital." Beginning with January 2007, women that give birth to or adopt a second or consecutive child are entitled to a "maternity capital" fund of approximately \$11,000 which they can obtain, as a once in a lifetime measure, after the child reaches the age of three. The funds can be used towards acquiring housing, paying for children's education, or investing in the mother's retirement fund. According to Slonimzyk and Yurko's study *Assessing the Impact of the Maternity Capital Policy in Russia* (2013), out of three million maternity capital certificates issued by 2012, about a quarter (23.9%) were fully claimed.

Predictably, over ninety percent of the certificates were used towards acquiring and improving housing conditions.⁵ Russia has been plagued by chronic housing shortage problems since the birth of the Soviet Union. A significant number of Russian families continue to live in difficult conditions where it is not uncommon for parents, their adult offspring, and sometimes a grandparent to share a two-room apartment for years. In the 2013 presidential address to the Federal Assembly, Vladimir Putin addressed the issue of quality permanent housing, but did so only in relation to the servicemen of Russia's Army and Navy. Making the issue a government priority, President Putin appealed to the Department of Defense to help military families on a case by case basis. Putin's 2006 Strategic plan did call for a special program for improving housing

4 My own, personal conversations with Russian women, research data, unpublished, 2012.

5 Slonimzyk and Yurko cite the Pension Fund of the Russian Federation Annual Report 2012.

conditions for families with three or more children by using the funds “left over after the completion of the Sochi Olympic facilities, the APEC facilities in Russia’s Far East, and the housing program for servicemen” (КТ). Considering the Sochi Olympics were reported to be the most expensive in history, it might be difficult to expect a significant improvement of the housing situation, which in Russia remains one of the key factors in family planning decisions.

After four years of the maternity capital program, Russia’s Total Fertility Rate (TFR) rose to 1.58, but demographers cautioned against attributing these results to the effectiveness of the government’s pronatalist policies. After all, the cumulative effect of maternity capital on fertility came to a mere 0.15 children per woman (Slonimzyk and Yurko 2013, 36). Slonimzyk and Yurko’s study concludes that “much of the increase in birth rates post 2007 was due to re-scheduling of births and not long-term increases in fertility” (Slonimzyk and Yurko 2013, 37). The following, frequently cited story from the city of Ulianovsk serves as an example of the “rescheduling of birth” practice and points to a lack of a comprehensive government approach to Russia’s demographic situation. On the heels of the government’s designation of 2008 as The Year of Family and the introduction of a new “Day of Family, Love, and Fidelity” holiday (July 8th), the city of Ulyanovsk came up with its own pronatalist “Give Birth to a Patriot on the Day of Russia!” campaign. This initiative rewards couples that produce an offspring on June 12th, the Day of Russian Independence, with a car called “A Patriot” no less. To facilitate the coordination of such a measure, September 12th is designated as “The Day of Family Socializing,” which the straightforward locals call “the day of conception.” On this day, the city governor recommends that employers let their employees go home, and stores are prohibited from selling alcohol.

On February 13th 2012, President Putin published a sixteen page article, “Building Justice: a Social Policy for Russia,” in the *Komsomolskaya Pravda* newspaper. The very last page of this extensive strategic plan, titled “The Conservation of Russia,” outlines the country’s demographic decline and makes a passionate appeal to the country, warning of ethnic and political extinction: “Our territory is home to about 40% of the world’s natural resources, whereas the population of Russia makes only 2% of the global population.” Putin continues, saying: “I believe the conclusion is clear. Should we fail to carry out a large-scale and long-term project for demographic development, the build-up of human resources and territorial development, we risk becoming an ‘empty space’ in global terms, and then our fate will be determined by someone else, not us” (Putin, 2012). Projecting that Russia’s population—at 143 million in 2012—is bound to shrink to 107 million by 2050, Putin calls for a “comprehensive population conservation strategy” that would bring the number to 154 million”

(Putin, 2012). At the closing of the article, Putin equates passivity with dramatic loss of life, saying that "the historical price of choice between action and inaction is almost 50 million human lives within the next 40 years" (Putin, 2012).

This new national idea, an American-esque dream with a three child model at its center, is channeled through social awareness advertising campaigns that focus on the message of reproduction as a means of social fulfillment. This is not an entirely new approach. Victoria E. Bonnell, in her *Iconography of Power. Soviet Political Posters under Lenin and Stalin*, demonstrates that between 1926 and 1957, in a series of now iconic propaganda posters, the Soviet woman's body becomes an experimental canvas for the changing needs of the state. Starting out as a larger-than-life figure with androgynous features when heavy industrial labor is expected of her, she then undergoes various transformations: she either slims down or gains weight, appears with children or without, her chest and hips either expanding or becoming understated depending on whether the politics of the time focus on production or reproduction (Bonnell 1999, 105).

Triplets, Storks, Toys, and Cosmonauts: Crafting a Message of Urgency

This part of the study will analyze a cross-section of social awareness advertising initiatives: the 2008 Moscow subway billboard "The Country Needs Your Records," the 2011 campaign "They Were Born Third," ushered in by then President Dmitri Medvedev in the Altai region and Kamchatka Peninsula, and the two winning short films of the 2012 Social Advertising Conference contest in the city of Novosibirsk. The "Boost the Birthrate" campaigns in Siberia and the Far East demonstrate pronatalist policies outside of Moscow and point to the federal government's efforts to revitalize these regions.

The Moscow subway billboard, "The Country Needs Your Records. Three persons are born in Russia every minute," features a modestly dressed young "every mom" holding three identical babies on her lap.⁶ The outlines of the mom's bra are visible through the fabric, revealing a healthy bust. She seems to have broad child-bearing hips. The noun "records," "рекорды," in "The Country Needs Your Records," carries a distinct Olympic-Games connotation, equating

6 Considering how much effort a Russian woman devotes to her wardrobe, female internet users took issue with the fact that the pictured "every mom" is poorly dressed.

FIGURE 7.1

"The country needs your records." Photo from the author's personal collection.

motherhood with competition, and is meant to prompt action.⁷ By implication, since every minute "three persons" are born in Russia, you too can join the renewal process and help the country win. The language of the ad is also reminiscent of the 1930s Stakhanovite campaign, launched by the Communist Party to celebrate and reward model Soviet workers who set production records. The plural "you," "ваши" in "The Country Needs Your Records" ("Стране нужны ваши рекорды") groups all women in one class. Replacing the more traditional "babies are born" with "persons are born" aims to elevate motherhood to an act of duty while also multiplying the mother's emblem of worth by three.

⁷ The opening ceremony of the 2014 Sochi Olympic Games, the biggest global advertising and public relations machine of them all, also had a demographic "accent." It featured dozens of young men handing over dozens of twins to dozens of young women, who donned red kerchiefs, and pushed red strollers against the word, "Children," inscribed on the stadium floor in giant letters.

A wedding ring, a necessary wholesome component of a western ad, is not pictured, though the mom is wearing a golden bracelet and earrings. Absent from the picture is another detail – a dad. There is no hint of him in the background making breakfast or leaving for work. The pose that mom is made to assume is unnatural (one of her legs serves as a bench for her two boys). She and the eerily clone-like triplets are stiff, her body language is strained, and as a result the image reads forced. Awkwardly smiling and barely managing to balance the triplets on her lap, our mom looks not only decidedly alone, but also somehow lost and abandoned. The ad, a misguided attempt at an "every mom" image, advances a certain standard of femininity that reinforces the child caring role as exclusively feminine. This billboard speaks volumes about the need for a national conversation about the role of fathers and partners in family dynamic and the pattern of the "absent father" in the Soviet/Post-Soviet iconography, which will be addressed later in this chapter.

The 2010 "They Were Born Third" initiative was introduced by the Charitable Foundation for the Protection of the Family, Motherhood, and Childhood.⁸ The foundation's official site includes a separate category for "Anti-abortion Social Ad Series" that feature smiling toddlers, women in the midst of agonizing decisions, together with images of nuclear holocaust and fetus skeletons accompanied by such slogans as "Russians, wake up!" and "Birth control is the ideal method of mass genocide."⁹ When "They Were Born Third" was co-launched with the Russian OTP Bank, its president V.V. Korovin lamented "a catastrophic decline in the number of Russian multiple child families (from 23.5 million or 9.8 % in 1989, to 1.4 million or 6.6 % in 2002)" and suggested that the three child family model will solve the demographic problem in the Russian Federation.¹⁰ This statement echoed an earlier endorsement of the campaign by then Russian President Medvedev in his 2010 address to the Federal Assembly.

"They Were Born Third" campaign targeted the Altai region, the Kamchatka Peninsula, the cities of Novosibirsk, Omsk, and later Moscow, Rostov, and Nizhniy Novgorod. A series of billboard ads each featured a photo of a different Russian historical figure such as cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin, Russian poetess Anna Akhmatova, the writer Anton Chekhov, and others. Each celebrity photo is framed by an outline of a pregnant women's stomach and is accompanied by the words, "They Were Born Third."

8 Благотворительны фонд защиты семьи, материнства и детства: <<https://semyarusia.ru>>.

9 <<https://semyarussia.ru>>.

10 <<http://www.advertology.ru/article90140.htm>> accessed Feb. 7, 2018.

Consumers had a field day with the “They Were Born Third” ad in their sarcasm-filled internet posts on the Russian social networking service, LiveJournal. One discussion thread mocked the new initiative as yet another “attack of the social ad industry,” pondering why Stalin, also a third child, was not included and challenging the authorities to “widen the propaganda horizons by including ‘those who were born fourth,’ such as Lenin, Hitler or better yet, Mendeleev, the seventeenth child in the family,” since “one has got to populate the Far East somehow.” The same LiveJournal user noted that this propaganda piece was no less irritating than the 2008 one, “The Country Needs Your Records” and argued that these “primitive efforts mask the complete absence of any kind of social guarantees.” She advocated for additional vacation time, 100% paid sick leaves for both parents of three children, priority daycare placement, free medicine, favorable bank credits for homebuilding, tax breaks, and special deals with the makers of diapers, baby food, clothes, and toys. Women shared their frustrating experiences regarding lack of childcare options, bemoaned the “withering of their dreams,” and said that those women who “went for the third child can count only on themselves for survival.”¹¹

While the two above analyzed social awareness ads represent the end product of each of the pronatalist projects, the 2012 Social Advertising Conference in city of Novosibirsk is an opportunity to see these initiatives in the making.¹² The Novosibirsk conference was a five day training camp for the advertising professionals. The event included round-tables and workshops and culminated in a social ad contest, with two winning short films selected out of fifty-six submissions. The mission of social advertising was outlined as follows: “to influence perception stereotypes, habits and models of human behavior in order to solve a number of social issues.” The conference web brochure cited Putin’s address to the Federal Assembly where he advocates for the three child model: “Demographers argue that the choice to have the second child is potentially the choice for the third. It is important that the family makes this step. And despite the hesitations of some experts, and with all due respect, I’m convinced that the norm in Russia must be the family with three children.”¹³

Participants were charged with “the production of materials that would advance traditional norms and values in the sphere of demographic politics.” In a symbolic gesture, the conference’s homepage opens with a quote from the

11 <<http://kalinnka.livejournal.com/547043.html>>.

12 Transcripts and conference materials are available on-line. All further discussed materials of the Novosibirsk conference are obtained from its official website: <<http://www.slideshare.net/filurin/201212-15730507>>. Translation is mine.

13 Materials of the Novosibirsk conference: <<http://www.slideshare.net/filurin/201212-15730507>>. My translation.

Russian State Law that defines public awareness advertising as "information, disseminated in any form and by use of any means, aimed at accomplishing philanthropic or other socially useful goals, and insuring state interests." This legal speak signifies a focused effort to redefine the notion of motherhood as a blend of self-fulfillment, social adequacy, and patriotic duty.

The advertising conference focused on two groups: 1) "educated urban professional couples in their twenties and thirties" and 2) "financially comfortable middle class couples with two children." The conference outlined the problem with the younger demographic in the following way: "young urban professional couples in their twenties and thirties often postpone childbirth 'till later,' a decision which sometimes leads to abandoning the idea of childbirth altogether." The charge was to find "a platform to persuade young families on the issue of the advantages of early childbirth" by employing a "tomorrow will be too late" message that would create an association between delaying childbirth and infertility. Because Russians are known to attribute their medical problems to the environment, advertising agencies are encouraged to exaggerate the environmental causes of infertility. Conference guidelines recommended linking an anxiety inducing "tomorrow will be too late" message with the idea of looming medical complications as a fail proof narrative.

While these age-old scare tactics are not entirely uncommon, what is of interest is a new and a slightly more subtle part of the charge – the cultivation of a social inadequacy message. The short film-makers were encouraged to promote the idea that "postponing childbirth for too long, you risk ending up altogether childless and socially inadequate." The association of childlessness with inferiority is quite new for Russia, especially as it relates to professional women, and the conference participants seem to have been aware that they had to tread lightly. The winner of this category, the short film "The Stork," presents an attractive, professionally and personally fulfilled businesswoman, who, it suggests, could benefit from an urgent reminder that life marches on and fertility does not last forever. "The Stork," takes the audience through four scenes, each accompanied by a lullaby tune. The first shows a fashionably dressed young woman shopping, her fatigued but willing beau trailing behind her. As the woman picks up a dress hanger from a clothing rack, the gap reveals a stork that gazes into her eyes. Visibly annoyed, she shoves the hanger back and walks away. The contrast between the aggressive woman and what appears to be a fragile cartoon-like figure, something a child might have made out of cardboard for a first grade project, becomes instantly apparent. The second scene shows our childless woman, with her hair up, in a smart beige suit, in her office. As she enthusiastically types away at the computer, the camera points to a

framed picture of her and a boyfriend on her desk. When the stork appears, stretching out his neck and reaching for her, she blocks him with her monitor.

The next encounter takes place while she is on a date in a trendy coffee shop. Here too the stork is angrily dismissed. The ad ends on a snowy night, as the woman is snuggling on a couch, watching TV with a vaguely identifiable male. When the stork knocks on her window, she resolutely shuts the curtains. Visibly defeated, the stork disintegrates into pieces. As we watch, the stork pieces merge with the snowfall, and a gentle male voice sounds an alarm: "While still young, you are strong and full of health. But years go by and, postponing pregnancy, you are decreasing your chances to conceive and give birth to a *healthy child*. Later your stork might disappear forever!"¹⁴ The ad's anxiety inducing tactics appear to be effective as medical complications due to inadequate healthcare and environmental factors are known fears among young Russian women. It is arguable whether or not the ad delivers on the required association between childlessness and female social inadequacy, but it effectively shapes a selfish diva portrait as the fragile, vulnerable, and childlike stork is no match for the sterile, ice queen's decimating stare.

"The Stork" echoes ideologically motivated, "litanous" construction of demographic analyses, characteristic of the 1990s when Russia's economic and political decline was directly linked to its failure to reproduce (Rivkin-Fish 2006, 154). Such discussions on women's health characteristically sidestep socioeconomic problems but frame the issues of fertility in terms of Russian identity and the future of the Russian nation itself. While the rhetoric seems to have gotten more subtle with time, one can observe that the advertising industry has kept the core ingredients of the recipe the same. "The Stork" ad combines the use of scare tactics with dangers of irreversible medical complications, while equating a woman's ability to reproduce with a life well lived.

The Absent Father

The four scenes of the "The Stork" are linked by a certain narratorial absence. What they have in common is what they lack – a husband/father/partner image. Although the successful businesswoman is featured with two male figures, their presence is marginal and fleeting, and their roles are ambiguous. The heroine comes across as alone on her life journey and certainly in her child-

14 "В молодости ты полна сил и здоровья, но годы идут, и, откладывая беременность на потом, ты снижаешь свои шансы зачать и родить ЗДОРОВОГО ребёнка. Ведь потом твой аист может исчезнуть навсегда!"

bearing decision, a discursive pattern that is important to address. While Russia has a distinct tradition of a motherhood narrative, there is little if anything to fall back on as far as a "school" of fatherhood portrayal. This gendered space was previously occupied in the Soviet iconography by a succession of Soviet political leaders beginning with Lenin and Stalin. In terms of a national consciousness, the "father of the nation" space is currently filled, but it still remains empty in the advertising terrain. To this end, it is informative to refer to an in depth study of sixty years of family related advertising in *Good Housekeeping* magazine (Marshall et al., 2014). Examining discursive shifts in the advertising portrayals of the father's role in family identity construction, researchers identified seven "epochs of fathering" among which are "the absent father" (year 2000), and "the invisible but implied" father figure (year 2010). The study suggests that the absent father "cultural script" reflects society's general anxiety and uncertainty about the role of fathers within the family dynamic, a pattern and sentiment that certainly reflects current Russian reality.

Johnny Rodin's and Pelle Aberg's 2014 study shows that although the post-Soviet era created conditions for a "breadwinner model," which assigns financial and discipline responsibilities to men, the Russian fatherhood discourse "continues to involve an unclear and sometimes weak role for the father" (13). Although the gendered space made vacant by the "retreat of the state" created an invitation for a male father figure to step in, Russian men do not appear to be ready for the new involved, engaged, and hands-on role, which the post-Soviet women would welcome. Rodin and Aberg argue that "men's ties to their children are in many cases weak due to the high number of non-marital births and high divorce rates, which frequently imply separation from the children too" (13). Issoupova suggests that "the future of motherhood, fatherhood and parenthood is still in the balance, with the gulf between the new ideas and the existing reality likely to do little to resolve the gender tensions bequeathed by the Soviet state" (50).

The second winner of the Novosibirsk social ad contest, "Toy store," makes an effort to bridge this gender gap and repair the father figure void by targeting "financially comfortable *couples* in their thirties and forties with two kids" (my emphasis). The goal set up by contest organizers was to capitalize on what was identified as an emerging fashionable trend – "having a third child as a symbol of stability, wellbeing, family health, and the woman's social success." "Toy store" shows a textbook family unit – mom, dad, and two blond, perfectly groomed children – on a shopping trip, but suggests that even this ideal is lacking and that real "happiness you can afford" is just around the corner. When the daughter suggestively picks out a toy baby stroller and the boy winks knowingly at his father, the parents smile and a male voice delivers the message:

“Children already read your thoughts. Leave your doubts behind. The third child is happiness you can afford!” In the last frame the now family of five (mom is holding a bundled up newborn) appeals to the audience: “We’ve got three. What about you?”

By targeting upper-middle class couples with two or more children, the “Toy store” ad emphasizes individual financial responsibility in the matters of child-bearing and child-rearing while at the same time hopes to capitalize on a recent cultural shift in the treatment of large families. During the economically and politically tumultuous 1990s having a large number of children was viewed as unquestionably negative. Given that the responsibility for reproduction was transferred to the private sphere, having more than one child was seen as an irresponsible behavior characteristic of the under-educated class and a gateway to the lumpenization of society. Such sentiments, while still very much “audible” as related to low-income families with multiple children, eventually gave way to a new cultural trend, in which financially comfortable families with multiple children are viewed as a sign of national health and prosperity.

The ad industry’s attempt to capitalize on the financially comfortable families misses the mark as the upper middle class represents a mere fraction of the Russian population. Additionally, despite its attempts to sell an inspiring image of a desirable family, the “Toy store” ad fails because its mannequin-like ensemble of characters lacks the natural intimacy shared by parents and children. Just like her awkwardly smiling and overdressed for the occasion husband and kids, the heavily made up “mom,” in an outdated 1980s era cocktail dress and high heels, looks very much out of place in a Toys-R-Us-like toy store. In a country plagued by inadequate healthcare system, difficult housing conditions, lack of quality, affordable daycare options, and weeks’ long “prophylactic” hot water shut offs in entire apartment districts, these sickly-sweet images of ersatz family togetherness have little chance of motivating any woman to action.

Russian social awareness ads on demographic topics lack sophistication and nuance, and fail to connect with their target audience. This fact does not appear to escape the industry professionals as more and more articles and surveys on “Why Do Social Ads Fail in Russia?” are beginning to emerge. For example, a recent *Survey on the Effectiveness of Russian Social Awareness Advertising* devoted to demographic topics asked internet users to evaluate “They Were Born Third” for its level of “effectiveness” and “ability to convince the audience to forgo abortions or have a third child.” The survey also asked for help in identifying flaws in the social ads after which it requested information about the user’s age, gender, marital, educational, and financial status.¹⁵

¹⁵ <<https://www.surveio.com/survey/d/R5X7M5I7A3F8B4EgU>>.

While a social ad may be able to convince a consumer to consider drinking responsibly or give up smoking, there may not be a successful ad that influences a woman's decision to have a second or third child. A new set of 2017-18 Russian government initiatives, following reports of continual population decline, reflect Russian government's growing awareness regarding a need for a comprehensive approach to demographic issues. Speaking at the November 28, 2017 meeting of the presidential council for the implementation of a 2012-2017 National Children's Strategy, President Putin voiced his concern about the "acute demographic situation in Russia," urging "active and consistent work along all avenues: lowering death rates and stimulation of birth rates." Putin announced the government would "reset Russia's national demographic program" with a particular focus on low-income families. He introduced a new financial support initiative beginning in January 2018 by which parents would receive about \$180 per month, for eighteen months after the birth of their first child. This federal aid would be distributed to the sixty Russian regions where the birth rate average is two children or less. Also, special lower interest rate mortgages would be available for families with two or more children. Additionally, the President charged the government to work out a timeline for reconstruction of the country's pediatric clinics in order to ensure accessible and quality healthcare.¹⁶

Some Concluding Thoughts: A Woman's Body as Experimental Canvas

The issue of incentivizing motherhood is always problematic. Short-term financial programs have historically proven to be ineffective, as child-bearing decisions, regardless of geography, are determined by a reliable system of social support and medical care. Hoping to facilitate a pronatalist shift in a culture, in which one-child family has been an expected national standard for over seventy years, the Russian government seems to be seeking to find a way to re-engage with the everyday of its citizens and re-enter their private lives. The untranslatable and culturally elusive Russian notion of "*byt*," "the everyday," yet again finds itself at the center of politics in the new millennium, after Russia's rapid and painful transition from a socialist to a market-oriented economy.¹⁷ Embracing the sudden array of choices and eager to create bright and

¹⁶ <<https://iz.ru/676425/2017-11-28/putin-prizval-stimulirovat-rozhdaemost-v-rossii>>.

¹⁷ Svetlana Boym's study of the phenomenon of "*byt*" and the Russian peculiar conception of private life shows that Russians have historically considered the idea of privacy to be a

cozy domestic nests, new post-Soviet consumer is redefining the Soviet concept of “byt” from that of accepted mediocre everydayness to the well overdue, highly sought after, and eagerly embraced lifestyle of material comfort. This new concept of “byt” does not necessarily include a multi-child family.

The advertising industry’s pronatalist push for a “new woman” to be used in the production of Russianness and the Russian tomorrow continues a pattern of Soviet iconography politics with women as passive ground for the nation’s political and economic desires. With new cultural developments rapidly ushering new interpretations of “byt” and “private life,” pronatalist ads’ implied messages regarding a set of things women owe impose preferred models of womanhood and motherhood that are sure to be ineffective in the post-Soviet space.

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Western, bourgeois notion, synonymous with “I-centered,” egotistical behavior. “Byt” carried a firm negative connotation, associated with suffocating routine, monotony, and stagnation. The act of living a life, “*bytie*,” on the other hand, occupied the realm of artistic, spiritual, and intellectual exploration. The historic opposition between “byt” and “bytie” is reflected in the fact that state-driven initiatives against or in favor of “byt” continued throughout the Soviet years, beginning with the 1917 campaign against “petit-bourgeois everyday life.” Since the working mother was “a pillar of the Soviet gender contract,” (Rodin and Aberg, 9) domesticity in terms of its “reproductive potential” did not constitute the government’s priority, but “utility was exalted as virtue and the marriage of fitness and beauty was proclaimed” (36). In contrast, the post-World War II period and its devastating demographic loss saw a new government respect for the new Soviet middle class and its culture that welcomed domesticity, femininity, and accumulation of household items.

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