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# Finding gender from the capital of gas: Reflections of women in Russia's fossil fuel industry

Sohvi Kangasluoma

*The oil and gas industry has historically been and still remains, very male-dominated. In Arctic Russia, where the oil and gas industry is an important local employer and actor, the narratives, perceptions, and opportunities that the industry creates are meaningful. Fully understanding extractivism and its multiple natures consequently requires focusing on the different identities connected with it. This article seeks to understand how women are present and presented within the Russian Arctic oil and gas industry. With the concepts of ecofeminism, intersectionality, and biopolitics guiding my reading, I performed affective visual reading and content analysis to examine Instagram posts of the local subsidiary of Gazprom and responses to a questionnaire that I made and distributed among local women. The article shows how assigning certain roles to women and minorities that emphasise motherhood, control the living space of the Indigenous Peoples, and support physical fitness are all tools of biopolitical governance aimed at enforcing nationalist narratives.*

## 1. Introduction

As I was visiting the city of Novy Urengoy in northern Russia in late spring 2019, my senses were filled with the endless pink blockhouses, the biting wind — and the presence of the parastatal gas company Gazprom. Russia is one of the world's largest producers of oil and gas, and its production in that field has increasingly shifted towards the Arctic. Novy Urengoy is Russia's hub for its Arctic gas explorations: a thriving city living up to its nickname as Russia's "gas capital". The city itself is rather young; founded after the discovery of the massive Urengoy gas reserve in the 1970s, it was built around mineral extraction. Gazprom is the biggest actor in the area, and its influence on the city can be seen everywhere: in employment, in education, in culture, and even in how the streets look.

However, since Russia's large-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the circumstances of Russian Arctic oil and gas have changed. The terrible series of events that have unfolded have changed the lives of millions of people and completely reshaped the security arena in Europe. In turn, discussions related to the Russian north and its oil and gas empire have increasingly focused on geopolitical tensions, economic sanctions, and security aspects. Although all of those

developments have been highly important, my interest, especially now, lies in the ordinary people, particularly women, living in Russia's gas capital of Novy Urengoy. Worldwide, the oil and gas industry has historically been and continues to be dominated by men, and, in the Russian context, the masculinity of the industry is salient (Etkind, 2014; Kangasluoma, 2020; Saxinger, 2015; Tynkkynen, 2016). Indeed, the masculinity of the backbone of the Russian economy, the fossil fuel industry, has not become less interesting since the start of the war but more so. Therefore, in this article, I seek and make gender, especially that of women, visible within the masculine fossil fuel industry in Arctic Russia. The article first focuses on *finding gender in the Arctic gas industry* and second questions *how women are presented therein, what kind of roles are assigned to them, and how they approach the industry?* By focusing on gender and other intersecting identities within the northern fossil fuel industry, this article shows how assigning certain roles as well as governing women and minorities serve to enforce nationalist narratives of the parastatal gas company in the Arctic.

In my quest to find women within the Arctic fossil fuel landscape, I turned to the Instagram page of the most dominant actor in the region, Gazprom Dobycha Urengoy. For supporting material, I also developed a questionnaire for women living in Novy Urengoy that inquired into their experiences with living in the gas capital. With the concepts of ecofeminism, intersectionality, and biopolitics guiding my reading, I examined the material by performing affective visual reading and content analysis. By analysing the posts of the local subsidiary of Gazprom and questionnaire responses from local women, I show what kinds of roles are assigned to women in the region's gas industry. This article shows how emphasising and governing aspects such as motherhood, the coexistence of the industry with northern Indigenous Peoples, and physical fitness enforces the parastatal gas company's nationalist narratives.

The role of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation has come to be extremely important and emphasised in national discourse (e.g. Larouelle, 2014). In parallel, the construction of the Arctic as a resource base (see e.g. Arctic strategies of Russian Federation 2013, 2020; Heininen et al., 2019) has been a key aspect of recent Russian policies in the Arctic. In decades past, the militarisation of the Russian Arctic during the Cold War emphasised the sense that the Russian north was a masculine space dominated by means of destruction. Although the idea and narrative of conquering the North largely derives from nostalgia for the Soviet Union, the growing importance of the Russian Arctic is emerging due to climate change and the opening of sea routes (Tynkkynen, 2019: 79–80). For all of those reasons, the Arctic as a concept is filled with emotional and affectual meanings, for northern Russia is governed not only by investments and infrastructure projects but also by creating certain affects and emotions around that space (Kangasluoma & Lempinen, 2022).

By paying attention to how gender and other intersecting identities are portrayed by the gas giant Gazprom, we can perhaps better understand the underlying logics of fossil fuel dominance. In the process, the intersectional gendered impacts of the fossil fuel industry should be acknowledged. As feminist scholar Brooke Ackerly and colleagues have written, “Just as states, conflict, institutions, security, and globalization cannot be studied without analyzing gender, gender cannot be studied without analyzing these subjects and concepts” (Ackerly et al., 2006: 4). The same goes for the energy industry: we cannot simply ignore gender while examining fossil fuel production in northern Russia, and, while looking at gender, we should also incorporate other intersecting categories as well.

## 2. Key concepts: Ecofeminism, intersectionality, and biopolitics

In Arctic Russia, where extractive industries are an important employer, the perceptions and opportunities that locals have are meaningful—for example, the perceptions formed by and opportunities for youth living in local communities (Bolotova, 2021; Stammer & Toivanen, 2021). As me and my colleagues visited a local Gazprom high school during our trip, I asked the teacher about the small number of girls in the higher classes. He replied, “They won’t be employed here [by Gazprom] anyway”. The taken-for-granted masculinity within the industry is the reason why I decided to focus my research on the experiences of women, for I find it to be crucial to understand how such a masculine industry affects women’s perceptions of the place and how the industry itself portrays gender.

Extractive industries have traditionally been a very masculine industry in which the workforce has been and still is dominated by men (Macdonald, 2018; Helbert, 2021). In general, *extractivism* refers to the large-scale utilisation of natural resources derived from socio-ecologically destructive processes (for a more in-depth discussion on extractivism, see Chagnon et al. 2022). The connections between fossil fuel production and gender are often approached from an ecofeminist perspective, a viewpoint that perhaps best acknowledges the different forms of oppression, both social domination and domination of non-human nature, similarly. Ecofeminists have for long observed a deeply gendered, patriarchal grounding to modern, capitalist relations with nature (Merchant, 1980; Mies & Shiva, 1993; Plumwood, 1993), which can clearly be seen in modern extractivism. The connections of extractivism and gender are thus both practical and ontological in nature, for the underlying mindset within extractivism depends on comprehending nature as something that can and should be exploited, which aligns with the patriarchal worldview. In response, ecofeminism, as both a movement and a critical theory, links the oppression of women and minorities to the oppression of nature. Ecofeminism, understood as a conceptual umbrella, can provide tools for understanding the layered structural conditions of fossil fuel production and their effects on humans and non-humans alike (Helbert, 2021: 36).

The relationship between gender, fossil fuel, and authoritarian movements has often been explored in light of the concept of petro-masculinity. Based on the underlying assumptions of ecofeminist thinking, *petro-masculinity* simply means the creation and maintenance of (white) hegemonic masculinity via the extensive utilisation of fossil fuels. While Cara Daggett, the creator of the concept, focuses on the United States, the idea is applicable to other contexts as well, especially Russia. She explains that as the privileges of petro-masculinity are increasingly threatened—for example, due to environmental reasons—the desire for authoritarian actions gains support (Daggett, 2018). The literature discussing the connections between gender and extractivism is extensive, even if the vast majority of it focuses on mining and the lower latitudes. In different localities around the world, extractivism is shown to have gendered impacts and gendered natures (e.g. Caretta et al., 2020; Helbert, 2021; Macdonald, 2018). In the Arctic context, for instance, Rauna Kuokkanen (2019) has noted that Indigenous women have limited power in planning and executing extractive projects. However, in the Russian context, that connection has not been thoroughly examined, and research on the topic remains slim. Furthermore, there exists no research focusing on the visual presentation of gender within (Russia’s) fossil fuel companies.

The oil and gas industry has been shown to affect different groups of people differently. In her book *Women, Gender and Oil Exploitation*, Maryse Helbert (2021) focuses on the industry’s effects

on gender and pinpoints five ways in which petroleum dominance affects women in particular: discrimination in employment, a lack of recognition of women's work and land rights, the unequal distribution of environmental risks, the unequal distribution of social vulnerability, and the unequal distribution of security risks. Although her work focuses on the Global South, many of the effects can be seen elsewhere, including in Arctic Russia. For example, the limited possibilities and opportunities presented for girls and women in areas driven by fossil fuels can force them to seek work elsewhere (Bolotova, 2021; Rozanova-Smith, 2021), conflicts in land use between the extractive industries and Indigenous People in the Russian north are not uncommon (Stammler & Ivanova, 2016), and the environmental risks associated with oil spills are shown to affect genders differently in the Komi Republic (Stuvøy, 2011).

Extractivism can have very personal, subjective, and emotional impacts. Fully understanding extractivism and its multiple natures consequently requires focusing on the different identities connected with it. Although gender is indeed a highly relevant category, it is not the only category that needs to be examined to better understand the scope and impact of extractivism. Intersectional approaches, originally presented by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1991, are highly valuable in relation to extractive practices and identities. Intersectionality, as “a deeply spatial theoretical concept” (Mollett & Farhia, 2018), allows constructing a comprehensive image of the way in which gender and other identities are portrayed and understood in and by the fossil fuel industry at the local level. Despite the numerous intersecting identities present within the industry, the choice of material for this article limits what can be seen and thus known. In the material, the identity most visible other than gender was Indigeneity, and much of my analysis thus focuses on that. However, other categories, including disability, are also present and discussed. Intersectionality is an increasingly important way of looking at the world, including in the Arctic, as works on intersectionality and polar sciences recently emerged have shown (e.g. Hoogensen Gjørsv, 2017; Seag et. al., 2019; Vladimirova & Habeck, 2018).

As I started to familiarise myself with the research material, the concept of biopolitics continued to seep into my mind. Put very briefly, the idea of Foucauldian biopolitics is concerned with the governance of populations and the control of people and their bodies via different political technologies (Foucault, 2007, 2008). Biopolitical governance takes life itself as its main object (Alt, 2016: 39); thus, life, namely ensuring and controlling it, is central to the idea of biopolitics. As a tool for governance, biopolitics is usually connected to modern (neo)liberal states, including Russia (Tynkkynen, 2019: 29), and has emerged simultaneously with the socio-economic order of capitalism to ensure a productive population able to meet its needs (Alt, 2016; Foucault, 1978). Gender, reproduction, and physical fitness of people, all visible in my research material, are some of the core components of biopower, and controlling them enables the state to govern the population and safeguard its continuity (Foucault, 1978).

### **3. Materials and methods**

To gain a comprehensive understanding of gender's role in the gas industry in Novy Urengoy, I collected material for this article from the Instagram page of Gazprom's local subsidiary and, for supplementary information, from a questionnaire distributed among women living in Novy Urengoy. To process the variety of material, I conducted visual analysis and thematic content analysis. Furthermore, the experiences, observations, and conversations I had during my trip to Novy Urengoy in 2019 are utilized as a background for this paper.

The Instagram page *Gazprom\_gdu* focuses on Gazprom Dobycha Urengoy, the operating subsidiary of Gazprom in Novy Urengoy. Instagram is a social media platform owned by Meta (i.e. the parent organisation of Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp) that relies on the power of visuality. For my analysis, I chose the period from Women's Day in 2021 until Women's Day in 2022, both celebrated on 8 March. Soon after March 2022, activity froze on the majority of Russian Instagram accounts when Meta became banned in Russia.

*Gazprom\_gdu*'s Instagram page is highly versatile. The chosen one-year period encompassed 499 posts about sports events, holiday celebrations, historical events, COVID-19-related information, and art exhibitions and other events sponsored and courses organised by Gazprom, as well as illustrated images about different issues, images of nature, advertisements of the company magazine *Gas Urengoy*, and finally the "Za mir" symbol ('for peace'), with the caption "Za Rossiju" ('for Russia') in the colours of St George's ribbon. Given the large number of posts, I did not analyse all of the photos and videos but instead focused on the ones that would help to answer my research questions. Although my chief interest was the visual aspects of Instagram, especially in depicted in photos, I also read and considered the captions.

Including a variety of approaches, visual methodologies have become not only increasingly useful but also increasingly important. We live in an era defined by visuality, yet the ways in which we understand knowledge within academia and elsewhere remain largely based on text and textual analysis (Bleiker, 2018: 1). Social media has made the world even more visual and in many ways has democratised who has the ability to create certain (visual) narratives of the world (Kaempf, 2018). Therein, the visual aspect of modern (political) communication is crucial and can have a strong impact on viewers (Filimonov et al., 2016). Even though Gazprom is a company, the political aspect and political communication of the social media account, such as the state-owned Gazprom cannot be overlooked. Emotional and affective reactions towards certain forms of energy affect one's cognitive reactions, and stimulating behaviour towards energy projects and platforms such as Instagram can be highly useful in creating (positive) emotional connections (Vespa et al., 2022).

Gillian Rose (2001) has identified three sites that warrant consideration while analysing visual culture: its production (i.e. where the image is made), the image itself (its visual content) and the audience, (for whom it is for, and where it is viewed) (cf. Pauwels & Mannay, 2020; Marston, 2020). Each of those sites has three modalities—technological, compositional, and social—that also have to be taken into account (Rose, 2001). For my analysis, I followed Rose by incorporating those three sites and their modalities into my reading to generate a background for the analysis. What I find to be particularly important is that every image tells a story as well as arouses emotions and affects (Bleiker, 2018). Affect has indeed been used as a guide for visual studies on social media, and Kate Maerston (2020), for instance, has shown how Rose's different sites of visuality can be examined in relation to affect. The site of an image, the image itself, and the audience are all affected by different sensations, sometimes bodily ones. Affective reading thus emphasises the materiality and the body, which, according to Rose (2016: 9), results in the "rejection of the distinction between vision and visuality", thereby allowing visual analysis to include more than merely the visual (Marston, 2020: 606). While analysing the posts by *Gazprom\_gdu*, I have attempted to examine the images with consideration of the affectual dimensions that may have emerged, as in line with feminist methodologies (e.g. Penttinen, 2019: 8; Åhall, 2018).

For this article, the questionnaire provided supporting material by offering additional information used in analysing the images. Containing nine questions, the questionnaire was distributed in February 2022 via snowball sampling, which began with two women living in Novy Urengoy whom I had met during my trip there in 2019. The two women were thus the so-called gatekeepers of the sample. The questionnaire included questions addressing the respondents' experiences with living in Novy Urengoy, their relationship with the gas industry, and the role of gender therein. I received eight responses to the questionnaire, and because of the circumstances of the war, it was impossible to find more respondents. The responses were not especially extensive yet contained interesting ideas. After translating the responses with the help of a native Russian speaker, I subjected them to thematic content analysis (e.g. Julien, 2008; Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2004) and thus identified key themes from the responses. In the analysis section, the responses are organised according to the themes identified, which primarily derive from the visual material.

Because I am not Russian, I inevitably look at the research topic from the outside. The ongoing war has affected my views and the views of many others on the Russian government and society. By extension, I later found out that the first gatekeeper for the questionnaire sample—my first contact in Novy Urengoy—was a firm supporter of the Russian Government's actions, which might have influenced the responses of the other women. That possibility thus forced me to rethink the ethics of remaining in touch with her and ultimately to not pursue more answers from her. My gender, because I identify as a woman, also naturally affected how I approached the topic. Even so, interpretative research is always subjective, whether text or images are being analysed, because “interpreting images is just that, interpretation, not the discovery of their ‘truth’” (Rose, 2001: 2).

#### **4. Analysis**

With ecofeminism, intersectionality, and biopolitics as my analytical lenses, I analysed the material utilizing affective visual reading and content analysis. In this section, the ways in which gender and especially women are presented, portrayed, and reflected upon within the research material are divided into three common figures: the motherly woman, the northern woman, and the absent woman.

##### **a. The motherly woman**

The women who answered my questionnaire had a generally positive attitude towards the industry. In the questionnaire, the presence of the company was described by one woman as follows: “It’s everywhere. You can’t help but feel it”. Because my interest was gender, especially that of women, I began reviewing the Instagram posts one by one, with particular focus on the presentation and visibility of women and other possible intersecting identities. As on the webpage of Gazprom (Kangasluoma 2020), most of the images portraying workers and other people were of men, though I also observed an increasing number of women portrayed in work clothes and not only in attendance at cultural or similar events.

Around the time of Women’s Day 2022, the company magazine *Gas Urengoy* devoted space to women working at the local division in Novy Urengoy. One Women’s Day post published on Instagram on 4 March 2022 shows images of seven women from the publication, all portrayed in work uniforms in the plant, in business attire in the office, and in dress clothes at award ceremonies. The women are all white and able-bodied, have long hair, and are visibly using make-up. Connected to the Women’s Day post, there is a video, published on 5 March 2022, of a woman named Nuria,

also present in the earlier post, working as an operator of Boiler No 7. The video and post describe her life and how she came to work with Gazprom in the North. To viewers, Nuria seems like an inspiring person, and someone committed to encouraging other women to enter the industry. She is also a mom and grandmother, as stressed in the video. The official Women's Day post, published on 8 March, also stresses certain qualities of women, beginning with motherhood and followed by love and dedication to family. The post continues to state that because of women, men are inspired to conquer great heights. Even so, as the posts following that brief period reveal, the spotlight on women workers seems to remain limited to the time around Women's Day. Likewise, during Women's Day 2021, the company magazine was dedicated to women; however, throughout the rest of the year, women were in a clear minority of the posts, especially ones of a professional nature. In the posts in which they do appear, women are presented in different roles, and, also a few women in work clothes are shown reading *Gas Urengoy* (e.g. on 23 and 30 July 2021).

Thinking about fossil fuels and gender from an intersectional point of view demands recognising which identities are promoted and which become invisible, chiefly as a means to identify patterns of power (Kajiser & Kronsell, 2014). Annica Kronsell's (2006) work on gender within institutions of hegemonic masculinity, (in her case, the Swedish military) reminds me to pay attention to the silences as well. Examining the fossil fuel industry has many similarities to examining the military industry; after all, both reproduce the norms of hegemonic masculinity via everyday practices and symbols, which, in the latter's case, manifest in petro-masculinity. Furthermore, the Russian military is also largely funded by the fossil fuel industry. Against that background, Kronsell (2006) has argued that silence about gender is a determining factor within institutions of hegemonic masculinity, one that reinforces the normality of a trend as just "how things are". Building on Judith Butler's work on gender, Kronsell continues that the situation in those institutions, where being a man is the norm, has "led to the rather perplexing situation in which "men are 'persons' and there is no gender but the feminine" (Butler, 1990: 19). That phenomenon is also visible in the Instagram posts of Gazprom. In ones showing women workers, their gender and, in many cases, maternal qualities, as in the post celebrating Nuria, are made explicit in the text, whereas the posts with men address only the processes depicted, not their gender. Similar to Kronsell's findings from the military context, where the "male citizen is considered the citizen a priori, while the female citizen is expected to perform different duties towards the state" (2006; 114), at Gazprom men are the workers, whereas women are foremost "beautiful" mothers and grandmothers, as the caption of a Women's Day post says, and workers only secondary to those roles.

The emphasis on motherhood can be also approached in light of biopolitics. Accentuating fertility and motherhood is a prime example of biopolitical governance, a key aim of which is the reproduction of the human race (Foucault, 1978, 2003). In northern Russia, Gazprom's emphasis on motherhood and traditional family values ensures the reproduction and continuity of the life of the Russian people. Likewise, family values are salient in the Instagram posts. A post published on 8 July 2021 heralds a day celebrating family, love, and loyalty, with a drawn thumbnail image of a family. The image shows a family of five: a big, muscular man holding a woman, a toddler, and twin babies safe under his arms, while the woman carries the children. The congratulations in the post are directed towards, among others, those who "honour family values". At the centre of the biopolitical approach lies the notion that policies ensuring the life of some inevitably diminish the life of others (Alt, 2016; Foucault, 1978; Weaver & Silvan, 2016). Overemphasising traditional



family values thus diminishes other values, including those of sexual minorities, as Weaver and Silvan (2016) have shown in the context of homosexuality and biopolitics in Russia.

#### **b. The northern woman**

The northern location of Novy Urengoy was addressed in many of the answers to the questionnaire. The “white nights”, the Russian expression for the period of the midnight sun, was mentioned as something enjoyable but the “polar nights”, the dark period in the winter, as something negative on top of the bitterly cold weather. At the same time, northern Russia offers better opportunities to earn money, as one respondent from the questionnaire admitted. In one response, living in the north was described as if living in one country (i.e. mainland Russia) but being entirely separated from it as well. A sense of distance, the feeling of being far away from everything, was palpable. On my trip to Novy Urengoy in 2019, locals repeatedly referred to the rest of Russia as *Материк*: the mainland. The location of the city, far in the north and thus on the “periphery”, has presumably also affected local perceptions of the industry, the city, and life there, for northern Russia is typically viewed as a separate entity, similar to island states. At such a distance, it is gas that connects the satellite location to the mainland.

In the responses to the questionnaire, respondents expressed a deep respect for the northern people and the northern nature—in a phrase, “love for the harsh land”. Meanwhile, in the imagery on Instagram, snowy landscapes, northern animals, and harsh working conditions were regularly portrayed. Unsurprisingly, no posts were dedicated to questioning the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions caused by the oil and gas industry. One tool of governance is to control what is shown and for whom, as well as what is hidden. During the period examined, the Instagram page of Gazprom\_gdu regularly utilised imagery of the Indigenous People of the north and of, for example, reindeer crossings in production areas. Although Novy Urengoy is located in the homeland of the Nenets people, an Indigenous group in northern Russia, compared with the other bigger cities in YaNAO and NAO, the number of Indigenous People living in Novy Urengoy is rather small (Rozanova-Smith, 2021). The Nenets have traditionally pursued a nomadic reindeer-herding lifestyle, one that the presence and dominance of extractive industries in northern Russia threatens in various ways, including via environmental degradation, changes in demography, and alienation from traditional ways of life (Stammler et al., 2020).

In a post published on 9 August 2021, a young woman posing in a white, festive, presumably Indigenous outfit holds a white cloak in front of a verdant natural background, and the caption, celebrating the International Day of the World’s Indigenous Peoples, notes that life in the area is a perfect example of the coexistence of industrial and Indigenous ways of lives. In another post published on 19 March 2021 advertising the company magazine, five people—a baby, three children, and a woman—dressed in traditional fur outfits are shown perusing the company magazine in an urban environment. Such a portrayal of Indigenous people serves a purpose in Gazprom’s social media strategy and, more importantly, constructs a narrative of a successful cohabitation in the region. From a biopolitical standpoint, the parastatal gas giant is efficiently governing both the life and living space of the Indigenous people in its vicinity. That narrative was also visible in the official Gazprom Museum in Novy Urengoy, which I visited in 2019, where the coexistence of the local Indigenous people with the gas industry was presented as harmonious and thriving. The creation of the narrative of successful coexistence shows, and more importantly hides, the unequal power relations present between the dominant industry and Indigenous people.

Stammler et al. (2020) have noted, however, that extractive industries in northern Russia can be both a threat and a source of security for Indigenous people, many of whom also work in the industry. Even so, a colonial mentality exists among the non-Indigenous, one that enforces the narrative that northern Russia was “built with their own hands under extreme conditions and with the spirit of ‘pioneers’” (Saxinger, 2015: 89; Stammler et al., 2020: 379), all of which ignores the much longer presence of Indigenous people. In the questionnaire responses, pride in the industry was also expressed, as well as pride in the people working in it: “I am proud of our people, who can build gas pipelines, maintain them, and produce for the benefit of the Motherland”. The importance of the industry was not only described as important for Russians but also for all people living in the cold part of the continent.

Oil and gas production is a highly comprehensive, space-intensive industry. Between preliminary exploration and the time when gas begins its journey via pipelines, or when liquefied natural gas (LNG) is loaded onto ships at the beginning of its Arctic voyage, the building of infrastructure, roads, and pipelines has to occur, along with the extraction of minerals, the construction of seaports, and much more. The vast use of land often causes permanent environmental damage and change, an example of which is the domination of both nature and other beings living in the area.

### **c. The absent woman**

On the questionnaire, most of the women reported not feeling that the gas industry affects them differently because of their gender. However, one responded that most people living in the city are workers, mostly men, and that in public places and at events, even at work, people are mostly men as well. She nevertheless added that it does not affect her feelings or behaviour. Another responded that there were fewer career options for “us” here—meaning women—because of the industry. Other research has highlighted the issue of gendered labor markets within northern cities devoted to extraction (Bolotova, 2021; Rozanova-Smith, 2021). Rozanova-Smith (2021), for instance, has noted that though the gender segregation of the labour market in those areas is visible, several initiatives exist to encourage women’s entrepreneurship, among other targets.

On the Instagram page analysed during the period in question, sports were a dominant theme. Many of the posts on Gazprom\_gdu Instagram were dedicated to the celebration of success in sports competitions, either of Gazprom’s own teams or of professional local teams in ice hockey, snowmobile races, crossfit, volleyball, karate, rowing, mini football, and skiing, among others. However, in the posts celebrating competitive sports, women appear only in posts celebrating a competition of couples dancing, along with one woman in a karate competition and some women among many skiers at a skiing event. Sport is the most visible form of Gazprom’s corporate social responsibility, and as Veli-Pekka Tynkkynen (2019: 49) has noted, sponsoring sports infrastructure and sports teams is especially visible in energy-producing regions, and in regions with little or no gas coverage, they are utilised as tools to promote national gas programmes. Responses to the questionnaire also recognised that tendency and showed how Gazprom was perceived to provide opportunities for young people, support schools and sports, and, in turn, add value to the city. That tendency echoes what Tynkkynen (2019: 54) has noted, namely that Gazprom has managed to create a narrative in which all sport-related investments are seen as responsible social provisioning, instead of investing, for example, in hospitals or poverty relief.

The Instagram page for Gazprom\_gdu also portrays people with disabilities. For example, a post published on 21 February 2022 shows a video of a wheelchair dance event organised for children

with disabilities, supported by Gazprom as part of its series of social and cultural projects. The video shows children and youngsters, either in wheelchairs or not, dancing in formal outfits. However, portraying disabilities as something exceptional and something that needs charity support also acts as a form of exclusion instead of inclusion, for people with (visible) disabilities are not shown unless their conditions are mentioned explicitly.

While sponsoring and establishing sports centres, teams, and individuals, Gazprom also promotes the biopolitical goals of the Russian state, namely by ensuring fit individuals for the sake of the Russian economy and military (Tynkkynen, 2019: 49–50). The posts celebrating sports often focused on teams (of men) gaining good ranking in a local sports competition. An example is a post published on 1 November 2021 addressing a volleyball competition for Gazprom Dobycha Urengoy employee teams. In the images, employees of different ages are portrayed playing in the heat of the game. The teams are comprised of men, and it remains a mystery whether women's teams were part of the competition. Although constructing sports centres and sponsoring sports can be useful for all genders, portraying primarily men in the catalogue of Instagram posts creates a sense of valuing certain sports(men) and thus echoes the idea of petro-masculinity.

## Conclusion

The images that Gazprom, as a parastatal oil and gas company, publishes on its Instagram are not only images. On the contrary, they create certain narratives about Russian oil and gas in the Arctic—a national source of pride—while downplaying others. Emphasising motherhood, controlling the lands of Indigenous people, and supporting sports are all tools of biopolitical governance aimed at enforcing nationalist narratives. The identity of Russia is built on hydrocarbons, and its entanglements with ventures in the North are crucial to understanding the logic and nature of extracting Arctic fossil fuels (Tynkkynen, 2019). In a city and country that is run by fossil fuels, the narratives of women and minorities show what is valued, what is expected, and what is excluded.

Patriotism about the role of the oil and gas industry, visible both in the Instagram posts and the questionnaire responses, is not surprising given Gazprom's national role. The way in which gender is utilised in the material examined for this article can be seen as an embodiment of petro-masculinity. In a city such as Novy Urengoy, one cannot but see and feel the presence of the industry that keeps Russia's economy rolling. However, with the invasion of Ukraine, the economic role of Russia's oil and gas industry has gained new meaning, for it is now the *de facto* industry allowing Russia to practice extensive violence, not only against nature but also towards Ukrainian civilians. The entanglements of petroculture in the modern world are profound and perhaps even more so in Novy Urengoy.

In this article, I have shown how women are indeed present within the fossil fuel industry, though the roles assigned to them emphasise aspects considered to be necessary for the biopolitical needs of the state. Combining ecofeminism, intersectionality, and biopolitics allowed me to pay attention to the embodied social structures within the Arctic fossil fuel industry. Examining the visual material with affective visual reading also revealed which kind of categories and identities are permitted and what are not. Many of the pathways presented in this article came as a surprise to me but demanded to be included as the writing process evolved. When I started writing this article, the full-scale attack on Ukraine had not commenced. That development clearly changed everything, from the research material to the research questions. Nevertheless, I wonder whether, without the

war, I would have paid as much attention to questions of nationalism that now seem more important than ever.

As one of the most active players in Arctic oil and gas extraction, Russia will impact not only the future of the North but also the future of the planet. With the ongoing war, it is impossible to know what will happen to gas production in Novy Urengoy. The oil and gas province of YaNAO has been the crown jewel of Russian Arctic development, one closely connected to the development of the Northern Sea Route. However, with increasing sanctions, it remains to be seen whether production will continue as it has. For environmental reasons and for the well-being of our planet, energy transitions should happen sooner instead of later, whereas developments in the Russian Arctic have indicated otherwise.

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