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Is Russia Confused? #MeToo (Op-ed)

The whole culture of sexual behavior differs from one country to the next

By Artemy Troitsky

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William Shakespeare once remarked, and rightfully so, that there is one war in the world that will never end — and that is the war between men and women.

Of course, the great playwright was not speaking of war in the militaristic sense, but of the war of passions, attitudes, and feelings. In this sense, women more than hold their own against men. In the more prosaic, everyday social aspect of the question, however, men are naturally the ‘stronger‘ sex and always occupied a dominant position.

Although they condescendingly referred to women as ’the fairer sex," those words have meant little in practice: those whom they also condescendingly call ‘the weaker sex’ have always enjoyed a much lower social and financial status than men. It was on these fronts that the war was fought, albeit after a very long delay.

It was not until the late 19th century that courageous suffragists — and soon after, Marxist ideologues — lay siege to the entrenched view of male superiority by demanding the right to vote and equal pay. In the former, they succeeded.

The next wave of this women's rebellion surged into view in the 1960s as a broad struggle for full equality that was dubbed feminism. Again, women gained a partial victory: many of the key terms and values of feminism became politically correct norms in Western countries, and especially in the U.S.

This was particularly true of sexual harassment, which was widely condemned as a despicable male tactic reflecting a complete lack of respect for women. The problem, however, was that the thousand-year history of male dominance and the patriarchal traditions it spawned would not — and could not — evaporate into air as if by magic.

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Ostensibly, the women's movement managed to topple many of the false gods of the male pantheon, but in reality, the 'alpha male' remained intact replete with the practice of sexual harassment. There is a new flare-up in the war between men and women, which is an attempt to bring the feminist doctrine to its logical conclusion: to establish a factual — not fictional — equality of the sexes.

It all began with revelations about the lecherous conduct of Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein who tried, sometimes successfully, to coerce 100 young actresses to have sex with him. This triggered a domino effect: the accusations against and confessions by numerous well-known men greatly intensified interest in the topic.

In the U.S., an entire movement emerged of women subjected to male aggression that took the hashtag #MeToo. Similar movements have appeared in France ('Out Your Pig!'), Britain ('Time's Up!'), and other countries.

Now a backlash has begun — and not by demoralized men, but by French women. Actresses, along with female writers and journalists there have signed a collective letter urging protestors not to overdo it. Flirting and rape are fundamentally different things, they explain, and banning courtship behaviors is a violation of the principles of personal and sexual freedom.

I fully agree with this message, written by actress Catherine Deneuve and her female friends. My only regret is that most of the women who signed the letter are elderly. It resembles an appeal from the veterans of the 'sexual revolution' of the 1960s-1970s to the 'new Puritans" of the 21st century...

The intolerant youth responded to these representatives of the older generation with a sarcastic tongue-lashing. I have always shared the basic values of feminism: equal rights, equal opportunities and full mutual respect. At the same time, I have also noticed that radical feminism does not always accord with basic common sense and puts not only men, but also women in an absurd position.

I have mixed feelings on this and cannot claim to have a clear position on every point, so I will simply make a couple of what I feel are unassailable assertions and pose a couple of questions: Traditions, manners, degrees and generally the whole culture of sexual behavior differ from one country to the next.

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The U.S. has one norm and France a very different one, even though it was an open secret that former French President Francois Mitterrand had a mistress, former U.S. President Bill Clinton was almost impeached for his tryst with a Washington intern.

Russia has not one, but multiple norms, depending on the region in question. The men of some minority ethnic groups in the North, for example, show traditional hospitality by offering their wives to visiting travelers....

All of these customs share a common denominator — namely, that rape is a crime and rapists should be imprisoned. Beyond that, sexual 'multiculturalism' prevails. Or is it the supporters of women's equality versus cultural equality?

It might be tempting, in theory, to paint the whole world with one broad brush of 'white Anglo-Saxon Protestant' values, but that would be completely unrealistic in practice. Without harassment — whether gallant or galling flirtation, overly amorous advances or body language, shocking compliments and tactful or tactless grabbing — the human race might long ago have died out.

At the very least, it would never have known many masterpieces of literature and art and been deprived of the tantalizing pleasures of polite promiscuity — although, admittedly, such encounters often favor men more than women.

One of Ms. Deneuve's old beaus was the great French chanteur Serge Gainsbourg, whose entire life was one long drunken binge of sexual harassment. And yet, he wrote absolutely brilliant songs and became the greatest icon of French music of the second half of the 20th century.

There are countless such examples. And what to do with them all now — banish them in shame to the dust heap of history along with Harvey Weinstein?

Believe it or not, that is already happening with works of art. A major scandal only recently unfolded at the Manchester Art Gallery where the female director and curator removed the 1896, pre-Raphaelite John Williams Waterhouse painting 'Hylas and Nymphs' from a permanent exhibition in an attempt to change the perception of the female body as 'passive bodies for male consumption.'

A storm of indignation and accusations of censorship ensued, and the picture was returned to its place. Most comments on social media were harsh, suggesting that 'feminism has gone mad."

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But there were also the more tempered, such as: "We should create and display art that reflects today's ideology alongside the older works. There is room enough for both.' I agree with that completely, although I might add snidely: 'And let's see which stands the test of time.'

Now, a question. When I served as the editor-in-chief of the Russian edition of the once popular magazine Playboy, several attractive and famous young women — models, TV hosts, film stars, and young singers — offered to have intimate relations with me in return for the questionable honor of appearing on the pages of the magazine.

Did that make me a victim of sexual harassment? Or what about the not-so-innocent but not-quite-professional young ladies who frequent pricey restaurants in their lascivious search for 'sugar daddies' — kissing and sitting on the laps of overworked, generally upright men in an effort to rouse their flagging libidos?

Of course, these women are looking for something more than sex with a rich suit, but just the same — is this harassment? Honestly, I don't see a problem here, and it is more than a little amusing to think of these men as victims of sexual harassment.

But strictly speaking, and in the interests of absolute equality, wouldn't it be fair to consider sexual harassment a two-way street? Or does the guilt always lie with the man, regardless of circumstances?

And there's something else that bothers me. Harvey Weinstein and the other anti-heroes of the #MeToo movement have been cast out of the professional community, shamed so thoroughly that people refuse to even shake their hands. But why haven't legal charges been filed against any of these malicious 'harassers?'

Why is Weinstein in a clinic calmly undergoing treatment for 'sexual addiction" and not sitting in the dock? After all, according to the actresses who accused him, he has committed a crime — and not just one.

That, however, must be proven in court. And if it cannot be proven, then he is innocent. What's more, Weinstein is now the victim of the crime of slander. I cannot understand why the whole story exposing these vile rapists, with all its deafening resonance, remains outside the domain of law.

Rather than walking to the podium in a black dress, wouldn't it make more sense for women to report these crimes to the police and put these scoundrels behind bars?

Unfortunately, little of this holds true for Russia. Here, to engage in sexual harassment and other displays of male chauvinism is not only nothing shameful, but a point of honor in all segments of society.

Russian men even manage to justify rape and lust-induced murder with such statements as, 'Then why did she wear a mini skirt?' or 'For what other reason did she post a topless photo of herself on the online?'

Most surprising, perhaps, is that Russian women often show complete solidarity with men regarding allegations of 'harassment,' claiming that those Western women are all off their

rockers and have nothing better to do than raise a big fuss.

I suspect that Russia is one of the few developed Christian countries where the #MeToo movement will not only fail to stir up the local film community (where the 'Weinstein syndrome' is alive and well), but also Russia's miniscule feminist community.

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