

### **2018 Graduate Essay Prize**

The AWSS Graduate Essay Prize Committee is delighted to award the prize to Natalia Fomina, a Ph.D. student in Sociology and Sociology of Anthropology at Central European University.

In a beautifully written, well-researched, ethnographic essay, Fomina investigates the intersection of Russian Orthodox Christianity with athletic and paramilitary youth groups among contemporary Russian men. Instead of characterizing these militant patriotic and religious young men as skin-heads, Putin's thugs, or brainwashed by the church, she takes seriously their desires for dignity and moral self-expression framed in a vocabulary of faith, self-sacrifice and community. Whereas an anti-government and radical ethnic nationalism animated many male youth movements and subcultures in the first decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Fomina finds that this is no longer the case.

The carefully cultivated state-supported nationalist politics under Putin in the late 2000s, the Russian invasion of Eastern Ukraine and seizure of Crimea in 2014, and the regime's increasingly anti-global and anti-Western rhetoric has allowed many men in recent years to reassess the Russian government and see a convergence of interests. Meanwhile, the masculinization of Orthodox Christianity in the post-Soviet years, combined with young men's search for spiritual development and their demand for conservative morality in a rapidly changing world, has led to religion's greater appeal among members of these male athletic and paramilitary groups. In Fomina's view, the attraction of brotherhood and communalism in the face of individualism and commercialization is also a factor in the growth of these organizations and their anti-Western and patriotic attitudes. Ultimately, Fomina's nuanced essay helps us to better understand contemporary radical conservative national movements in Russia, Russian grassroots responses to the crisis in Ukraine, and men's insecurities beyond the Russian context.

Graduate Essay Prize Committee:

Amy E. Randall  
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