

# From Moral Indignation to Affective Citizenship: Public Shaming of Celebrity Emigration from Russia During the War Against Ukraine

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## Abstract

The article analyzes the public shaming campaigns that followed celebrity emigration from Russia at the beginning of the war against Ukraine. It shows that celebrity emigration represented a challenge to the construction of a nation morally and emotionally united around the war. The special status of celebrities in modern society as figures that provide the public with a focus of common identification and attention makes celebrity emigration during the war particularly challenging both for the state authorities and for the public. Through systematic analysis of commentary on social media, the article reveals the communicative process of public shaming of these public figures, which works through acts of revelation of their moral failure and othering, including by highlighting their ethnic and class differences. By expressing moral outrage, individual commenters on social media are not only conducting symbolic destruction of these celebrities' moral character and social status, but also reconstituting the moral meaning of emigration as an act of betrayal of the Motherland. Using the affordances of social media, ordinary people not only express their outrage but also formulate how they see the proper moral commitments and appropriate feelings of patriotic citizens in wartime. Their moral rhetoric and affective expressions are anchored in the well-established Soviet tradition of public shaming

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and denunciation. They are also framed by the contemporary context of emotional and confrontational social media campaigns.

### **Keywords**

public shaming, celebrities, affective citizenship, emigration

## **Introduction**

During the months following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the names of authors who expressed criticism toward the Russian military aggression, as well as artists who left Russia after the start of the war, began to disappear from announcements of public cultural events. Their individual concerts were cancelled by authorities, and their parts in collective performances were erased from theatre posters and programmes.<sup>1</sup> In a press release, the Russian Ministry of Culture stated that “it’s only logical” as they “gave up on the Motherland at a difficult time (. . .) We receive a lot of appeals from outraged citizens (. . .) This request originates primarily from the public at large and we cannot and should not ignore it.”<sup>2</sup> In this way, the Ministry of Culture legitimized cancellations of celebrities, presenting them as a response to popular demand. Although these institutional omissions of professionals were clearly political, waves of discussion condemning public figures for leaving the country at a time of war also took place on various Russian media platforms and social networks, each prompted by media announcements that another celebrity figure had crossed the Russian border. Many figures of popular culture were subjects of mass adoration one day, only to become targets of insults, abuse, and even threats the next. In this study, we analyze social media shaming campaigns against popular public figures and investigate their meanings. The research is based on a systematic analysis of the posts of individual commenters responding to YouTube videos whose authors discussed emigration from Russia.

Condemnation of celebrities’ emigration is far from unanimous in Russian society. According to a national opinion poll conducted by the Levada Center in February 2023, 52% of respondents said that they had a negative attitude toward celebrities who left the country after the start of the war. About 41% were neutral and 5% said that they had a positive attitude. Public attitudes toward celebrity emigrants were even harsher than toward people who left the country because of mobilization (in the latter case, 51% of those questioned had negative attitudes, 36% were neutral, and 10% were positive).<sup>3</sup>

In this article, we focus on the voices that joined in the public shaming of celebrities in order to understand the meaning of public expressions of moral criticism in a context of national crisis and the rupture of collective bonds and, more generally, under conditions of war. By addressing the meanings of public shaming of important figures who left the country during the war, we draw attention to the way shaming can be employed not only to express moral indignation and publicly sanction the emigrants but also to define the affective meanings of citizenship. We suggest that moral conflict that leads to shaming can be dramatized simultaneously as a ritual of denunciation of

deviants and a performance of emotional belonging to the community of good citizens that is threatened by their deviation.

Being almost universal psychological, political, and cultural phenomena, acts of condemnation of individuals in public as well as public shaming of famous individuals are addressed in various social sciences approaches. Historical, sociological, and anthropological approaches stress a community dimension to these shaming acts, their meanings for maintaining a social consensus around important norms, and their impact on group identity and its boundaries (Durkheim, 1915; Frevert, 2020; Garfinkel, 1956; Girard, 1986; Goffman, 1963). Political psychology sees these acts as a strategy of political communication and conceptualizes them in terms of “moral accounting and devaluation” while understanding them as a way to disparage one’s opponents through negative labelling (Icks & Shiraev, 2014) or as a rhetorical technique in “persuasive attacks” (Benoit, 2007), while social psychologists study them as strategies and experiences of “social ostracism” (Hales & Williams, 2021). The interpretation of these acts prioritizes a close analysis of the dramaturgy and symbolic and discursive community rituals of embarrassing, shaming and harassment on the level of everyday micro-interactions and utterances (Blitvich, 2022; Cohen et al., 2017; Stephenson, 2021). Yet public shaming is rarely addressed as resulting from society-wide moral conflicts (though see Jacobsson & Lofmark, 2008), as exemplified by the emigration at the start of the war. It also tends to be viewed as predominantly an outpouring of moral indignation, while collective constructions of what it means to be a good member of the national community are not addressed.

In this article, we draw on insights from Durkheimian and neo-Durkheimian sociology of morality and the role of collective rituals of shaming and denunciation in restoring the moral and social order violated by deviants. We explain how, in a situation of acute political crisis, the shaming of important national figures who decided to leave Russia because of their opposition to the war, and thereby choosing to exclude themselves from the state, became a key way for the government and a patriotic public to respond to the challenge created by this emigration.<sup>4</sup>

By examining the discourse of public shaming of celebrity emigrants in the first three months of the war, we reveal a communicative process through which these celebrities were denounced and symbolically expelled from the national community. We show how public shaming of celebrity emigrants acts as a vehicle of “patriotic” mobilization. By following the literature on the role of celebrity in modern society, and in particular Jeffrey Alexander’s neo-Durkheimian analysis, we show that celebrities, by representing the focus of collective identity, became the anchors around which normative re-solidification could be most effectively performed.

Within the chorus of social media shaming, moral emotions, we argue, serve to redefine the meanings of collective belonging. Individual expressions of moral indignation function not only as a means of denunciation and status degradation of previously socially elevated individuals, but they also provide a means of reconfiguring the moral order through a re-formulation of the national contract of affective citizenship (Ayata, 2019; Fortier, 2010) in the context of war. In this sense, the outpouring of collective moral indignation, driven by an urgent need to define and express what it

means to feel like a “true” citizen, serves to reinforce the denouncers’ affective belonging to the nation in crisis. We suggest that similar analysis can be applied to other moral crises where normative and emotional unity of the citizens is at stake.

### *Celebrity Emigration as a Threat to National Unity*

In the first months of the war, Russia witnessed the emigration of many prominent public figures. Among those who left were famous writers, actors, musicians, and comedians. Household names who left Russia included the diva Alla Pugacheva, an icon of national mass culture, her comedian husband Maxim Galkin, the actress and philanthropist Chulpan Khamatova, the popular rapper Oxxymiron and hundreds of others. The live music industry alone lost about 30% of its performers.<sup>5</sup> Many of these celebrities spoke out against the war, both while still in Russia and after emigrating, whereas some left but have remained silent. Although celebrity emigration was just part of a massive wave of Russian citizens escaping the country after the start of the war, it was these popular figures who became a major focus of public condemnation by officials and state-controlled media. Since February 2022, the Kremlin’s top officials<sup>6</sup> have taken every opportunity to condemn the emigration of celebrities.<sup>7</sup> Many of those who spoke out against the war were designated “foreign agents,” a legally discriminatory status, which also comes with an attached stigma, being associated with Soviet concepts of internal and external enemies (Kanevskaya, 2015, p. 3). Some were prosecuted (in absentia) for spreading “fake news” and discrediting the Russian army.

The fact that authoritarian states develop a range of punitive measures toward celebrity emigrants has so far been largely explained by the importance of the latter’s “voice.” Building on Hirschman’s (1970) work *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty*, scholars have argued that exit and voice have become particularly important in the age of diasporas, as dissenting citizens can become vocal in articulating disagreement abroad (Hoffmann, 2010; Newland & Tanaka, 2010). With the relative ease of migration, influential emigrants—with access to public platforms and social and mainstream media—represent a particular threat to authoritarian regimes, as they can impact public opinion domestically and in their new host states (Baser & Ozturk, 2022, Tsourapas, 2021). Through strategic public attacks on celebrities and their legal persecution, the authorities seek to reduce the threat to their own legitimacy.<sup>8</sup>

However, we would stress that celebrities’ defiance by exit and voice is challenging not only for the legitimacy of the political regime but also for constructions of national identity and belonging in a time of war. Emigration of celebrities, who in modern societies serve as objects of mass attention and emotional identification, presents a threat to national cohesion and creates a challenge both for the Russian political regime and for their own followers and fans.

Sociologists writing about celebrities have highlighted the important symbolic role of these figures. Developing a Weberian approach, Frank Furedi has argued that celebrities have charismatic influence in modern societies as they respond to people’s deep emotional need for identification (Furedi, 2010). People feel that celebrities, while

being part of the upper strata of society, the rich and famous, work for them and also belong to them, almost like distant family members. They are often referred to by their first names, indicating a relationship of intimacy. In Jeffrey Alexander's neo-Durkheimian analysis, celebrity represents an "iconic form of collective representation central to the meaningful construction of contemporary society" (Alexander, 2010, p. 323). According to Alexander, celebrities are totemic figures that personify the unity of the nation; in this sense, they play an important role in the experience of belonging in highly plural heterogeneous societies. While not necessarily admired for their morality (Browne et al., 2020), celebrities play an important role in externalizing audiences' own values and feelings (Alexander, 2010, p. 324). In this neo-Durkheimian understanding, they become personifications of a collective "we." They can also, due to their publicity and visibility, become important objects of ritualistic sanctioning if they transgress the borders of public morality. In this way they—similarly to politicians—help to expose moral contestations and solidify normative positions (Jacobsson & Löfmarck, 2008).

As Malesev (2010) explained in *The Sociology of War and Violence*, nationalist mobilization for war requires alignment between the personal emotions and ethical norms of members of the community and the ideological narratives of the state. Celebrities can be seen as pivotal figures for this alignment. In the Russian context, the social solidarity and national homogeneity needed in times of violent conflict required public shaming of those who left Russia, people who broke the bonds of attachment and affection with their fans and with the national community as a whole. This shaming also became an expression of the redefined moral attitudes and emotions of those who stayed.

### *Shaming of Public Figures*

In our definition of public shaming, we follow those authors who see it as a practice of public moral criticism in response to violations of social norms (Billingham & Parr, 2020; Frevert, 2020). In the classical Durkheimian and neo-Durkheimian understanding, this ritualized practice recruits group emotions to articulate public morality. As Durkheim argued in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, in bringing individual moral transgressions to public judgment, society affirms existing mental constructions of good and evil and connects them to individual experience and action. As a result of this ritual, the social bonds, which had been threatened by the transgressor, are strengthened (Durkheim, 1915, p. 238).

In modern societies, public exposure of moral evil has not become obsolete but continues to be an essential ceremony of social integration (Alexander, 2003). Today, virtual space has become one of the most important arenas of shaming. It has been argued that we are currently experiencing a "moral turn" associated with the "loosening of strictures on publicly denouncing immoral behavior" through blaming and shaming using the affordances of digital media (Márquez-Reiter & Haugh, 2019, p. 35). Digital public shaming is often accompanied by attacks on gender, sexual, ethnic, and national identities and expressions of class prejudices and resentments

(Jane, 2014; Nakayama, 2017). A new form of public shaming—the cancel culture associated largely with social media—is primarily targeted at public figures who are seen as having violated social norms. These individuals are subjected to online abuse and humiliation, and their social esteem and status may be profoundly affected as a result (Cashmore, 2006). Yet the meaning of shaming of public figures on social media is not limited to personal abuse and collective status degradation. Like other, more traditional forms of public shaming, it can become a way to validate particular norms in conditions of moral uncertainty. As a result of moral contestation, dramatized through shaming, the central aspects of relationships between citizens, or, in certain cases, between citizens and the state can be brought to the forefront of public debates (Jacobsson & Löfmarck, 2008).

### *Public Shaming in Russia: Historical Legacies and Post-Soviet Development*

The political meanings of public shaming of celebrity figures also need to be understood in their historical context. As Randall Collins has noted, collective rituals of “deviance-hunting” are frequently used by regimes which attempt to create high levels of group solidarity and achieve a “fusion of community and polity” (Collins, 2004, p. 128; see also Douglas, 1992 [1966]). Indeed, rituals of communal shaming and denunciation were a major feature of public life in the Soviet Union in the early Bolshevik years and throughout the Stalin period. Although ordinary citizens were denounced and shamed via criticism and self-criticism sessions and party cleansing campaigns, prominent public figures were also subjected to shaming during show trials, academic witch-hunts, and trials by the media, accompanied by outpourings of orchestrated public indignation (Halfin, 2007; Fitzpatrick, 1999, 2005; Goldman, 2011). Post-Stalin, alongside the everyday practices of shaming through comrades’ courts and *prorabotka* rituals (Kharkhordin, 1999; Stephenson, 2021; Yurchak, 2005), political campaigns of denunciation of public figures continued, albeit with less severe consequences. Public condemnation of the writer Boris Pasternak, the broadly publicized criminal trials of the writers Siniavsky and Daniel and the poet Joseph Brodsky, and campaigns of public shaming and condemnation against dissidents and defectors sought to mobilize public opinion and reinforce feelings of patriotism, loyalty and unity of the Soviet people against people who were seen as not truly Russian, bought by the West and beholden to its material comforts (Sasse, 2016; Scott, 2023). Press publications, organized public meetings at workplaces, and campaigns of letters to newspapers condemning famous public figures aimed to produce normative and affective unity between the state and its citizens, and to reinforce the moral and political order.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the issues of shame and shaming have remained highly important to public life (Golubev, 2018). The Russian state has been directing the shaming of a range of scapegoats, particularly on the basis of sexual behavior (Essig & Kondakov, 2019). Since the 2010s, in line with global

trends, public shaming in Russia has gained a new impetus, largely enabled by social media. While shaming has sometimes been used by groups aiming to promote moral accountability among the powerful and reduce abuse and violence in public and private life (Magun, 2021, Mikirtumov, 2021), the Soviet tradition of public shaming by state-societal coalitions, pursuing a variety of ideological deviants and those who are seen to defy public morality, has persisted, now mostly through social media (Favarel-Garrigues, 2018; Guseinov, 2020). The war in Ukraine gave this process a new impetus.

### *Public Shaming for the Sake of the Nation*

By examining public shaming of celebrity emigrants within the context of the Russian war with Ukraine, we seek to understand the meaning of the judgments and accompanying emotions expressed in these practices. The meanings of these acts are anchored in the well-established Soviet tradition of the political and moral collective denunciation of individuals in public, as discussed above. They are also framed by the contemporary context of emotional and confrontational social media campaigns. Today, they are however, expressed in the new context of a national crisis and the need to delineate new meanings of political belonging.

Some scholars of contemporary modern national identity have recently emphasized the significance of the emotional dimension of citizenship in the practice of governance (Beauchamps, 2021; Fortier, 2010, 2016; Johnson, 2010; Mookherjee, 2005). The notion of “affective citizenship” explains how relations between the state and its subjects are constituted and maintained through affective mechanisms (Ayata, 2019). This presupposes the existence of certain affective dispositions, the “right” feelings for the state, nation, and political community. Moreover, affective citizenship does not just appear naturally; it is a product of emotional effort and invested labor, of the articulation and performance of “feeling rules” (Hochschild, 2012), as well as acts of demarcation of moral affective communities and identification of internal outsiders (Fortier, 2016). Affective citizenship as a practice of governance works through regimes of inclusion and exclusion and also through creating moral hierarchies among the citizen-subjects. As Fortier (2010) put it, following Ahmed’s (2004) approach to the political meanings of emotions, states are not confined to governing through law and regulation, but are also “governing through affect” (p. 22). However, affective citizenship is not limited to the practices of the state. It is also produced by the subjects themselves on the level of individual participation in collective action and other means of public expression. Emotional performances of moral norms and “proper” feelings become the way to reconstruct affective citizenship, through the lines of demarcation between insider and outsider, where some subjects are designated as affectively included “us” and others as the treacherous and unworthy “them” (Beauchamps, 2021).

In our study, we analyze how affective citizenship is constituted by performative acts of individual members of the patriotic public. Specifically, we address how this is achieved in the context of Russia’s war with Ukraine through online public shaming of celebrities emigrating from Russia.



## *Methodology*

The empirical base for our study consists of textual data about emigration since the outbreak of the war posted as comments to YouTube videos on emigration. We watched 18 videos addressing emigration streamed on YouTube in March and April 2022. From these, we selected three of the most commented-upon videos whose authors denounced emigration. These are Andrei Kuriaev's video (a song titled "Do not live with a country you don't love") streamed on March 11, 2022 (2,633 comments, video 1); an interview with the writer Maria Arbatova on the Pravda.ru YouTube channel ("Those people who ran away from Russia will soon rush back") streamed on April 11, 2022 (14,000 comments, video 2); and the film director Nikita Mikhalkov's video on Besogon TV ("Titanic effect") streamed on April 15, 2022 (17,460 comments, video 3). In the first video, Kuriaev sarcastically implored celebrities who had already left the country or condemned the war (their photos are shown in the video), "Do not live with a country you don't love," comparing Russia with an unloved wife despised by rich, West-loving, "liberal" celebrities, who cannot quite decide whether to leave or stay. In the second video, Arbatova discussed celebrity emigration from Russia, expressing her belief that the emigrants left for material reasons, looking to save their money, but that they would not find success and happiness abroad and would inevitably return. In the third video, Mikhalkov described celebrity emigrants as running away from Russia in fear for their bank accounts and real estate in the West.

For each video, we conducted qualitative analysis of the top 300 user comments that YouTube's ranking algorithm designated as the most popular. The algorithm ranks the comments on the basis of the numbers of likes and dislikes, post date, and the number of replies to the comment. Although the comments were meant for public display, in addition to most of the accounts themselves remaining anonymous, we have kept the identity of each commenter anonymous by not including any YouTube usernames in this article. We also limit the scope of the analysis to comments with a focus on negative evaluation of celebrities' emigration from Russia and associated with the dominant pro-war position.

From a methodological perspective, we must assume that some comments were created by trolls or bots as part of aggressive state-sponsored social media campaigns, which intensified after February 2022. Although such comments are estimated to represent up to a fifth of all current commentary on Russian social media (Geissler et al., 2023), they employ well-established formulae that fit into the wider Russian contemporary context and feed into cumulative public opinion (Bodrunova et al., 2021). Precise identification in every instance of whether a comment was made by a troll or bot or a genuine user is therefore not crucial for our discursive analysis.

Our analysis draws on critical discourse studies and assesses the language used in communication on social media (Blitvich, 2022; KhosraviNik, 2017). The analysis was carried out qualitatively and conducted in three steps. First, both authors read all the comments. Second, the comments were thematically arranged. Some themes were derived deductively from the literature, whereas others were derived inductively from randomly selected comments. The authors discussed the themes, adjusting the coding



scheme to resolve any disagreements. Third, the comments were analyzed more closely, with the final thematic framework organized around the following categories: the construction of the motives for emigration, evaluation of the personality traits of the emigrants, suggested sanctions, perceived moral obligations of citizens, and emotions used to define citizenship.

### *Uniting in Moral Indignation*

Public shaming is a ritual in which members of society come together to express collective moral indignation and denounce a deviant member. The communicative work that this ritual involves was best described in Garfinkel's (1956) article, "Conditions of successful degradation ceremonies," written in response to McCarthy's trials in the US. For the ritual to be successful, people must agree that the denounced person's actions were driven by malicious motives. Further, the whole persona of the denounced individual is recast: "What he is now is what, 'after all', he was all along" (Garfinkel, 1956, p. 422). The person is "made strange" to the legitimate order of the community, which now sees itself as holding diametrically opposite values and beliefs to his (p. 423). Such moral indignation, as Garfinkel argued, may reinforce social solidarity, binding the citizens to collectivity (p. 421).

Our analysis shows that, similarly to the process described by Garfinkel, the commenters responding to YouTube videos attribute malicious motives to celebrities' emigration, denounce their entire personae, and define them as alien to the moral community.

In discussing the causes of emigration, the denouncers do not accept any moral justifications, such as protest against the war, as valid. Instead, many accuse the celebrities of leaving the country for self-serving, materialistic reasons:

*"They moved where they will be fed better" (video 2); "It's very simple, they didn't leave for ideological reasons, they all went to the places where they invested the loot earned in Russia, and since they are used to living the high life, that's why they moved, for the loot" (video 2); "They have no moral values and they don't care. They will always be where it's most comfortable for them" (video 1).*

Celebrities' emigration exposes flaws in their moral characters. The commenters construct a stigma to indicate moral weakness (Goffman, 1963, p. 5), and the stigmatized individuals are seen as less than fully human and often given degrading names (they are often described as vermin, trash, or "little cowards", and their names are changed in derogatory ways).<sup>9</sup> The commenters often claim that those who left Russia have "revealed" their true selves once and for all (cf. Garfinkel, 1956):

*"A person's essence is always exposed when difficult times come. It was easy to imitate humanity and decency in front of a microphone" (video 1); "The snow melted and all the dirt was exposed" (video 1); "Bravo to everyone who has left—don't come back. You are trash, Russia doesn't need you" (video 3).*

The celebrities' character flaws are often attributed by commenters, openly or by implication, to the fact that they are not ethnically Russian. There is "a re-examination and redefinition of origins of the denounced," a common theme in the rhetoric of denunciation (Garfinkel, 1956, p. 422, footnote 7). Many of these comments have clear antisemitic connotations:

*"It is Jews who have left, but Russia and its people are still here" (video 2); "Yes, let them go! They don't grow bread !!!<sup>10</sup> This is treason. It's how they think, it's in their genes!!!" (video 2); "All those who left are not Russians, they were drawn to their historical homeland [implying Israel—authors], and to Europe for a Western way of life. They have no sense of homeland" (video 2).*

Others present the emigrants as having always been culturally alien and beholden to Western values: *"People who did not carry Russian cultural values have left. People who were not with us in mind and soul. Pushers of foreign shit." (video 1); "Why are you such sell-outs? Bloody intelligentsia????" (video 3).*<sup>11</sup>

In this way, emigrating celebrities are presented as the opposite of true Russian patriots, as outsiders who had only pretended to be members of the community.

The commenters can be seen to express negative moral emotions, such as anger, contempt, and disgust, which underlie moral indignation (Haidt, 2003). These emotions are often expressed together and mark a psychological response to a threat (Every, 2013).

Anger over former idols' perceived rejection of their fans, which breaks the bonds of affection with the domestic public and instead shows loyalty and commitment to "the enemy," is expressed in many comments: *"I was especially struck by the departure of Pugacheva, and I did not expect this from her of all people. Well, let the West feed and cherish them now, we don't need them here anymore" (video 2); "(. . .) Galkin, our beloved idol, is in Israel, agitating for everyone to come to his concert. He's giving a charity concert in support of Ukraine, not Russia. That's how these idols act and we have to love them for this?" (video 2).*

Contempt is often expressed through derogatory and demeaning language. Celebrities' actions are belittled as those of irrational—or even sick—people: *"I don't understand, what happened is that all our singers ran abroad, well, they just ran away and suddenly started talking all sorts of crap about Russia. They probably ate something bad? What kind of verbal diarrhea do they have?" (video 1).*

Disgust, which according to Haidt can be a response to certain types of threat that are impossible to escape and present a danger to the self (Haidt et al., 1997) are frequently linked in comments to a sense of being devalued by celebrities: *"To be honest, I wouldn't want them to come back. Not out of spite, but out of fatigue, out of a kind of disgust. They think badly of me, it's obvious. They have informed me about this often and diligently, both in their words and in their actions. Well, why on earth should I think better of them than they think of me?" (video 2).*

Disgust also helps to define and maintain boundaries, manifesting itself as an aversion to that which threatens to contaminate, infect and pollute. It is frequently expressed

in terms of physical sickness (Miller, 1997). Celebrities have put themselves beyond the pale, both morally and physically, and the fans distance themselves from them in return by saying that these people make them sick. Emigrants become redefined as the “object other,” a person who is no longer included in the social body (Lawler, 2005). *“I would very much like them to ‘disappear’ forever. Tired of them. Tired of the endless dirt and stench that these figures spread”* (video 3).

### *Emotional Demarcation of Belonging*

No longer “quasi-family members,” these celebrities are seen as distant, arrogant, and condescending to their ex-fans. The celebrities are now reconstructed as aliens, as inhuman, as impurities, or infection that needs to be expunged (Douglas, 1992[1966]): *“They aren’t even migratory birds, you can’t even compare them, this is an infection from which we need to defend ourselves as much as we can and which we should destroy”* (video 3); *“The time has come when the exterior shells and the dirt have fallen off, the makeup has disappeared and their true face has been revealed (. . .) We will cope with this infection, there are many of us, we are Russia, we are together”* (video 1).

They are now defined through the tropes of “dirt” and “pollution,” and their emigration is seen as a “cleansing” of the nation, as purification of society (Douglas, 1992[1966]):

*“And after those people left, the air became cleaner. I hope they don’t come back!”*(video 2);  
*What’s happening is the cleansing of the air and of the spirituality of my homeland”* (video 2).

Public shaming involves status degradation and exclusion from the social body (Garfinkel, 1956, Frevert, 2020). Indeed, the shaming of celebrities involves a discussion of the ways in which they should be prevented from returning to and performing in Russia—either now, or in the future, “when Russia rises.” The most common suggestion is a people’s boycott of their artistic activity: *“There is only one protection against the returning mould—the people must declare a boycott! Not a kopeck! Don’t watch! Don’t attend! Turn off the TV!”* (video 2); *“I know who is a traitor to the Motherland and I will not go to their events and concerts; this is my practical contribution to the overall solution”* (video 1).

A common refrain is that, while the citizens will do what they can, refusing to pay money for shows and concerts, the state should also do all it can to protect the common folk from “them.” Thus, the option of symbolic or actual denaturalization is also raised in the comments:

*“THERE WILL BE COMPLETE DISREGARD AND SHAME, THEY WILL NOT BE ABLE TO COME IN, WE WILL MAKE SURE OF IT [Caps in original]”* (video 2);  
*“As soon as Russia rises, they will be the first to come and talk to us about love, but I ask of you, the authorities and the people of Russia, don’t forget this betrayal and don’t let them in”* (video 2).

Indeed, acting against the country in a time of war and speaking against it abroad, some believe, should lead to denaturalization. By lacking the underlying affective states attributed to proper citizens (discussed in the next section), the emigrants have put themselves beyond the national body. The emotional work of symbolic purification of the national body is performed by individual citizens participating in the shaming chorus. The state, they believe, should follow public outrage by excluding the emigrants through its administrative procedures.

*“And why would the government allow them to return? I’d understand [a possibility of return] for those who left in silence. Those who publicly insult the country and the people have no right to live in Russia”* (video 2); *“Okay, they left, but why pour mud on the country, which at one time gave them everything, and we want the authorities to join in depriving them of titles, awards and Russian citizenship [for the sake of] of our fallen guys”* (video 3).

### **The Motherland as a Locus of Affective Citizenship**

Commenters are involved in performative acts of reconstructing citizenship through “political mobilization of affect”—such as pride in, and love of, the Motherland—and affirmation of the bonds of loyalty. Such performances testify to the “truth of citizenship” (Fortier, 2016) and become a political means of inclusion and exclusion.

*“You do not choose your Motherland. . . The Motherland is like the parents who raised their children and they will need them in times of difficulty (. . .) For all its defects, it is the Motherland (. . .)”*; *“The Motherland is a part of the soul, like a mother, like a child. When you betray her, there is an emptiness in your soul”* (video 2).

In many comments, we came across narrative constructions of the Motherland or Homeland, which in modern European and Soviet and post-Soviet history has signified the political body of the nation which binds everyone who belongs with affective ties, and excludes those who do not. From deep personal identification with the “local Homeland,” its land and its people, to familial-type obligations toward the whole state, the “Motherland” acts as a totalizing ideological construct (Sandomirskaja, 2004).

In comments criticizing emigrant celebrities, this construction also serves as a basis for moral judgment and a locus of one’s own affective citizenship. Patriotic commenters proclaim their love for the Motherland and accuse the emigrants of lacking it. Often, class differences are also used as a basis for the construction of moral hierarchies, not only between those who leave and those who stay, but also between ordinary Russian citizens and affluent, powerful celebrity figures.

*“Let them go, we need leaders with a completely different ideology aimed at our people, promoting the moral values of marriage, family, honesty, love”* (video 2); *“Our great people will survive this. Most of us have made our true historical choice”* (video 1); *“How can it be that ordinary workers and simple people without a public profile love and*

*defend their Motherland, Russia more!!*" (video 3); *"Russian fans are ordinary Russian citizens, with simple taste, but the emphasis should be on the word 'Russian'"* (video 2); *"Has Russia left? No, the scum have left (. . .) Russia is always here, these are ordinary people! This is RUSSIA!"* (video 2).

In proclaiming the inseparability of individual life from the Motherland, commenters reconstitute the affective ties between themselves and the political nation. They declare their own unquestionable loyalty and request recognition and care from the state as they would from a family.

*"Russia is not those who left it having earned money from the people, but the people who live here with their problems and who do not have the opportunity to leave, even to travel. Notice us, keep us warm, feed us, take care of us. After all, only we are the earth, the backbone, the essence of the country. Don't betray us"* (video 2).

Some commenters express a fear that the emigrants will be allowed to return and former hierarchies of wealth and status will be reconstituted. They hope, however, that their love and loyalty will be appreciated by the state, and those who ran away will be consigned to infamy.

## Conclusion: Belonging Through Public Shaming

During Russia's war with Ukraine, the emigration of many famous public figures represented a challenge to the construction of a nation morally and emotionally united around the war. Both state and citizens needed to address the crisis. Russian government figures repeatedly publicly condemned emigration in general, and celebrity emigration in particular. In his speech on February 21, 2023,<sup>12</sup> a year after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Vladimir Putin drew attention to *"those who stepped away, abandoned their Motherland (. . .) Let it be a matter for their conscience, let them live with it, it's their burden."* He then proclaimed that the Russian people had demonstrated the appropriate reaction to the emigrants' transgression. *"What's important is that the ordinary people, the citizens of Russia (. . .) have made their moral judgement in regard to these people"* (. . .) *"The feeling of patriotism which has historically defined our people is impressive as it shows dignity, a deep realization that everyone—I stress, each and every one—ties their destiny irrevocably to the destiny of the Motherland."* In Putin's speech, his own denunciation of the emigrants goes hand in hand with the claim that Russian citizens feel the same way. Moreover, they are driven by superior emotions that link each of them individually to a national collective entity that is at one with the ruling political regime, and is governed through affect.

The rhetoric of the Russian state, represented by Putin, has been echoed in the discourse of public shaming of emigrants by patriotic citizens on social media that followed the Russian invasion of Ukraine and that we have addressed in this article. Moreover, the role of voluntary participation in restoring social bonds has been performed and realized through the acts of moral indignation by individual commenters on social media, contributing to redefinition of the meanings of affective citizenship.

Our analysis reveals the communicative process of public shaming of celebrity emigrants, which works through acts of revelation of their moral failure and othering, including by highlighting their ethnic and class differences. By expressing moral outrage, individual commenters on social media have been conducting symbolic destruction of these celebrities' moral character and social status, while at the same time reconstituting the moral meaning of emigration from Russia as an act of betrayal of the Motherland. These discursive practices of exclusion are anchored in the well-established Soviet tradition of public shaming and denunciation. However, they are also framed by the contemporary context of emotional and confrontational social media campaigns.

As a ritual which mobilizes individual citizens to collective moral outrage against those whom they devalue, exclude, and redefine as the "Other," public shaming becomes a way to combine morality and emotion. As previous studies have shown, a range of "moral emotions" play an essential role in moralizing (Turner & Stets, 2006). Anger, contempt, and disgust are recruited to an act of symbolic expulsion of the defecting celebrities from the moral and civic community. The sanctions toward the dissenters are expressed through calls for their cancelling, but they are also linked to their formal status as citizens, and suggest their symbolic and actual denaturalization.

Furthermore, public shaming of celebrities allows the patriotic public to symbolically constitute the borders of the renewed national community. The rhetoric of unmasking emigrants as self-serving, disloyal, and morally worthless individuals also imparts moral value to those who remain, now even more part of a more homogenous and purified nation. We found that the shaming of celebrities was accompanied by asserting the existence of affective bonds between patriotic Russian people and their Motherland.

Shaming of people who escape from taking part in their country's war effort is probably an inevitable part of any war (see, e.g., Frevert, 2014 on public shaming in Germany during the First World War). New aspects of shaming, however, are being created through social media and the extension of "cancel culture" to condemn people who contest the necessity of the war and do not accept its justification. Using the affordances of social media, ordinary people can not only express their outrage but also formulate how they see the proper moral commitments and appropriate feelings of patriotic citizens in wartime.

This study contributes to scholarly understanding of moral regulation in the context of national crises and wars. We show how shaming of prominent public figures is used as a means of processing and resolving the internal moral conflict arising from the Russian invasion of Ukraine and to redefine the affective relations between the citizens and the state.

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## Notes

1. BFM.ru, 2023; Akhmeev, 2022.
2. Meduza, 2022.
3. Levada Center (2023).
4. Emigration at the beginning of the war was one of the few remaining forms of political protest in Russia and a way to “exclude” oneself from the state. See, for example, Roshchin, 2022.
5. Mayer (2022).
6. Komsomolskaia Pravda (2022), Empatiia Manuchi (2022).
7. Kremlin.ru (2022).
8. Some celebrities who stayed in Russia became involved in public denunciation of those who left ([https://www.youtube.com/@empatia\\_manuchi/videos](https://www.youtube.com/@empatia_manuchi/videos)). For some, this may have been a way to move into the niches “freed” by the emigrants and get access to government grants for “patriotic” cultural projects.
9. For instance, “Chulpanka” for Chulpan Khamatova, “Madam Galkina” for Alla Pugacheva (after her husband’s name).
10. A common antisemitic trope. Jews were historically stereotyped as involved in commerce and usury rather than work on the land.
11. Members of the “intelligentsia”—which in the Soviet Union signified a broad social group that included educated professionals and cultured people—were often perceived as bearers of foreign ideas and values (Zubok, 2019).
12. Kremlin.ru (2023).

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