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Women's Access to Positions of Political Leadership: Gendered Narratives from English Language Newspapers in the Case of Yulia Tymoshenko of Ukraine

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I began studying women's political leadership as the scholarship addressing women's access to positions of political leadership is less extensive in comparison to scholarship addressing women's access to parliament. Furthermore, I am interested in the influence that the communist system has had on politics of post-communist Europe (PCE). My thesis is a case study about Yulia Tymoshenko of Ukraine, that analyzes the contextual factors of the rise to the position of prime minister twice (2005, and 2007-2010), and her failed presidential campaign (2010). Why Tymoshenko was perceived as viable for the position of prime minister, yet was unable to secure the position of president in 2010? Moreover, how was gender used to portray Tymoshenko in English language newspapers during her time as head of government and her pursuit for head of state? I employ gender analysis to identify how gendered narratives may help or hinder a politician, presenting them as competent or incompetent in three English language newspapers (*The Globe and Mail*, Canada, *The New York Times*, the United States, *the Guardian*, the United Kingdom). In addition, I seek to understand how these news sources portray a woman political leader from a PCE country. I analyze whether these newspapers impose western concepts of understanding or stereotypes of PCE, to a Ukrainian context.

Keywords: Women, politics, leadership, gender, Ukraine

The subject of gender and politics in post-communist Eastern Europe is wide-ranging in topic, yet somewhat under analyzed in terms of women's political leadership. Various issues might be examined including, for example, barriers to women's access to parliament to whether more women in positions of power potential yields more 'woman-friendly' public policy to how gender affects what type of executive position a woman occupies. The excerpt I present today from my current research highlights the role of gender in a single regional case: where one individual woman has sought or achieved positions of formal political leadership, such as prime minister or president. More specifically, my research focuses on one women's access to political leadership, Yulia Tymoshenko from post-communist Ukraine. One benefit of this kind of focussed study would be to consider a larger question of how communism has potentially affected, negatively or positively, women's access to political leadership. This paper briefly discusses newsprint media's perceptions of women's political leadership and lastly I assess the media's role in representations of women's leadership.

Women and political leadership—can they or can't they lead?

The main concern of literature on women's political leadership is with the ways in which women access these positions of leadership, such as Nirmal Puwar (2003), Farida Jalalzai and Mona Lena Krook (2009), and Donatella Campus (2013). Another key topic in the literature is the relationship between gender and positions of leadership as well as how women seeking positions of leadership are represented in all forms of commercial national/state media such as Donatella Campus (2013) and Rebecca Richards (2015). For the purpose of this paper, I will mainly focus on how historically space has influenced perceptions of political leadership. Lastly some recent scholars, some feminist, have examined how the media may represent women as outsiders and how gendered stereotypes influence representations of competent leaders. I'll review briefly some of these trends.

Scholars Farida Jalalzai and Mona Lena Krook (2010) initially take the quantitative approach by mapping out the number of women presidents and prime ministers, from 1960 to 2009, from the first woman leader to the more recent period. The number of women heads of government and heads of state has increased every decade since the 1960s when the first woman prime minister came to power. Jalalzai and Krook note that women political leaders come from different locations geographically. Furthermore, several of these women become leaders of nations where women as a general population lag behind economically and educationally, and face political and social constraints.¹ Jalalzai and Krook's findings that so few women have been prime ministers and presidents begs the question as to why women have generally been excluded from these positions of formal political power.

Women's exclusion from positions of political leadership is manifested in historical social relations and historical perceptions of public space. Nirmal Puwar (2003) discusses the historical traditions associated with public spaces and parliament in Great Britain. Puwar describes that historically public spaces, and in this case, political spaces, have been occupied by men resulting in a certain normalization of political space as dominated by white, upper-class men. Puwar goes on to indicate that women and visible minorities who then occupy these spaces may be perceived as "space invaders" and may be subject to mistrust.ⁱⁱ

Donatella Campus (2013) reinforces Puwar's idea of the "space invader," stating that the historical exclusion of women from certain public spaces has not only excluded women, but has also reinforced certain behaviours that are expected from political leaders.ⁱⁱⁱ Campus notes that relationship between power and authority are closely embedded with gender norms, and thus characteristics associated with power are usually masculine traits.^{iv} Campus notes that these masculine aspects of power are generally associated with concepts of strength, force and authority over others.^v Lastly, the author suggests that relationships between leadership and gender are rooted in certain social stereotypes about women and men.^{vi} Positions of political leadership therefore rely on certain social perceptions of gender to inform citizens as to who is an appropriate political leader.

Gendered stereotypes associated with leadership are outlined by Rebecca Richards (2015), characterizing general constructs of masculinity as built around hierarchical and autocratic behaviours, where men are viewed as competitive, decisive and assertive.^{vii} Richards explains that women are then categorized in opposition to men as emotional, sensitive, dependent, and lacking drive.^{viii} Furthermore, the author observes that when discussing leadership, there is a certain need to identify women leaders as "women" whereas there is rarely, if ever, the word "man" before leader^{ix} Historical and social perceptions of leadership inform society that men are perceived as a 'natural' or 'normalized' leader, and women in positions of leadership merely disrupt the norm.

Farida Jalalzai and Mona Lena Krook (2009), note that certain factors that affect women's access to political leadership are closely related to gender: familial ties to politicians, especially those who were assassinated; lack of institutional development, that allows charismatic leadership to play a greater role in politics, and; institutional features of the political system, including the position women occupy – prime minister versus president – and the type of electoral system.^x For example, women may be elected to office because of some kind of political crisis, where gender stereotypes reinforce the public's view of women as caregivers that are best equipped to fix the situation. Gender stereotypes may therefore help or hinder women seeking positions of political leadership dependent on context.

In addition to Jalalzai and Krook's contextual factors, Campus points out that gendered stereotypes play important roles in women's political leadership. Campus suggests that the personalization of politics has resulted in political campaigns that rely on selling personal traits rather than policy and ideological ideas. This personalization then frames the campaign as a horse race between two candidates based on their personality traits.^{xi} Campus explains that the personalization of politics may benefit or hinder women when framed through gender stereotypes. For example, women's association with nurturing may make her appear to be more democratic, more inclined to protect social systems and education compared to men candidates. Campus' second example is that of a woman in politics is an outsider. This suggestion implies that women are present politically because of specific reasons besides their own personal achievements such as luck or perfect timing. Campus' third example is the tactical outsider, where the candidate is viewed as different from other politicians. The tactical outsider may be employed by the candidate or media during a period of political corruption or during the need for some kind of change, whether it be political, economic or social.^{xii}

Method, Context and Media Analysis

Yulia Tymoshenko, is portrayed as a polarizing figure, yet she has worked her way to positions as the leader of the Fatherland political party, a leader of the Orange Revolution, two-time prime minister and two-time presidential candidate. Tymoshenko is useful as a case study of women's political successes and failures to ascend to the positions of leadership as she was popularly perceived to be a leader during Ukraine's Orange Revolution and twice she held the position of Ukraine's prime minister (2005 and 2007-2010) however she lost the presidential election in 2010. This paper asks why a woman, Yulia Tymoshenko, became a viable candidate for the position of Ukrainian prime minister, yet could not translate that political success into the presidency and ultimately, lost the 2010 presidential election. More specifically, I am interested in the role her gender played in her ability to reach a very prominent and powerful position as Ukrainian head of state.

This paper, as a smaller example of my thesis, employs two approaches to understand how gender affects political leadership using Tymoshenko's case: first I conducted a biographical analysis as biographical components of an individual life including age, status, and family connections are important in understanding women's histories and identities.

Second I looked at English language print media sources to find evidence of gendered language and narratives that may or may not portray Tymoshenko as a competent political leader. For example, news articles and television interviews are more likely to focus on a woman political candidate's appearance or use specific gendered language when discussing a candidate, shifting the focus from policies to the person. Preliminary findings from my analysis of print media use a gender analytic framework, in order to demonstrate how journalism or popular print sources portray Tymoshenko as a viable political leader, or not.

The method I used to identify gendered terms and representations was to seek out materials or mentions of Tymoshenko in three English language newspapers ranging across a three month period from December 7, 2009 to March 7, 2010: *The Globe and Mail* (Canada), *The New York Times* (the United States), and *The Guardian* (the United Kingdom).^{xiii} These dates mark a six-week period prior to the first presidential vote, January 17, 2010, to the second vote on February 7, 2010 to her removal as prime minister on March 3, 2010. Several different periods in Tymoshenko's political career prove significant: first, her entry to politics 1997, her position during the Orange Revolution in November 2004 to December 2005, the month prior to and following her terms as prime minister in January 2005 to September 2005 as well as December 2007, to the period during the presidential election to the vote of no confidence previously mentioned. Furthermore, I chose to analyze these periods of time because they would hopefully provide the most relevant context of the campaign issues and how Tymoshenko was represented.

I used gendered stereotypes of women by scholars Farida Jalalzai and Mona Len Krook (2010) as well as Donatella Campus (2013): the charismatic uprising of a political figure; the personalization of the election that focuses on personal traits rather than policy, framing the race as between two candidates; the nurturing nature of women that leads to assumptions that they are the protector of democratic values; justification for a woman's presence, and; the agent of change. Furthermore, news coverage of women politicians may leave out their political accomplishments, thus I looked for instances where news articles referenced Tymoshenko's position as prime minister or whether she was only perceived as a presidential candidate. In addition to these narratives, I looked for certain themes such as reference to the Orange Revolution, and reference to East-West divisions, pro-Russia versus pro-Europe, or pro-authoritarian versus pro-democracy.

This was the first presidential election since the 2004 presidential election result, naming Viktor Yanukovich – considered the pro-Russian candidate – the winner, was overturned on the grounds of extensive voting fraud. This claim resulted in millions of Ukrainians rallying to the capital of Kyiv to protest the fraudulent results that lead Yanukovich's win. Viktor Yushchenko, the candidate considered to be pro-Western and who lost the election to Yanukovich was supported by Yulia Tymoshenko as they were named the leaders of the Orange Revolution, calling for democracy. The election results demonstrated a division within Ukraine, where the Russian speaking population from the East was more likely to side with Yanukovich and the Ukrainian speaking West was more likely to side with Yushchenko. The 2004 election results were eventually overturned, and a second run-off between Yanukovich and Yushchenko was held, yielding a presidential win by Viktor Yushchenko. At this point, the Orange Revolution was believed to be a step towards European integration and NATO membership, and a step away from Russian influence. Once president, Yushchenko appointed Tymoshenko as his prime minister in January 2005.

Constant in-fighting between Tymoshenko and Yushchenko over political power affected the passing of legislation. Divisions of powers between the positions of prime minister and president were not clearly set, which caused political stand-still. The period between 2005 and 2007 when Tymoshenko was no longer prime minister, she saw her popularity rise. Conversely, Viktor Yushchenko began to see his popularity fall. In December 2007, Ukrainian parliament approved Yulia Tymoshenko as prime minister, once again. However, again, in-fighting between Yushchenko and Tymoshenko brought forth a political crisis, where the Ukrainian economy continued to slump following the 2008 economic crisis forcing the country to take on a loan from the IMF. Tymoshenko refused to pass legislation that would adhere to IMF reforms of cutting social services, and brought the government to a standstill while the Ukrainian currency plummeted.

Leading up to the 2010 presidential election, President Yushchenko's popularity had almost disappeared. Yulia Tymoshenko, and former Prime Minister and leader of the opposition, the Party of Regions, Viktor Yanukovich were considered the front-runners. While Yushchenko came in fifth after the first round of voting on January 17, 2010, Yanukovich and Tymoshenko came in first and second, respectively, and would head to the second round of voting on February 7, 2010. The following is how three English language newspapers represented Tymoshenko from December 7, 2009 to March 7, 2010.

My analysis involves articles from three aforementioned news articles, varying in number of articles published as well as when articles began and ended mentioning Tymoshenko. Six articles making reference to Tymoshenko were published from the *Globe and Mail* four were published prior to the first round of voting on January 17, 2010, and two

were published on or following the second stage of the presidential election on February 7, 2010. I analyzed fifteen news articles from *The Guardian*: four occurred prior to the second round of the presidential election and the other eleven occurred after the election of Yanukovich as president and into Tymoshenko's removal from the position of prime minister on March 4, 2010. *The New York Times* had published twenty-one articles referencing Tymoshenko, the most of the three newspapers. The publishing date of these articles began after the first round of voting, beginning February 3rd, 2010, and prior to the second round on February 7th. The articles that came up prior to Tymoshenko's loss, simply referenced Tymoshenko's absence from conceding the presidential election to Yanukovich.

As Tymoshenko was prime minister at the time of the election and not necessarily just a presidential candidate, almost all of the articles in all three newspapers reference Tymoshenko as the Prime Minister at the time of the election campaign. Noting Tymoshenko's post as prime minister in the media sources is important because women's political positions are sometimes erased in reporting due to them being outsiders to the political system. References to her position as a political leader, however, were used in either positive or negative ways. Articles portraying Tymoshenko negatively, generally referenced her in-fighting with Viktor Yushchenko.

The print media articles from all three of the above English sources represented Yulia Tymoshenko as a polarizing prime minister and competent presidential candidate compared to her opponent, Viktor Yanukovich; but the similarities and differences between the newspaper coverage bear closer examination. In several instances, Tymoshenko is generally portrayed as the pro-Western, and therefore 'good' leader. The reporting is consistently using descriptive gendered phrases that justify Tymoshenko's presence because she was deemed as 'one of the leaders of the Orange Revolution' who is therefore pro-Western and therefore considered pro-democratic.

All the news print sources reference the Orange Revolution in most of the articles, citing Tymoshenko as one of the leaders of the Revolution. The subject of the Orange Revolution usually leads to a discussion of disillusionment felt by some that the Revolution did not yield political, economic and social results. Tymoshenko's association with the revolution, then sets her as an incumbent in the election, rather than a politician.

Furthermore, the focus on Tymoshenko's apparent insinuated position as an incumbent is further reinforced by focusing mainly on only two presidential candidates: Tymoshenko and Yanukovich. The election became more personalized, where Tymoshenko was represented as the charismatic public speaker, and Yanukovich was represented as a shady character. Rarely were there instances discussing social or political policy of either candidate; rather the focus remained on East-West divisions in Ukraine, and simplified matters of foreign policy that aligned the two politicians as pro-Russian (Yanukovich) and pro-European (Tymoshenko). By framing the election in this way, East-West divisions characterized by linguistic differences were treated almost synonymously with pro-Russian versus pro-Western (pro-European). Although there is evidence supporting these voting divisions, pro-Russian and pro-Western divisions are then further implied to be pro-authoritarian and pro-democratic. Therefore, when discussion of Tymoshenko portraying autocratic tendencies – albeit that discussion is rare in the news print sources – are highlighted they are generally erased because of the synonymy that exists between the images of Tymoshenko as pro-Western, and therefore democratic. Tymoshenko as acting in an authoritarian manner does not gain much traction in the news print sources because of the fact that Tymoshenko is labeled as pro-Western, and also that she is a woman.

The differences in language between the news print articles is of some value here. *The Globe and Mail* describes Tymoshenko in three of their articles as a "charismatic prime minister" and a "gas-princess." The use of the term charismatic may be used as a way to justify Tymoshenko's political presence, success and ability to lead. As mentioned earlier, Jalalzai and Krook (2010) and Campus (2013) discuss the importance charisma, or assertiveness play in notions of political leadership. The use of "princess" is a means of infantilization, as princesses are normally younger and also less powerful than other royalty such as a queen or a king. Using "princess" also denotes Tymoshenko as holding some type of privilege but also insinuates that she is innocent.

Guardian also noted Tymoshenko's strong public speaking skills. *The Globe and Mail* and *The Guardian* both cite that Tymoshenko is a strong public speaker, however *The Globe* uses the term "charismatic" while *The Guardian* identifies her as a strong public speaker. I think it is important to note here that although Tymoshenko is known for her speeches, the way in which the articles refer to this characteristic is important, as it is a personal trait.

The Guardian took an interesting approach to the election campaign by describing the election as a "bitter rivalry" between Tymoshenko and Yanukovich. At times the print article would frame the article as a fairy tale about good and evil. Articles would emphasize that the Orange Revolution was a signifier of good times to come, as the villain of the story, Viktor Yanukovich had been defeated. However, due to the "break up" between Yushchenko and Tymoshenko, the good times were coming to an end and the "villain" was making a return to control. The "queen" (Tymoshenko) was the only person who could defeat the villain. Once the election was over, this narrative stopped.

Similarly, *The New York Times* also made regular note of the Tymoshenko and Yanukovich as political opponents. The paper did have one story in particular that focused on Tymoshenko's physical appearance, and her role as a heroine of Ukraine during the Orange Revolution. According to the article she earned her fame internationally, however, disillusionment was a result of her and President Yushchenko becoming "estranged" from one another, implying they were in a loving relationship.

Once Yanukovich won the election, and international election observers declared that the election was fair, these fairy tale narratives stopped. Although it was speculated for days after the election Tymoshenko would appeal the results, and she did not appear for days, the type of aura and gendered language dissipated. Furthermore, once reports that President Barack Obama and Prime Minister Gordon Brown had called to congratulate Yanukovich, Tymoshenko was simply referred to as a prime minister, without any kind of embellishment.

Conclusion and further questions

The use of English language print sources was useful in understanding how women political leaders, in this case, Yulia Tymoshenko have been represented. Using three news print sources *The Globe and Mail* (Canada), *The New York Times* (the United States), and *The Guardian* (the United Kingdom) during Tymoshenko's bid for the president in 2010, has provided me with an useful understanding of how Tymoshenko was represented as a political leader, through gendered language, and through narratives of democratic values as well as that of a fairy tale that ended in defeat. As I noted earlier, citing Campus, gender stereotypes may be beneficial or detrimental. In terms of these three news articles, although they used gendered language, I believe they believed Tymoshenko to be the superior leader over Viktor Yanukovich because of her persona as a pro-Western, and therefore also pro-democratic. However, by focusing on the quotes from Ukrainians interviewed in the story, I would surmise that the narratives from these newspapers as Tymoshenko as competent is a much more divisive concept in Ukraine. This last note somewhat complicates my analysis of whether newsprint media sources represent Tymoshenko has a competent leader, because her record of political leadership during the 2010 presidential campaign is framed in a simplistic East-West division. Further research is necessary to understand how East-West assumptions oversimplify the politics of Ukraine and why Tymoshenko was not considered a viable candidate for president besides analysis rooted in newsprint sources.

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- ⁱ Farida Jalalzai and Mona Lena Krook, "Beyond Hillary and Benazir: Women's Political Leadership Worldwide," *International Political Science Review* 31 (2010): 7.
- ⁱⁱ Nirmal Puwar, "Thinking About Making a Difference," *BJPIR* 6 (2004): 65.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Donatella Campus, *Women Political Leaders and the Media* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013): 10.
- ^{iv} *Ibid.*, 10-11.
- ^v *Ibid.*
- ^{vi} *Ibid.*
- ^{vii} Rebecca Richards, *Transnational Feminist Rhetorics and Gendered Leadership in Global Politics* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015): 16.
- ^{viii} *Ibid.*, 17.
- ^{ix} *Ibid.*, 17.
- ^x Jalalzai and Krook, "Beyond Hillary and Benazir," 8.
- ^{xi} Campus, *Women Political Leaders and the Media*, 23.
- ^{xii} *Ibid.*, 44.
- ^{xiii} I analyze linguistic and narrative trends from articles from *The Globe and Mail*, *The Guardian* and *The New York Times* from December 7, 2009 to March 7, 2009. I do not reference a specific author as there are generally more than one reporting a story and themes mentioned occur across several articles by different authors. I used the LexisNexis Academic database from the University of Lethbridge library website with these specific date ranges, as well as the keyword "Tymoshenko."

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