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Filling the Power Vacuum in Post-Soviet Ukraine: The Role of Women in Oksana Zabuzhko's Museum of Abandoned Secrets

The role of women in social and political structures is much discussed within the post-colonial context, with scholars such as Elleke Boehmer and Cynthia Enloe identifying an idealisation of woman as symptomatic of states aiming for, or having recently won, independence from former colonial powers. In these studies, women tend to be aligned with the symbolic and the metaphorical: they are envisioned as national totems, or essentially mythologised figures of the 'Mother Nation'. Women in positions of power, as valued co-participants in the struggle for national liberation, or as active constructors of the newly independent state, are absent from such examinations.

This paper will offer one potential model for filling this gap with a new image of post-colonial woman, proceeding from the post-Soviet context. Far from a passive, semi-divine national mother, this woman is depicted as a soldier of the battlefield nation. This figure will be pieced together from the presentation of women in Oksana Zabuzhko's *Museum of Abandoned Secrets*. My paper will argue that in Zabuzhko's novel the Ukrainian male is incapable of exerting power in the domestic sphere, or even on a national level, as a result of the emasculating influence of Russian colonisers. In Zabuzhko's text it is the woman who moves in to fill this vacuum in post-Soviet Ukraine.

This project seeks to understand from Zabuzhko's writing the gender models which result from the legacy of Soviet rule and the level of influence which that former subordination to Russia still bears upon nation-building processes in Ukraine.