

## GENDER SEMIOTIZATION OF INTERNATIONAL DISCOURSE

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**Abstract.** The text examines the semiotic dimension of international relations, emphasizing the role of symbolic politics in shaping political images and collective identities. Drawing on early works by Robert Jervis, the author highlights how perceptions, cognitive frameworks, and “desired self-images” influence actors within global politics. Special attention is given to gender as a key sign system alongside ethnic, religious, and civilizational markers. Gender is conceptualized as both a social and semiotic construct. Building on the ideas of Umberto Eco and Raewyn Connell, the text argues that gender operates through culturally encoded meanings and behavioral norms, forming a system of symbols that structure social relations and power hierarchies. Gender stereotypes are defined as generalized representations of masculinity and femininity that guide interpretation and behavior within symbolic politics. A case study of the film “*Conspiracy of the Doomed*” illustrates an inversion of traditional gender hierarchies: the female protagonist becomes the benchmark of masculinity, redefining power relations and challenging androcentric norms. This example shows how gender semiotics operates within Cold War symbolic politics to construct ideological oppositions. In conclusion, the text argues that gender is a semiotically mediated reality that plays a crucial role in organizing social order and international relations. Cinema, as a cultural medium, contributes significantly to the reproduction of gendered power structures, where masculinity and femininity signify not biological differences but relations of dominance and subordination.

**Key words:** Semiotics, Symbolic politics, Gender discourse, Masculinity and femininity, Cinema studies, Film semiotics, Social construction of gender

**Аннотация.** В тексте исследуется семиотическое измерение международных отношений, подчеркивая роль символической политики в формировании политических образов и коллективной идентичности. Опираясь на ранние работы Роберта Джервиса, автор показывает, как восприятие, когнитивные рамки и «желаемые самообразы» влияют на участников глобальной политики. Особое внимание уделяется гендеру как ключевой знаковой системе наряду с этническими, религиозными и цивилизационными маркерами. Гендер концептуализируется как социальный и семиотический конструкт. Опираясь на идеи Умберто Эко и Раэвин Коннелл, текст утверждает, что гендер функционирует посредством культурно закодированных значений и поведенческих норм, формируя систему символов, которые структурируют

социальные отношения и иерархии власти. Гендерные стереотипы определяются как обобщенные представления о мужественности и женственности, которые направляют интерпретацию и поведение в рамках символической политики. Анализ фильма «Заговор обреченных» иллюстрирует инверсию традиционных гендерных иерархий: главная героиня становится эталоном мужественности, переопределяя властные отношения и бросая вызов андроцентрическим нормам. Этот пример показывает, как гендерная семиотика функционирует в рамках символической политики времен холодной войны для построения идеологических оппозиций. В заключение текст утверждает, что гендер — это семиотически опосредованная реальность, играющая решающую роль в организации социального порядка и международных отношений. Кино как культурное средство вносит значительный вклад в воспроизводство гендерных властных структур, где мужественность и женственность обозначают не биологические различия, а отношения доминирования и подчинения.

**Ключевые слова:** Семиотика, Символическая политика, Гендерный дискурс, Мужественность и женственность, Киноведение, Киносемиотика, Социальное конструирование гендера.

### **Introduction**

The semiotic dimension of international relations analysis became clearly evident in international academic literature as early as the 1970s<sup>1</sup>, focusing on the construction and dynamics of political images in the space of international relations [1], as well as the problem of cognitive determinism in the acceptance/rejection of "desired self-images" by actors in symbolic politics [1]. The diversity of symbolic identity politics discourses is determined by the nature of the sign systems that represent a particular cross-section of international relations. Among such sign systems, ethnic, religious, racial, civilizational, and other systems stand out, each forming its own discursive semiotics as specific concepts through which symbolic politics unfolds. Contemporary symbolic politics is characterized by a synthesis of these concepts.

### **Main Part**

Gender signs have taken a special place in the system of signs of international relations (see, for example: [8]). The semiosphere of gender at the structural level is represented by specific gender symbols, which can be found in *“clothing, shoes, hairstyle, cosmetics, perfumes; style of speech, gait; way of spending time, reading circle; form of expression of emotions; type of car, bicycle, sport practiced; body type; functions performed in the family; career preferences; attitude towards military service; frequency of visits to stores and their selection; demonstrated moral qualities, etc.”* [7].

At the structural level, large-scale aspects of gender discourse are analyzed, such as representations of masculinity and femininity, love, marriage, and family [4]. Ultimately, by taking the form of images of men and women, they become symbolic borderlines that act as markers of inclusion and exclusion, participating in the formation of collective identity, in separating "us" from "them," and in valuing the former more highly than the latter [3].

### **Gender as a Semiotic Category**

W. Eco convincingly demonstrated that understanding a sign is directly linked to the formation of a habit of action, which is carried out according to the rules established by that very sign [5]. This thesis is developed by Sh. Cohn and R. Connell, on the one hand, revealing the social (sociopolitical) aspect of gender as “a structure of social relations organized around the reproductive sphere” [10], and on the other, emphasizing its semiotic dimension as “a

constellation of meanings that culture ascribes to the biological differences between the sexes" [11].

Thus, gender reveals itself not only as a political problem, but also as a semiotic question. The **semiotic** aspect here sets the rules of interpretation (reconstructing the meaning of a particular image), while the political aspect presupposes practices of implementation (the reproduction of this image in everyday life). This synthesis of the political and the semiotic gives rise to a gender discourse proper, which represents a way of symbolically organizing the world into binary oppositions, the sides of which are associated with the male or female sex [11]. The peculiar semiotization of gender as a sphere of social relations gives rise to the term "gender stereotypes," which, in our view, is more convenient for use in the context of symbolic politics. Following Cohn, we understand gender stereotypes as "schematized, generalized images of masculinity and femininity" [11]—ideas about the properties and relationships (roles, occupations) characteristic of men and women.

Gender possesses a distinct semiotic impulse. A sign is not simply a representative of a particular gender—it dictates the rules of its reading (interpretation) and demands adherence to corresponding rules of behavior. The concept of gender discourse within the framework of symbolic politics is the relationship of power/subordination, which is not least responsible for its relevance in expressing not only military (hot) conflicts but also the Cold War.

### **Cinema as a Technology of Gender**

Gender analysis in cinema is represented by two main approaches: content analysis and semiotics. Content analysis, which primarily uses quantitative sociological methods, is interested in "the roles, psychological, and physical qualities of women and men" and "on-screen violence" [2,5,8]. Semiotics allows us to "discover the structures of meaning" created by the presence or absence of women in cultural representations. Semiotics asks how meaning is created, not what it consists of.

Gender semiotics, according to T. de Lauretis, unfolds as follows: "... the woman, frozen in the position of an icon, spectacle, or image to be gazed upon, sets the dynamic gaze of both the spectator and the male character. It is the male character who commands both the action and the landscape and occupies the position of subject of the vision he conveys to the spectator" [3]. Here, we are talking not so much about the relationship of power/subordination as about a more fundamental relationship between subject and object.

Characteristically, masculinity and femininity are "bidubled." In cinematic language, as T. B. Ryabova demonstrates, two masculinities emerge: excessive aggressiveness, ambition, and the demonstration of male strength, or the masculinity of women, manifested through the qualities of "real men" that correlate with the image of power (responsibility, reliability, fairness, rationality). Femininity is also dual: among "outsiders," it appears as a doubt about their masculinity, with the aim of discrediting them; the feminization of "insiders" does not carry a negative charge (for example, emphasizing maternal care, compassion, and humanity) [6].

Gender semiotics in this context appears as a sign system that includes images and relations of masculinity and femininity as marking standards of behavior (political, economic, moral, patriotic, etc.). At the same time, it can be considered as a corresponding methodological program, which has proven to be in high demand in understanding contemporary international symbolic politics [Riabov, 2017; Ryabov, 2018; Gudalov, Tulupov, 2018].

Gender semiotics, which generates "a set of practices that situate reproductive differences between bodies in social processes" [10], being a derivative of the system of

gender stereotypes, is actively used in cinematic texts. The exploitation of gender signs in this case implies "an appeal to a person's gender identity in order to achieve a desired type of behavior or a desired type of orientation. Such an appeal establishes a relationship between the individual's forms of behavior and certain models of masculinity/femininity" [Ryabova, 2001: 10]. Gender markers not only help to define "us" and "them," but also develop a system of evaluations and preferences, relations of inequality and control. It would be more correct to define gender *semiotics as a sign system that analyzes not only masculine and feminine symbols (as marking standards of behavior), but also other gender aspects.*

### **Gender Analysis Experience**

In the context of our reflections, the film "Conspiracy of the Doomed" is of interest. The central character of the film's narrative is Hanna Licht, the deputy prime minister of an Eastern European country, with whom the viewer involuntarily compares the other characters. This moment, in our opinion, defines the film's uniqueness among Cold War films. It features a peculiar inversion of the androcentric orientation: the protagonist is not a man, but a woman, who sets the benchmark for masculinity.

In Hanna Licht, male femininity defeated female masculinity (revealed through "normal" images of friends). The image of Hanna Licht reinforces not so much the global status of women as the global status of men: men's masculinity is defined in comparison to the masculinity of the female protagonist. Resistance to this feminine regime shapes the binary opposition of the film's semiotics.

### **Conclusion**

Gender appears as a "reality mediated by signs, symbols, rituals, and acts of communication" [6], and "artistic representations make a significant contribution to the figurative definition of social order" [9]. Social order, according to P. Bourdieu, appears as a "world gender order" [10]. Cinema reveals a complex system of gender semiotics—signs of masculinity and femininity, etc.

Female images in early cinema served a subordinate, mirroring function, shading images of masculinity and making them more representative. At the same time, they could sometimes be used as referential images, defining the entire system of legitimization of international relations (through the relationships of cinematic characters). Gender signs formed the idea that masculinity, being expressed through semiotic markers, does not fix sexual differences, but rather relations of power and subordination (relations between actor and actant), where the subject of the exercise of power can be either a man or a woman.

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