

Putin, Pussy Riot and the Global Gay: The Queer West
versus Holy Russia

by

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INTRODUCTION

It was just over a year and a half ago that I spent the fall semester of my junior year in St. Petersburg, Russia. Before I left, many of my friends and family warned me to be safe and exercise caution given the political atmosphere of Russia as well as US-Russia relations at that time. I was bombarded with news of anti-gay militia groups wreaking havoc on gay youth across the Russian Federation and the recent legislation that was passed banning the promotion of homosexual propaganda to minors. I found it hard to believe that the status of the LGBTQ community in Russia was that dire and wanted to find out for myself if it was actually true. I have always had an immense fascination with Russia ever since I was a child. The big mass of land that hogs a good portion of world maps never ceased to amaze me. The revolutions, the wars, the frigid temperatures, the Russian soul; it all took my breath away. Never once did I associate queer identity with Russia. New York and San Francisco were always my gay reference points when it came to geographical, spatial associations of homosexuality. It was not until I actually went to Russia that I discovered a whole new world that defined queerness in a completely different way from that of the US.

The issue of gay rights is a profoundly personal topic for me. I knew I loved Russia far earlier than I knew I was gay, and for most of my life I ignorantly thought being gay was solely a Western concept. Surely I knew gay people existed in other parts of the world but not as openly as they did in the West. It was not an identity to be proud of, and up until a few years ago it still wasn't,

even in America. It was not until I witnessed the remnants of a pro-gay rally gone wrong in the Field of Mars Square in St. Petersburg that I realized that I needed to write my senior capstone project on the issue of anti-gay legislation in contemporary Russia. Upon witnessing a bunch of angry Orthodox believers shouting hateful slurs at the poorly represented pro-gay rights protesters, I realized how dire the situation was in terms of advocating for openly queer rights. I could not understand how people could be so hateful towards a minority group that merely wanted the right to openly love whomever they chose to love. Seething with anger, I automatically discredited the entire Russian Federation as a backwards, tyrannical country filled with disgusting, uneducated barbarians.

However, this blanket assumption on my part is simply misguided. The Russian people that I met abroad were some of the most thoughtful, intelligent, persevering people I've ever had the pleasure of meeting. Accordingly, so are the queer men and women I met at the underground gay bars in St. Petersburg. However, I realized that there was a fundamental gap in understanding far greater than just the language barrier. When I asked the queer men and women at the gay bars in St. Petersburg about their opinions regarding President Putin, the political atmosphere of Russia and being queer in Russia they all responded with similar answers. They said that they loved Russia, and even though being gay is not openly accepted, they did not mind this because they saw queerness as merely who you are sexually attracted to, not a full-blown political identity. These answers that were unanimous across the board shocked me. While queerness as an identity is undoubtedly heightened in the West, one would still

like to believe that in other countries besides Western ones that they too would want equal rights before the law when it comes to love. However, these men and women firmly believed in Putin's mission of achieving world superpower status for Russia regardless of the anti-gay laws enacted by the Russian Duma.

As an American, I did not buy into this Putinomania. I believe the institutions Putin has put in place are restrictive, patriarchal and oppressive. This is exactly the issue, though. As an American I was not privy to Russian media and life before studying there. In Gary Shteyngart's article, "Out of My Mouth Comes Unimpeachable Manly Truth," he highlights the power of Russian TV and the effect it has on the Russian populace. As an experiment, Gary Shteyngart checked into the New York City Four Seasons Hotel and for seven days streamed nothing but Russian television. He details the slow descent towards insanity he experienced from Day One to Day Seven watching nothing but Russian television. In the opening scene of his article, Shteyngart is watching parodist Elena Vorobei, sing "I Will Survive" as she impersonates the Austrian drag queen Conchita Wurst, who won the Eurovision contest in 2014.¹ Vorobei mockingly shouts, "I have a beard," poking fun of the fact that Conchita Wurst deviates from traditional gender norms. When the Austrian drag queen, Conchita Wurst won the Eurovision competition in May 2014, Russian Parliament member Vladimir Zhirinovskiy said that Conchita's Wurst's victory signified "the

¹ Gary Shteyngart, "Out of My Mouth Comes Unimpeachable Manly Truth," February 8, 2015, *www.nytimes.com*, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/22/magazine/out-of-my-mouth-comes-unimpeachable-manly-truth.html?hp&action=click&pgtype=Homepage&module=second-column-region®ion=top-news&WT.nav=top-news#>

end of Europe."² The Russian Orthodox Church later legitimated Zhirinovskiy's claim by stating that Christian civilization had fallen to homosexual sin.³ While the rest of the countries that compete for the title of Eurovision champion have denounced homophobia, Russia still finds derisive humor in the fact that a male contestant dresses as a woman. The people I met in Russia were some of the most well educated people I had ever met in my life, so why then did they condone homophobic comments by their political and spiritual leaders?

Shteyngart later details how he is unable to understand the discrepancies between Russian television and Russian law and society. This is the same feeling I experienced while in Russia. State sanctioned legislation towards the oppression of queer rights and people did not necessarily match the public sentiment towards Putin and the Kremlin. Shteyngart then points to the real problem. He states that, "Unless you're a true believer, its (television's) endless din just reminds you of how alone you are in another man's designs. That man is Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin. These are his channels, his shows, his dreams and his faith."⁴ Putin's Russia follows a very strict model of what is expected of you as a Russian citizen. You must blindly support his policies, wholeheartedly buy into Russian exceptionalism, and you must fit the patriarchal mold of society that is predetermined for you. If you decide to differentiate yourself from the homogeneous pack, then you will find that Russia is a very inhospitable and

² Shteyngart, "Out of My Mouth."

³ *ibid.*

⁴ *ibid.*

lonely place. Queer Russians are somewhat obliged to buy into the whole system as a sort of coping mechanism.

However, I did not and do not buy into Putin's mission of a homogeneous and outwardly homophobic society. President Putin has managed to control every political institution as well as both the public and private sphere of Russian society. In my thesis I try to explain how President Putin pins the LGBTQ community as the ideological enemy of the state. The Kremlin associates Western liberalism and democracy with the societal acceptance of homosexuality. The societal acceptance of homosexuality is then attributed to the moral degradation of Western society. In Chapter One I discuss the anti-gay laws enacted over the course of Russian history and the changing societal views towards homosexuality that came with them. In Chapter Two I discuss Dennis Altman's term, the "global gay" and how its distinctly Western connotations threaten Putin's nationalistic agenda. In Chapter Three I detail how Putin came to power and what he did to consolidate total control of most political institutions in Russia. Chapter Four deals with how the Kremlin has sexualized politics in order to advance Putin's manly image as the savior of Russia as well as to enforce patriarchal values. These patriarchal values do not leave room for alternative ideologies such as feminism or identities such as queerness. Chapter Five deals with the feminist punk group Pussy Riot and their court trial testimonies. The women of Pussy Riot's court testimonies eloquently expose the unlawfulness of Putin's Russia. Looking at Putin's Russia through a queer lens, I hope to show that the LGBTQ community is mainly used as a scapegoat by the

Putin regime in order to consolidate his totalitarian regime based on patriarchal rule, hegemonic masculinity and Russian nationalistic sentiment.

CHAPTER ONE

History of Anti-Gay Laws in Russia

In June 2013, the Russian Duma voted unanimously, 436-0, to ban the distribution of "propaganda of non-traditional sexual relationships" to minors in Russia. This vague law enacted under the Putin administration does not outwardly ban homosexual acts but prohibits the dissemination of pro-LGBTQ information throughout Russian society. In order to explain the anti-gay laws enacted in June 2013 by the Kremlin, one must first understand the history behind openness and criminalization of homosexuality in Russia dating as far back as Kievan Rus'. One must then understand the different political factors and power structures in place that allow these laws to benefit Putin's contemporary political system. The Russian Orthodox Church's ties to the state, military prestige, wartime mobilization and the sexualization of politics under President Putin are all factors that have contributed to the newly enacted Russian laws banning homosexual "propaganda." This legal jargon framed as "propaganda" in actuality comes to mean the homosexual lifestyle and everything that is associated with it: individuality, mobility, cosmopolitanism and Western influence.

Church

Before the Russian state was born, there was the consolidation of Kievan Rus'. Kievan Rus' was a state of loosely identified Slavic tribes in Europe that existed from the late ninth to mid-thirteenth century. Before coming into contact

with the Byzantine Empire, the local Slavs were pagan people who were openly tolerant regarding same-sex unions. Men and women were allowed to "make brothers" or "make sisters" with members of the same sex.⁵ This making of brothers and sisters meant that same-sex unions were allowed under pagan ritual. However, once Kievan Rus' was Christianized by missionaries from Byzantium, same-sex unions were seen as less acceptable. The Byzantine Orthodox Church viewed same-sex unions as a sin committed by barbaric peoples. However, Eastern Orthodox Christianity considered sexual deviance, such as sodomy, to be a sin, not a crime. Therefore, an act of sexual deviance could be forgiven simply through confession, prostration and by abstaining from meat and milk products for several months.⁶ This example of how the Orthodox Church viewed homosexuality as a sin, not a crime, exposes the hypocrisy of contemporary Russia's religious stance regarding homosexuality, a topic that will be addressed in later chapters in relation to Putin's authoritarian regime.

The Orthodox Church elevated the status of Kievan Rus' to a region of civilized people, devoid of barbaric, pagan beliefs. From this point on, homosexuality was always going to be seen as a sinful, barbaric act of the godless pagans. While this mentality lacks strong connections to contemporary Russia, the basic tenets are the same. The Orthodox Church fully supports the Kremlin's enactment of the anti-gay laws because Orthodox religion has denounced homosexual relations as sinful, selfish and in defiance of procreation.

⁵ Dan Healey, "Russia: An Encyclopedia of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Culture," *gltq*, Last updated July 19, 2005, <http://www.gltq.com/social-sciences/russia.html>.

⁶ Simon Karlinsky, *Out of the Blue* (San Francisco, CA: Gay Sunshine Press, Inc., 1997), 16.

These same characteristics can be attributed to the capitalist, secular, sexually liberated West. Historically speaking, the Russian Orthodox Church and Russian state have functioned as one entity, up until the Bolsheviks began their anti-religion campaigns in 1921. Up until this point, the Church and state always functioned as one entity deriving power and wealth from each other. However, an anti-gay law that was backed by both church and state was never established until President Putin came to power. This is partly due to the fact that gay identities were not a political identity until the 1970's. Queer people obviously existed, but identifying as gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans or queer never held a powerful, political identity before the Civil Rights Movement in America in the 1970's.

The act of sodomy was banned in the military under Tsar Peter the Great in 1716; however, this only applied to the military and did not apply to Russian society outside the military. During Tsar Nicholas I's reign, anal intercourse between men in Russian society was banned under Article 995 in 1832.⁷ This law under the conservative Nicholas I is the closest example of church and state restricting homosexual practices before the Putin Era. Sodomy was decriminalized in 1922 during the Russian Civil War, but then was reinstated as a crime in 1933. However, these legal actions are not applicable to the ties between the Orthodox Church and Russian state because religious interference with the Soviet state was a punishable crime up until the fall of the Soviet Union.

³ Laurie Essig, *Queer in Russia* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 4.

The anti-gay laws of contemporary Russia differ from Article 995 because they prohibit the distribution of homosexual propaganda to minors. These laws do not strictly forbid the act of sodomy but the entire identity that modern homosexuality assumes. The Russian Orthodox Church and the Putin administration associate homosexuality with declining moral values, permissive sexual roles and the degradation of the West.⁸ The degradation of the West is a theme in both Russian history and Russian Orthodoxy. In 1453 when the Byzantine Empire fell to the Ottoman Turks, the Russian Orthodox Church asserted that they were now the center of holiness, what they called the Third Rome. This idea that Muscovy was now the religious center of Orthodoxy and morality can be applied to modern day Russia. The Russian Church and state sees the degradation of the West as a fall from morality. Both the church and state of Russia see Russia as the center of holiness, virtue and how society should function. Homosexuality is opposed by the Russian state because it distinguishes Russia from the West, and by the Church because it reads scripture as defining homosexuality as a sinful, fallen act. Using this platform and the tie between church and state, Putin is able to consolidate his power around nationalism.

Military

In 2003 the Russian Duma passed a law stating that all homosexuals were banned from the military along with alcoholics and drug addicts. Openly queer

⁸ Francesca Stella, "Queer Space, Pride and Shame in Moscow," *Slavic Review* 72, no. 3 (Fall 2013), 462.

citizens were even banned from conscription.⁹ This stab at homosexuality not only implies that homosexuality is an addiction that is curable like alcoholism or drug addiction but also devalues the manliness of the homosexual. Gay people are not fit to enlist in the Russian military because they are lesser. This fits in with Putin's macho politics and the elevated prestige of the military under his regime. Outlawing homosexuals from enlisting in the military partially resembles the Military Articles of Peter the Great in 1716. The articles, known as Peter's Code, were the first time in Russian history in which consensual anal sex between two men was legally prohibited. However, this code only applied to active-duty soldiers.¹⁰ These Military Articles did not extend to the general public and were not heavily enforced. Also, Peter's code only prohibited sexual actions, not queer identities, therefore a soldier could identify as gay, even though this identity was unlikely in 1716, but remain celibate and they would not be penalized. The act of sodomy was forbidden because Peter the Great was trying to create a 'new' Russia, one that mirrored the West. These Military Articles of 1716 were in response to, "reports of sodomy in boys' boarding schools, in an era when the state needed another kind of 'new man,' the pious, conservative yet educated bureaucrat. Yet the growth of cities, and their increasing sophistication, allowed the development of alternatives to the masculinity prescribed by the state."¹¹ In order to keep the Russian military

⁹ Healey, "Russia: An Encyclopedia of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Culture."

¹⁰ Laurie Essig, *Queer in Russia* (Duke University Press, 1999), 4.

¹¹ Dan Healey, "Russia: An Encyclopedia of GLBTQ Culture."

officer away from bourgeois temptation and on the path to modernization, Peter the Great decreed that sodomy was illegal in the military.

This law-abiding, educated yet conservative bureaucrat is exactly the type of man President Putin is trying to create. However, international sentiment regarding homosexual acts and lifestyles has changed since then. The West no longer sees homosexuality as a threat to society and champions equal rights for all sexual orientations. Putin sees this as the downfall and degeneration of the West.¹² Around the time that the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy was repealed in 2010 in the US, President Putin was in the process of enacting harsher anti-gay laws, thus demonstrating the shifting values of the liberal West versus the more conservative values of Russia towards the acceptance of homosexuality in society.¹³ Putin's political legislation and attitudes seem to follow a pattern of doing the opposite of whatever Western societies declare. The out and proud gay identifying male is an identity that only truly proliferates in Western societies. Therefore, if Putin is trying to distance himself from the West, relegating the homosexual to the private sphere of society is a strategy that not only defies the West but can also foster Russian nationalism. This nationalism functions as a way to mobilize the Russian population against the West and creates a sense of pride throughout the Russian nation. Nationalistic pride benefits the Putin administration by rallying the general populace around a strong willed, virtuous

¹² Stephanie Pappas, "Why Russia is so Anti-gay," *livescience*, Published February 11, 2014, <http://www.livescience.com/43273-why-russia-is-anti-gay.html>.

¹³ "Don't Ask, Don't Tell Repeal Act of 2010," *hrc.org*, September 20, 2011, <http://www.hrc.org/resources/entry/dont-ask-dont-tell-repeal-act-of-2010>.

leader who opposes the corrupt West. There is no place for the individual during periods of history when the government is stirring up nationalistic fervor; therefore the Putin administration sees the sexually defiant homosexual as an enemy of the state that must be banned from serving his country dutifully.

Wartime Mobilization

Since Putin has created a Russian society that actively opposes the West and disregards international sanctions, there is constant fear that war between the West and Russia might break out. Times of wartime mobilization are periods in Russian history when anti-gay laws are passed. In 1933-1934 sodomy was reinstated as a crime. This law was reinstated due to historical factors. Having just endured a bloody civil war, the Bolsheviks sought to promote heterosexual relations in order to boost the declining birth rate. Russia was also on the brink of a war with Germany, therefore there was no place for "bourgeois" homosexual relations in a time of wartime uncertainty. In 1934 Maksim Gorky stated that if you, "Eliminate homosexuality, (and) you will make fascism disappear."¹⁴ Political instability combined with the impending possibility of war tends to correlate to anti-gay laws being reinstated in Russia.

During much of the Soviet era, homosexuality was invisible to the public eye. Under Stalin's reign the public sphere was severely restricted, making homosexuality almost invisible. Homosexual relations were seen as bourgeois and a crime against the state. Anyone who was outed as a homosexual during Stalin's reign was either shot or sent to hard labor camps in Siberia. These hard

¹⁴ Essig, *Queer in Russia*, 5.

labor camps led to homosexual texts depicting sexual relationships among male prisoners. The GULAG, an acronym that translates in English to the "Chief Administration of Corrective Labor Camps," and the subsequent literature that followed, is what many contemporary Russian scholars have said to be a large part of the problem regarding the anti-gay sentiments of the current Russian population.¹⁵ These labor camps, which were separated by sex, created a heterosexual model for homosexual relationships in spaces that were devoid of women. Sexual relationships among male prisoners created a sexual hierarchy based on the heterosexual model of active/passive roles in sex. Known homosexuals in the camps were seen as the lowest caste of prisoner. If a man was the receptive partner during anal sex, he was treated as subhuman in the labor camps. The insertive partner was merely viewed as dominant and not particularly gay. The exact numbers of how many people were sent to these labor camps is unclear but estimates range from five million to ten million prisoners. Many of the gulag prisoners witnessed how power was derived in the camps through homosexual relations. Yaroslav Mogutin, an openly gay, contemporary Russian journalist claimed that, "the gulag has produced twice as many gays in Russia than there are in 'more normal countries.'"¹⁶ While this is an unfounded claim, seeing as sexual relations among men was the only

¹⁵ The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, "Gulag: Labour camps, Union of Socialist Republics," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2013.
<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/249117/Gulag>.

¹⁶ Brian James Baer, *Other Russias: Homosexuality and the Crisis of Post-Soviet Identity*, (New York City, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 37

plausible option in the labor camps since they were segregated by sexes, the gulag narrative is still very much engrained in contemporary Russian society.

While Peter's Code did not occur during a time of war, he was trying to create a strong military state that could compete with the West. Putin seeks to do the same, therefore he sees homosexuality as a frivolous distraction that detracts from a strong military and strong state. Also, homosexuality does not yield sexual reproduction. Wartime mobilization calls for bodies and reproduction of the state's capital: human beings. If homosexuality is allowed, then hypothetically there will be less human capital being produced. Therefore, in order to lessen the declining birth rate that plagues contemporary Russia, Putin has framed homosexuality as an unpatriotic, selfish act that does not contribute to Russia's well being as a state.

Sexualization of Politics

In 2007, the Mayor of Moscow, Yuri Luzhkov, banned LGBTQ rallies and denounced them as "satanic." After this rebuke to LGBTQ rights to the freedom of assembly, pro-LGBTQ activists went to deliver a petition to the Mayor's office but in the process were arrested. After the protesters were released from prison, they were attacked and beaten up by Orthodox believers and neo-Nazis.¹⁷ The denunciation of gay parades as "satanic" is an anti-Western tactic implemented by Russian politicians. Whether or not Russian politicians actually find gay parades to be demonic is beside the point, the point is that gay parades bring the private sphere of sexuality out to the public. The suppression of the public

¹⁷ Healey, "Russia: glbtq."

sphere is rooted in Soviet politics, a tactic Putin is trying to use in order to control Russian society and consolidate his power. Also, gay parades defy the typical standard of masculinity. Queer men and women parading their alternative lifestyles goes against hegemonic masculinity and femininity because it is the opposite of what defined gender roles are supposed to resemble. The Putin administration does not tolerate the sexual other, which is a symbol of cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism.¹⁸ Shortly following this ban, the city of Moscow declared a hundred year ban on gay pride parades, violating the European Convention on Human Rights of 2012. This hyperbolic declaration shows the extent Russian politicians will go to defy the West, demonstrating that they will not acquiesce to Western interventionism and cultural imperialism.

Gay culture and openness also detracts from the Kremlin's tactics of sexualizing politics. Until the fall of the Soviet Union, Russian leaders, aside from Joseph Stalin, were rarely sexualized as manly men that are protectors of the Russian state because there were never democratic elections that warranted the sexualization of a political leader. In order to beef up President Putin's appeal, the Kremlin has implemented a political tactic that the West uses to sell their political candidates. The depiction of Vladimir Putin as a conservative in principle, all-powerful, masculine president is what the Kremlin sells to Russian citizens in order to gain voter support. This political tactic has proven very successful throughout his presidency. However, homosexuality debunks the Kremlin's sexualized politics by denigrating the archetypal masculinity that the

¹⁸ Stella, "Queer Space, Pride and Shame in Moscow," 459.

Kremlin promotes. The Kremlin champions a patriarchal society in which rigid masculine and feminine gender roles are the only options. The fluidity that queer sexualities entail defies these rigid gender roles and takes power away from the patriarchy. Therefore, in order to firmly establish patriarchal rule, homosexuality and sexual otherness must be heavily restricted in Putin's contemporary Russia.

While the 2013 law does not outwardly state that homosexuality is a crime, the way it is worded basically states that it is. Igor Kotchetkov, the head of the Russian LGBT Network, a rights group based in St. Petersburg says that, "officially homosexuality will be considered illegal, something incorrect and something that cannot be discussed with children. It will create a negative atmosphere in society around gays and lesbians as well as our organizations."¹⁹ Associating homosexuality as a killer of innocence or a fall from grace automatically creates a negative stigma around homosexuality. As Igor Kotchetkov notes, homosexuality is not explicitly illegal, but framing homosexuality in this light denotes homosexuality as a moral sin, one that seeks to rob children of their innocence. This trope of homosexuality as a moral sin is then conflated with the idea of a morally corrupted West that is obsessed with homosexuality. Therefore, these laws not only function as a way to revoke the rights of a minority group but also as a political tool that brainwashes Russians to believe that the West as a whole is a fallen civilization. The well being of children and the protection of their innocence has also inspired the Kremlin to

¹⁹ Anna Peirano, "Anti-gay legislation passes in St. Petersburg," *FourTwoNine*, 2013, <http://dot429.com/articles/835-anti-gay-legislation-passes-in-st-petersburg>.

adopt other forms of anti-gay legislation. For example, it is now illegal for same-sex parents to adopt children both in Russia and out of Russia.²⁰ The state now defines what a normal, healthy family is, and by revoking the rights of gay parents to adopt, the state is able to control sexualities that deviate from the norm.

These laws reached the international stage when Russia hosted the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics. President Putin evaded the Western media attacks, stating that the queer community was welcome but that protests would not be tolerated and that gays should simply stay away from the children.²¹ By not explicitly stating that he believed homosexual lifestyles to be lesser, he avoided Western media portraying him as a ruthless tyrant who simply dismisses basic human rights. It merely looked like a slight cultural gap that could possibly be fixed with increased Western intervention. The claim that all gay people are pedophiles can be interpreted as simple ignorance that can be corrected with increased education. However, Western media missed the political implications behind these laws entirely. The laws seek to portray the West as the enemy. The Western media fell right into this trap during and after the Olympics occurred by posting humiliating articles about the poor facilities and backwardness of the Russian Olympics, which was then expanded outward to general Russian

²⁰ Maxim Shemetov, "Russia's Putin signs law banning gay adoptions," *Reuters*, July 3, 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/07/03/us-russia-putin-gay>

²¹ Shaun Walker, "Vladimir Putin: gay people at Winter Olympics must 'leave children alone.'" *The Guardian*, January 17, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jan/17/vladimir-putin-gay-winter-olympics-children>

society.²² While poor facilities do need to be addressed when a country is holding an international event such as the Winter Olympics, the way in which Western media portrayed Russian Olympic facilities had an air of condescension, an air that was absent when other non-Westernized countries hosted international events such as the 2014 World Cup in Brazil or the 2010 World Cup in South Africa. These criticisms about the Russophobic West were then used as ammunition to fuel the argument the Kremlin is so keen on establishing. The more the West criticizes Russia for its backwardness, the more Kremlin spin doctors will be able to use these criticisms to promote nationalism and anti-Western sentiment, thus strengthening Russian homophobic attitudes.

It Wasn't Always Bad

While queer life in Russia may look bleak, given all the legalized bans on homosexuality, there were periods in Russian history where queer life thrived. Before Kievan Rus' came into contact with the Byzantine Church, same-sex unions were not stigmatized. Homosexuality flew under the radar for most of the Imperial rule period, despite the enactment of Article 995 in 1832. People were aware that homosexuality existed but it was not the blatant identity that it has assumed today. The Imperial period and post-Soviet period of Russian history marked a certain degree of tolerance towards sexual otherness. Russian gay culture began to be more visible during these periods. The rampant growth of both Moscow and St. Petersburg during tsarist rule led to the burgeoning of

²² Safiah Chowdhury, "Why did the Sochi Olympics draw so much criticism?" *Aljazeera*, 22 February 2014, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2014/02/why-did-sochi-olympics-draw-so-2014221101422651375.html>

queer spaces. The Russian bathhouse became a profoundly homoerotic space, in which homosexual bathhouse prostitution became a business similar to that of the heterosexual brothel.²³ The seemingly private realm of homosexuality was made public by Mikhail Kuzmin in 1906, with his publication of *Wings*, the first published coming-out story in Russia. According to Laurie Essig, "By 1914 modern Russia had one of the most articulate gay and lesbian cultures in the Western world, but the tsarist government was not responsible for fostering that culture."²⁴ Until Tsar Nicholas I's Article 995 forbidding the act of sodomy by all men, anti-gay legislation did not affect the Russian population other than the military. Western influence penetrated both Moscow and St. Petersburg, which created a space for the sexual other. Once the tsarist regime was overthrown, homosexuality was relegated to the underground private sphere during the Soviet period. However, when the Soviet Union fell in 1991, homosexuality was decriminalized shortly after in 1993 under President Yeltsin.

After the anti-sodomy statutes of old were abolished, the new Russian Federation experienced a burgeoning of gay culture. Not confined to the private sphere, gay literature sprouted up and queer activism found its voice in a number of different organizations. Nikolai Kolyada's play, *Slingshot*, was banned in Russia in 1989 before the law against homosexuality was lifted. In 1995 the play was performed in Moscow. The play openly portrays love between two

²³ Healey, "Russia: glbtq."

²⁴ Essig, *Queer in Russia*, 4.

heroic men as "redemptive and morally uplifting."²⁵ This complete transformation signified the openness of the newly formed Russian Federation. This openness lasted into the mid-2000's, with cosmopolitan Russian gay clubs and organizations visibly popping up in St. Petersburg and Moscow. LGBTQ information resources were even established, most notably the portal, gay.ru (founded in 1997) and gay culture magazines such as *Kvir* (2004) and *Pinx* (2006).²⁶ Not until President Putin's authority was firmly established in the mid to late 2000's did gay culture in Russia take a turn for the worse.

Conclusion

The Putin regime has magnificently incorporated aspects of all the former anti-gay laws that occurred throughout Russian history, dating back to 1716. In order to gender a political system that supports patriarchal rule, Putin has consigned queer life to the private sphere. In order to legitimize this, he has created a strong bond between church and state. This bond works as a mutually beneficial relationship. The Orthodox Church gains more power in the public and political sphere while the Putin regime is able to legitimize their patriarchal system through religious leaders. Putin has also created a Cold War atmosphere that portrays the West as a Russophobic, hysterically homosexual society that is keen on preventing Russia from gaining immense international power. This Western Russophobia then creates panic among the general Russian populace, which fuels military mobilization. Military mobilization fits into Putin's plan of

²⁵ Susan Larsen, *Out of the Blue: Russia's Hidden Gay Literature*, (San Francisco, CA: Gay Sunshine Press Inc., 1997), 308.

²⁶ Stella, "Queer Space, Pride and Shame in Moscow," 467.

maintaining a strictly patriarchal society by confining women to the domestic sphere and coercing men to fit the ideal patriarchal image of how a masculine man should act and be.

Russian politicians have discussed how these laws do not interfere with the private sphere. Sexual minorities can go on with their lives as long as they are not open or near children. In doing so, the Kremlin is creating the illusion that they are a democratic society that is open to diversity and multiculturalism. However, Russia is a "managed democracy" that functions on paper as a true democracy but is controlled in every aspect by Putin's circle of power.²⁷ President Putin does not necessarily detest gay people. He merely uses their distinction from mainstream, patriarchal society as a political tool to consolidate his own power, distance his regime from the West, and promote nationalism around a scapegoated minority. The breakdown and analysis of these anti-gay laws in accordance with contemporary Russian societal events will further support this claim in the next few chapters.

²⁷ Igor Torbakov, "Russia: Looking at Putin's Nationalist Dilemma," *Eurasianet.org*, Published February 8, 2012, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/64975>

CHAPTER TWO

The Putin regime meets the "global gay"

Dennis Altman coined the term "global gay" in reference to Western gay men exploiting Southeast Asian gay sex tourism. This exploitative "global gay" is not welcome in contemporary Russia, given the recently passed anti-gay propaganda laws. Dennis Altman discusses the "global gay" in his essay, "Global Gaze/Global Gays," in *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian & Gay Studies*. Altman discusses the issue of "gay" and Asia and what this gay identity means to developing, non-Western countries such as Indonesia and Thailand. The "global gay" is typically a Western homosexual who uses his affluence and Western privilege to openly express his sexuality. Many non-Western countries keep sexuality strictly in the private sphere of life; however, the "global gay" self-identifies as gay, seeks out social contact and discourse with other homosexuals, and desires "long-term primary relations with other homosexuals."²⁸ The Putin regime rejects these aspects of the global gay due to the political implications of this prominent minority identity. The Russian State Duma passed a law in 2013, which states that, "public actions directed at the propaganda of sodomy, lesbianism, bisexuality and transgenderism among minors' will be punishable with fines of up to \$17,000. The law defines propaganda of homosexuality as 'the targeted and uncontrolled dissemination of generally accessible information capable of harming the health and moral and spiritual development of minors,' particularly

²⁸ Dennis Altman, "On Global Queering," *Australian Humanities Review*, no. 2 (July 1996), Internet edition at www.australianhumanitiesreview.org/archive/Issue-July-1996/altman.html (last accessed 24 February 2015).

that which could create 'a distorted impression' of 'marital relations.'"²⁹ The law is framed under the presumption that all homosexuals are pedophiles and that President Putin is only trying to protect Russia's children from corruption. In actuality, Putin is afraid of the intellectual, identity-assuming global gay that permeates the Western world. Therefore, the anti-gay laws enacted by the Putin regime, vague while they may be, are used to deter the global gay from ever penetrating Russia.

Applying the "global gay" to Russia

The global gay is the most pronounced, obvious Western symbol of the modern-day LGBTQ community. According to Altman, "Both affluence and political liberalism are required for a commercial gay world to appear."³⁰ The global gay is only possible if he comes from a well-educated, affluent country and/or background, because these privileges allow social mobility. The cosmopolitan, global gay can sneak by undetected, unless he wants to be seen or heard. To a former KGB officer, this concept of timely visibility is a scary one, one that can promote mass unrest. Minority groups that have been oppressed throughout history often have key characteristics that label them as a minority. However, oppressing a minority group based on sexual orientation can be difficult because a queer person can so easily assimilate into heteronormative society if needed.

To identify oneself as openly queer is to assume an identity that adheres

²⁹ Dan Healey, "Other Scholars: LGBT Studies in Russia," *NewsNet*, August 2013.

³⁰ Dennis Altman, "Global Gaze/Global Gays," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian & Gay Studies*, Vol. 3, (Amsterdam: Overseas Publishers Association, 1997), 417-436.

to the identity politics of the queer liberation movement in the US. The Stonewall Riots in America were the first public demonstrations against police brutality against a queer minority. In 1969, police officers unjustly raided and arrested queer patrons of the gay bar Stonewall Inn. After this incident there were a series of protest demonstrations against police brutality towards a queer minority, which then led to the formation of the Gay Liberation Movement in America. This liberation movement sought to support the individual in the quest to define one's own sexuality and have the government legitimate it. Altman asserts that, "to see oneself as 'gay' is to adhere to a distinctly modern invention, namely the creation of an identity and a sense of community based on (homo)sexuality."³¹ The legitimization of a queer, minority community assumes that sexual orientation is an individual right that is protected before the law.

In an authoritarian government such as Putin's Russia, human rights have taken a backseat to the rule of law that favors the Kremlin. The outspoken, gay individual has no place in this rule of law. In terms of sexual orientation, Altman asserts that there is a fine balance between universal rhetoric and applying it to social and cultural traditions of other countries.³² The fixed model of the Western gay does not fit cultures of the East or Russia. Putin rejects the Western idea that individualism should be celebrated. Contemporary Russia is a capitalist society but is controlled by Putin's inner circle of politicians, thus emulating the centralization of power similar to the governing style of the former Soviet Union. The Soviet state of order crushed the individual, marking one as a dissident. A

³¹ Altman, "Global Gaze/Global Gays," 423.

³² *ibid*, 420.

dissenter was subject to harsh punishment, harassment, and/or death up until the Gorbachev era. Harsh punishment, harassment and violence occurs in Russia towards gay men due to their dissenting sexuality and lifestyle choices. Queer minority members have been beaten up and even killed in Russia for publicly demonstrating for their right to be openly gay. Ultrnationalist groups using the Internet to police queer activity in the digital realm have attacked gay men. The police do very little to curtail the violence and terror these fascist groups inflict on Russian queer men; therefore regardless of whether or not the global gay is accepted in Russia, the personal is now political.

In Russia, what you do in the bedroom is no one's business as long as it is not discussed publicly. The only instance where it is publicly acceptable to discuss sex is when men are talking about the women they have slept with. Therefore, the global gay is a foreign concept to the Russian populace since the topic of non-traditional sexual roles is not a normalized topic of public discussion. Consequently, this unfamiliarity with non-traditional sex roles turns Russians off to the Western notion of queer theory discourse and human rights. The global gay has "become a convenient symbol of Western cultural imperialism, involving the encroachment of Western values (overt sexuality, nonreproductive sex, and consumerism) and Western political concepts (tolerance, diversity, and civil rights)."³³ This concept of the global gay goes against the politics and archetype of what a typical Russian citizen should be.

³³ Ken Plummer, "Introduction to *Modern Homosexualities: Fragments of Lesbian and Gay Experience*," cited in Brian James Baer, *Other Russias*, 6.

Because sexuality is not discussed in public unless it is heterosexual men discussing sex, Russian identity regarding homosexuality is invisible or not even a defined "identity" at all. It is merely a person's personal preference, a preference that should not be discussed outside of the bedroom.

Some Russian theorists regard Russia as the bridge between Eastern and Western queer identities. Russia does not fall prey to the overly developed, loud West but is more progressive than the underdeveloped East.³⁴ However, this middle-of-the-road identity is no longer feasible, given the recent anti-gay laws. While not explicitly condemning homosexual acts, the laws push queer people more in the direction of governments such as Sierra Leone, where homosexuality is punished by possible life imprisonment. In an interview leading up to the Sochi Olympics, British journalist Andrew Marr questioned President Putin about the recently enacted anti-gay propaganda laws. Andrew Marr highlights the West's displeasure with these laws as a violation of human rights. In response, President Putin states that, "being gay is not a crime unlike in one-third of the world."³⁵ The laws merely prevent homosexuals from advocating their way of life to minors, thus preventing child abuse and pedophilia. Putin goes on to state that in some European countries pedophilia is up for legalization. Putin is referring to a single, very radical, member of the European Parliament, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, who advocates for pederasty as a part

³⁴ Brian James Baer, *Other Russias*, 5

³⁵ Andrew Marr, " Russian President Putin interviewed by Andrew Marr." YouTube video, 16:18, posted by liarpoliticians2, January 19, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2nWENj8gbYY>

of the sexual revolution.³⁶ Citing such radical and extremely unpopular European political philosophies, President Putin asserts that the Western "sexual revolution" is over the top in its mission. Putin then goes on to discuss how Islamic countries have far stricter laws regarding homosexuality than Russia. Putin diverts Western criticism by using extreme Western radicals to present his laws as a middle ground between the radically liberal West and the militantly conservative East. From this stance, Putin justifies his anti-gay legislation as a middle-of-the-road compromise between East and West while also policing the activity of sexual minorities in the Russian Federation.

President Putin seeks to quell the global gay's appearance in Russia because it detracts from the productivity of his regime. In Soviet times the collective was seen as the highest goal. Sexuality was transcended in order to benefit the state. Men worked with men in large groups, and the disparity in gender roles were emphasized. Therefore, blurring the line between homosocial and homosexual bonds can distort the ideal Russian collective mission. According to Baer, "post-Soviet Russia reveals two fundamental oppositions: the spiritual versus the physical and the homosocial (all male-male relations) versus the homosexual (male-male sexual relations)."³⁷ While the Soviet period is indeed over, the ideology of the collective is still engrained in the overall mentality of everyday Russian people. Therefore the global gay can be seen as a

³⁶ J.C. von Krempach, "European Parliament member promotes pedophilia as a part of the sexual revolution," *Life Site*, Published April 29, 2013, <https://www.lifesitenews.com/opinion/european-parliament-member-promotes-pedophilia-as-part-of-the-sexual-revolu>

³⁷ Brian James Baer, *Other Russias*, 8.

threat, uprooting the collective in order to pursue individual, selfish, sexual gains that hinder the progress of the state. Herein lies the fundamental problem. The idea of homosexuality in post-Soviet Russia is not a question of identity but more a question of political theory. If the global gay is recognized in Russia, what does this very pronounced identity undermine in the Putin regime? These laws that have been enacted are not explicitly denying homosexuals the right to act on their desires, so what is Putin's angle? The anti-gay legislation is prohibiting the widespread dissemination of the global gay's desire to seek out social contact and discourse with other homosexuals. These laws are more progressive than those of Uganda or Sierra Leone, where one is sentenced to prison or even death for being openly homosexual. So why is Russia receiving all this attention from the Western media?

The laws against homosexuality that have recently made international headlines are not new. Jessica Stern, executive director of the New York-based International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, states that Russia is, "getting more attention today because of the level of progress that we've seen in other parts of the world."³⁸ While this is partly true, it also has to do with politics as well as spheres of influence. As Karen Dawisha points out, Russia has the economic capabilities to be on par with Western nations in terms of infrastructure, economic equality, educational resources and overall well-

³⁸ Uri Friedman, "How Sochi Became the Gay Olympics," *The Atlantic*, January 28, 2014, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/01/how-sochi-became-the-gay-olympics/283398/>

being.³⁹ However, due to Putin's vertical of power, the upper echelon elite reaps all the benefits and power while the general public continues to suffer. The economic resources that Russia possesses coupled with the corruption of Putin's regime are why Western countries are giving these anti-gay laws so much attention. Increased queer acceptance in a country signifies modernity and liberalism. Russia has all the resources and potential to achieve this, yet the Kremlin is persistent in its effort to curtail queer acceptance in Russia.

Western governments seek to correct this inequality and do away with corruption, but Putin stubbornly denies criticism from the West, demonstrating that he is the one in charge. Authoritarian regimes such as Putin's Russia use political institutions and minority scapegoats any way they can in order to consolidate their power, rallying their people around nationalism. However, from a Russian perspective, the heavy Western criticism can also be seen as forced cultural imperialism. The West is aware that Russia is a future political powerhouse that has immense economical wealth. Fearful of this, the West seeks to confine Russia to the Western ways of development and democracy. Part of this democratic model is sexual liberation and equal rights, regardless of sexual orientation. As I discuss in the next chapter, Putin's regime derives its power from patriarchal rule. Non-traditional gender roles such as homosexuality do not fit into a patriarchal society. By associating queer people, or more specifically the global gay, with the cultural imperialism of the West, President Putin defies

³⁹ Karen Dawisha, *Putin's Kleptocracy, Who Owns Russia?*, (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2014), 317.

Western intervention, promotes Russian nationalism and delegitimizes identity politics within the Russian Federation.

One way in which President Putin is able to create a homophobic Russia is by using the global gay as a scapegoat for Russia's problems. Using queer history to his advantage, Putin uses the HIV/AIDS epidemic as well as pedophilia to link gay men with the fear and sinfulness associated with HIV/AIDS and pedophilia. Dennis Altman asserts that discourse regarding the HIV/AIDS epidemic is a key marker of not only the gay rights movement but the identity of the visible homosexual. This is in no way saying that to be gay directly correlates to having AIDS, but under the Putin regime, anti-gay propaganda suggests just that. In Altman's essay he states that:

It is clear that the language of HIV/AIDS control, surveillance, and education has been a major factor in spreading the notion of 'gay identity' and in facilitating the development of gay consciousness, as it has also contributed to the creation of the self-conscious identities of 'sex workers' and 'People With AIDS' (PWA's). It is impossible to know how far the dispersal of western-style gay identities would have occurred without AIDS, which has opened both space and resources for gay organizing and increased western influence through surveillance, objectification, and shaping of sexuality.⁴⁰

This "gay consciousness" is the exact consciousness that Putin's regime is using to undermine LGBTQ rights. The AIDS epidemic was a tragedy that occurred in the 1980s and affected many gay men throughout the world. However, education regarding the issue has allowed for safer sex practices to be more commonly practiced within the global gay community. Regardless, a stigma associates all

⁴⁰ Dennis Altman, "Global Gaze/Global Gays," 425.

gay men with AIDS, and the Putin regime perpetuates this stigma, pitting uneducated Russian citizens against the global gay.

Russian Anti-Gay Militia Groups

In a recent example of Russian anti-gay hysteria, a monument to Steve Jobs in St. Petersburg was taken down after Apple's CEO, Tim Cook, publicly announced that he is gay. This example of anti-gay sentiment was then bolstered by legislator Vitaly Milonov who asked, "What can he bring us? The Ebola virus, AIDS, gonorrhea? All of them over there have promiscuous relations. Ban him forever."⁴¹ While the assertions made by Vitaly Milonov use the same faulty logic as Putin's comments on Daniel Cohn-Bendit, Milonov's comments are backed by a documented HIV/AIDS epidemic within the gay community. Using the Ebola outbreak, Milonov instills fear in the Russian population pinning this disease, which is unrelated to gay sex, on the queer community. Repeated memories of politicians like Milonov repeating on national television that gay people are promiscuous pederasts or disease spreading humans toys with a population's psyche. If you hear something enough times, you start to believe it, and since almost all Russian media stations are state-owned, there is not much variance in opinions. Therefore, statements such as Milonov's may seem absurd to Western ears but if one is exposed to the same blanketed, media statements then public sentiments will undoubtedly shift.

⁴¹ Cavan Sieczkowski, "Politician Wants Tim Cook Banned From Russia, Says He Might Bring Ebola," *The Huffington Post*, November 3, 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/11/03/tim-cook-russia-ebola_n_6096162.html?

By enforcing legislation that scares queer people away from "coming out" as "visible" homosexuals, the state gives off an illusion that homosexuality in fact does not exist in Russia. By creating this gap between the West and Russia, the objective is to denigrate the homosexual, making them a symbol for everything evil and then attributing that to the West. While the assertion that Tim Cook should be banned from Russia because he is gay and will consequently bring Ebola into Russia is absurd, the psychological implications of the assertion by Vitaly Milonov work in the legislators favor. Since the anti-gay propaganda laws were unanimously endorsed in the Russian Duma, all politicians seemingly agree on the issue. This unanimity then trickles down from politicians to the local level. Anti-gay militia groups have formed in Russia that police gay visibility on the local level. These groups terrorize gay men through gay dating and hookup sites such as grindr. The mission statements of these militia groups state that they are protecting Russia from pederasts but in actuality they are merely terrorizing gay youth. While these fragmented militia groups commit illegal, violent acts against gay Russians, Russian authorities seem to look the other way when it comes to gay bashing. Gay bashing harassment claims are not reported often because a person basically has to come out as gay in order to report one. The constant, one-sided media attention these anti-gay laws have received has spawned local level militia groups that terrorize gay men and prevent gay rights movements from making any headway.

In the recently released British documentary *Hunted: The War Against Gays in Russia*, gays are seen as targets of the state and state-sponsored

organizations such as Parents of Russia and Occupy Pedophilia. The documentary is separated into three distinct sections: an explanation of the position of both Parents of Russia and Occupy Pedophilia, the story of the empathetic, LGBTQ-friendly schoolteacher Ekaterina, who fights for the equal rights of the LGBTQ community and then the lack of resolution regarding LGBTQ rights in Russia.⁴² The opening scenes of the film introduce Timur, a "family man." In his spare time he works for the organization Parents of Russia. He believes homosexuals to be "psychologically unstable," and later goes on to promote homophobia in Russia. One scene depicts a seemingly innocent man handing out gifts outside a St. Petersburg Queer Film Festival. The "gifts" are actually pamphlets urging queer people to commit suicide.⁴³ This scene sets the stage for the climate of fear for gay people in Russia that pervades the documentary. Organizations such as Occupy Pedophilia and Parents of Russia are "a network of loosely organized groups of Russian ultra-nationalists" that assaults LGBTQ youth by "creating fake social media profiles and gay personals to attract unsuspecting victims."⁴⁴ These ultra-nationalist Russian groups work in the same way that Putin's officials in his inner circle function. They police fringe society members that go against the Kremlin's interests. The anti-gay laws are vague in that they only outlaw gay propaganda, but these ultra-nationalists work on a lower level to police the Internet and everyday instances of homosexuality in Russian society.

⁴² Ben Steele, (Director), (2014). *Hunted: War Against Gays in Russia* [Online video]. Retrieved from www.hbogo.com

⁴³ *ibid.*

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

The Putin regime has worked hard to control every aspect of Russian society, but the Internet is a difficult entity to control. These hateful militia groups such as Occupy Pedophilia and Parents of Russia have worked to effectively police the Internet, preventing gay visibility and instilling fear in all LGBTQ members. One group even posted on the Internet that they are offering a bounty equivalent to \$150 US dollars to anyone who outs any LGBTQ teachers in Russia.⁴⁵ Not only do these groups instill fear within the LGBTQ community but they also incentivize the outing of Russian teachers. In *Hunted: The War Against Gays in Russia* a gay man named Dima is blind in one eye from being beaten up by one of these anti-gay militia groups. He says that, "gay people are viewed as prey" and that they are treated like animals.⁴⁶ For example, in Novosibirsk an openly gay man was terrorized by another vigilante group who forcibly shoved a glass bottle up his rectum. These vigilante groups occupy cities all over Russia and have a cult following, using pedophilia as their moral platform to commit atrocious acts of violence and humiliation. "The Hatchet" or Maxim Martsinkevich was the leader of Occupy Pedophilia before he was arrested for "inciting ethnic strife."⁴⁷ Maxim Martsinkevich is notorious for making videos in which he lures gay youth to a specified location by using fake online gay chat room profiles. He then proceeds to publicly humiliate these gay youths by

⁴⁵ Brody Levesque, "Russian anti-gay extremists claim recent torture victim has died," *lgbtqnation.com*, August 6, 2013, <http://www.lgbtqnation.com/2013/08/russian-anti-gay-activists-claim-recent-torture-victim-has-died/>

⁴⁶ Steele, *Hunted: War Against Gays in Russia*

⁴⁷ Brody Levesque, "Russian anti-gay extremist sentenced to five years in penal colony." *lgbtqnation.com*, August 17, 2014, <http://www.lgbtqnation.com/2014/08/russian-anti-gay-extremist-sentenced-to-five-years-in-penal-colony/>

filming and interviewing the terrified gay men with a dildo, often humiliating them more by pouring urine on their heads. "The Hatchet" then posts the videos online, which then go viral and subsequently out these gay teens to the whole world. These videos will prevent the tortured teens from ever getting a job. Even though the law forbids it, there is discrimination in the work force based on sexual orientation in Russia. "The Hatchet" was not arrested for terrorizing gay youth; he was arrested for "inciting ethnic strife." As a radical Russian nationalist he also seeks to cleanse Russia from Central Asian migrant workers.⁴⁸ This demonstrates that the Russian authorities are homophobic as well in their inaction. These groups continue to terrorize the gay youth of Russia because the Russian police merely look the other way.

Putin has effectively destroyed any public space that gays occupied before the creation of the anti-gay laws. Masha Gessen highlights how the Internet has developed over the past ten years in Russia but as a series of separate information bubbles.⁴⁹ Local, anti-gay militia groups now control the prevalence of gay visibility in everyday Russian society by policing these information bubbles. Using his KGB training, Putin seeks to control every aspect of dissident culture, including the hopeless gay youth that these local level fascist groups terrorize. The Russian authorities prohibit small protests on the streets by enforcing a law that forbids repeated protests with fines or possible jail

⁴⁸ Brody Levesque, "Russian anti-gay extremist sentenced to five years in penal colony."

⁴⁹ Masha Gessen, *The Man Without a Face: The Unlikely Rise of Vladimir Putin*, (New York, NY: Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 2012), 262.

time.⁵⁰ In the *Hunted* documentary a Human Rights protester is seen protesting the anti-gay propaganda laws on the streets of St. Petersburg but must do so alone because if seen by authorities with another person around him, he can be written up by authorities for inciting a mass demonstration. He tells the documentary crew that the authorities "make me out to be an enemy and criminal to my country."⁵¹ The human rights protester is an enemy of the state, according to Putin's laws, because he disagrees with the government's denial of minority rights.

The outspoken, educated global gay is not welcome in Russia because he seeks to defy the laws preventing an open queer space. The global gay is used as a scapegoat in order to suppress free speech. Their everyday invisibility is shattered given the modern-day, gay dating applications that are geared for meeting other queer people. Information on the Internet wields enormous power for dismantling Putin's corrupt regime but is also used by these Ultranationalist Russian groups as a tool to weed out seemingly invisible gay men in Russia. The documentary ends by arguing that hatred for gay people is all-pervasive, which is untrue amongst the educated, urban Russian population but is mostly accurate among the general Russian populace. Devoid of proper education, these vigilante group members latch onto the oppressive legislation passed by the Russian Duma and act out their unhappiness on the state

⁵⁰ Karoun Demirjian, "Meanwhile in Russia, Putin passes law against protests," *The Washington Post*, 22 July 2014:

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/worldviews/wp/2014/07/22/meanwhile-in-russia-putin-passes-law-against-protests/>

⁵¹ Ben Steele, *The Hunted*.

sanctioned scapegoat. Occupy Pedophilia and Parents of Russia are groups that are either explicitly or implicitly created by the government in order to deflect the poor quality of Russian life for the everyday citizen and allow for a minority group to be scapegoated as the enemy, similar to the Russian pogroms of the nineteenth century.

Sex Tourism & Social Racism of the West

Another instance as to why the global gay is a threat to Vladimir Putin not only ties into his political philosophy but also Western imperialism. As Altman discusses, the colonial script of superiority/inferiority applies to sex tourism as well. Altman discusses that Southeast Asia is lauded as a liberal gay haven, one where young Asian boys throwing themselves at older white, Western men.⁵² Many non-Westernized countries face the issue of sex tourism. Russia is not exempt from this category despite its raised status among the international community. After homosexuality was de-criminalized during the Yeltsin Era, gay bathhouses sprouted up once again, creating a homosexual space that benefitted from sex tourism. As the Russian Federation grew, so did the appearance of public gay venues. While creating state revenue under a new capitalist society, the concept of sex tourism for a non-Western nation creates an inferiority complex. Putin seeks to rid Russia of this inferiority complex.

President Putin uses Western Russophobia in order to alienate Russia from the West and to expose the imperialist nature of the West. In an article titled, "Bikinis and Babas: The Gender Subtext of Cliches About Ukraine" Heather

⁵² Altman, "Global Gaze/Glocal Gays," 417.

McRobie talks about the over-simplified stereotypes Western politicians and media use to belittle Russia and Ukraine. During the Soviet period Western media poked fun at the Russian babushka, or old grandmother who sells fruit on the street and instructs younger generations on how to live their lives. The post-Soviet trope used by Western media is the "mafia-state" trope: the gangsters that rule over the lawless society of post-Soviet Russia. The article then discusses the sexism of the West regarding the Russian mail-order bride. American men see Russian women as beautiful, hyper-sexualized creatures, not yet tarnished by Western feminism.⁵³ Men of the West drool over this idealized image of what a woman should be and ship them to America in order to marry them. This is not only social racism but also a form of sex tourism that has cultural imperialist connotations. This culturally imperialistic sex tourism can be applied to the gay realm as well. As discussed previously, under the Yeltsin and Putin era gay clubs, bathhouses, sex clubs and public venues sprouted up under the newly capitalist society of contemporary Russia. These sex industries are distinctly Western, and as Altman points out, have come about, "through large cultural forces and through the influence of individuals."⁵⁴ The West's sex tourism fetishization of distant cultures implies inferiority and fascination with an "other." President Putin does not want Russia to be seen as an inferior "other" and therefore does not want Western sex tourism and cultural values infiltrating his country. Each

⁵³ Heather McRobie, "Bikinis and Babas: The Gender Subtext of Cliches About Ukraine," *opendemocracy.net*, January 26, 2015, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/heather-mcrobie/bikinis-and-babas-gender-subtext-of-clich%C3%A9s-about-ukraine>

⁵⁴ Altman, "Global Gays," 427.

time the West criticizes Russia for being a "backwards" nation Putin is able to add fuel to the fire. President Putin does not see Russia as a backwards nation and seeks to restore prestige and honor to his country. Therefore, by highlighting the degeneration of morals in the West, he can claim that homosexual rights are a Western issue that has no place in Russia.

Conclusion

If the global gay is permitted in Russia, then strong Russian nationalism has the potential to be uprooted by the queer, Western individual. Seen as socially mobile, cosmopolitan, grossly liberal in values and non-traditional, the global gay threatens Putin's consolidation of a controlled, patriarchal state. Therefore, the Putin administration has enacted laws in order to prevent the global gay from ever attaining a political voice in Russia. Occupy Pedophilia and Parents of Russia patrol the Internet and provoke terror in the Russian gay, discouraging them from ever forming a cohesive community. Using the LGBTQ community as a political scapegoat also promotes nationalism around a common hatred for a Western "enemy." Putin seeks to determine his own path for Russian progress, devoid of Western intervention. This self-sufficiency is a characteristic of what contemporary Russian masculinity has come to mean and is discussed in chapter four. Therefore, using the global gay as a political scapegoat is an effective way of pitting Russians against the West. Detaching Russia from the West also allows Putin to effectively control every aspect of Russian society, delegitimizing any opposition or Western criticism. These anti-gay laws were not put in place because President Putin personally hates gay

people. They were simply enacted in order to facilitate Putin's consolidation of complete control, using Russian nationalism and strong patriarchal values as his main weapons.

CHAPTER THREE

The Putin Regime

In order to understand why the global gay poses such a threat to the Putin regime, it is necessary to detail how Vladimir Putin came to power. In Masha Gessen's study, *The Man Without a Face: The Unlikely Rise of Vladimir Putin*, she describes how Vladimir Putin rapidly assumed his power out of the shadows of the Yeltsin Era.⁵⁵ She details Putin's early career, how he rose through the ranks of the KGB, which became the FSB after the fall of the Soviet Union, and how he became president of the newly formed Russian Federation. In his youth Putin was a self-described thug. He didn't care about school and was more focused on being tough. He dreamed of being a KGB officer one day. He grew up in a two-parent household; however, his father was a disabled war veteran and his mother had come very close to starvation during the wartime period. World War II had ravaged Russia of its men and resources, therefore this postwar Soviet Union ideology is very much engrained in Putin's psyche. At the end of World War II there were almost double the amount of women of child-bearing age as there were men in the Soviet Union.⁵⁶ This memory of mass starvation and the disproportionate ratio of women to men explains Putin's stance regarding the "selfishness" of homosexuals. He has defended his actions by saying that the Russian birthrate is diminishing and that Russian families as a

⁵⁵ Gessen, *The Man Without a Face*, 21.

⁵⁶ *ibid*, 45.

whole are in danger of decline.⁵⁷ While the birthrate in Russia has declined over the years, the "selfishness" that Putin associates with homosexuality is a poor answer to Russia's falling birthrates. The tactic of framing homosexuality as a choice that impacts the Russian state is a clear form of anti-western nationalism. The acceptance of homosexuality is seen as an overly liberal, Western concept that does not benefit the production of the state, whether it is the procreation of more Russian citizens or staying within the framework of the ideal Russian family unit that Putin is so keen on promoting. Putin's postwar Soviet memory of the fragmented state of the Russian family does support his criticism of homosexuality and the declining Russian birthrate could possibly be attributed to the increased global acceptance of homosexuality. However, the increase in visibility and acceptance of homosexuality in mainstream culture does not mean that there are more gay people now than there were in postwar Soviet Russia. The real issue at hand is the political implications the global gay has regarding Putin's consolidation of power. The global gay devalues the concept of the ideal Russian family by deviating from the traditional family archetype. This traditional family model is not only how Russian birthrates will hypothetically rise but is also an easy way for President Putin to create a homogeneous Russian society that supports his conservative, patriarchal governing system.

Putin's adolescence was marked by extreme diligence and ambition. In high school he knocked on the FSB Headquarters door asking for employment.

⁵⁷ Harvey Fierstein, "Russia's Anti-Gay Crackdown." *The New York Times*, July 21, 2013: <http://www.nytimes.com//2013/07/22/opinion/russias-anti-gay-crackdown.html> (last accessed 8 November 2014).

They said that they choose who works for them, not the other way around. However, the FSB clearly stated that studying law and languages was a good place to start one's career. Not typically a good student, he studied hard his last few years of high school and miraculously was admitted to Leningrad State University. Gessen asserts that it was possible that the KGB ensured that Putin would get in, due to his early expressed interest in working for the KGB.⁵⁸ After graduating from Leningrad State University Putin joined the KGB in 1975 and worked his way up through the ranks. Putin was later deployed to work as a KGB officer in Dresden, Germany. Putin's job during his term in East Germany was to collect information about "the enemy," meaning the West. This applied specifically to United States military bases in West Germany, which proved to be impenetrable bastions of intelligence and information.⁵⁹ While little is known about his deployment in East Germany, seeing as the KGB functioned as a secret police to monitor Western democracy infiltration, the mission statement was clear:

Dissidents, suspected dissidents, and those leaning toward activity that might be considered dissident were the objects of constant surveillance and harassment. Putin claims not to have taken part in anti-dissident work but has shown in interviews that he was thoroughly familiar with the way it was organized, probably because he was lying about not having done it.⁶⁰

While "dissident" mainly referred to "political dissidents" of the time and not specifically, the global gay, seeing as the global gay had not been established as a

⁵⁸ Gessen, *Man Without a Face*, 57.

⁵⁹ *ibid*, 63.

⁶⁰ *ibid*, 61.

concept yet, Putin was still being primed in the ways of surveillance and harassment, concepts that are so vital to the anti-gay movement in Russia today.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, Putin's position as a Soviet KGB officer no longer existed. Gessen notes that this point in Putin's career was one of immense instability. His identity, everything he had ever known, was destroyed. No longer a believer in communism, Putin now placed his faith in institutions. His loyalty lay with the KGB and the empire it served, no longer the USSR but now the Russian Federation.⁶¹ Herein lies the heart of the problem. As his political career blossomed, he still had the fundamental tenets of the KGB philosophy when he came to power. The topic of LGBTQ rights and the global gay that Brian James Baer so beautifully applies in his detailed study, *Other Russias*, did not fit into this type of rule. Loyalty to the state does not come from individual-minded people, especially those who do not seek to biologically reproduce for the state's benefit. Therefore, from the onset, the global gay was doomed to be seen as a bourgeois identity.

Through political maneuvering, political alliances and the help of the FSB, Putin became the Acting President of the Russian Federation in 1999. Gessen argues that once Putin came to power, he ruled Russia using the same principles that he cherished: the Soviet Union and its KGB.⁶² Gessen describes the Putin regime as "a closed system, a system built on total control--especially control over the flow of information and the flow of money. It would be a system that

⁶¹ *ibid*, 133.

⁶² *ibid*, 133.

aimed to exclude dissent and would crush it if it appeared."⁶³ In order to achieve total control, Putin had to do away with systems that were in effect when he took power, mainly the power of the oligarchs and free speech within the media. As Karen Dawisha points out in her study, *Putin's Kleptocracy*, Putin created a system of "vertical power," giving the Presidential Administration all the power. She asserts that Putin consolidated power by "engaging in criminal behavior, controlling the legal system and the media, and, above all, maintaining group cohesion through combinations of threats and rewards."⁶⁴ In the following pages, I will explain how Putin managed to do this and apply this to the motives behind the anti-gay laws of 2013.

Putin's upbringing through the KGB and then FSB taught him the inner workings of Russian politics and therefore, he realized that a loyal, "inner circle" of ambitious politicians and businessmen was needed in order to consolidate his own power. When Putin came to power in May of 2000, Russia was ruled by the oligarch elite. Yeltsin was not able to contain the oligarchs who capitalized on state-owned property after the collapse of the Soviet Union, therefore the oligarch elite of Russia ran the Russian government, not the Russian president. Upon Vladimir Putin's inauguration, a document titled, *Reform of the Administration of the President of the Russian Federation* was leaked to the newspaper *Kommersant*.⁶⁵ In the document, the founding Putin regime detailed how the Kremlin's Presidential Administration would increase political control.

⁶³ *ibid*, 134.

⁶⁴ Dawisha, *Putin's Kleptocracy*, 8.

⁶⁵ *Reform of the Administration of the President of the Russian Federation* cited in Dawisha, *Putin's Kleptocracy*, 252.

It basically stated that allegiance must first and foremost go towards the state and that elections, mass media and opposition movements would be controlled. This authoritarian regime was founded under the guise of what Putin grew up to understand as patriotism. Putin proceeded to employ a top down or "vertical of power" type government in which the center of power resides with the presidential administration, which then appoints government officials all the way down to regional governors that are loyal to the Kremlin. Putin realized that the Russian oligarchs needed the Kremlin to protect their private interests. Therefore, if they remained loyal to him and donated vast shares to his political motives, he guaranteed their protection. If they were disloyal and combative, he either had them killed or removed their power-wielding abilities through blackmail or scandal.

Control of the Media

Control of Russia's mass media was a big part of President Putin's consolidation of power. Boris Berezovsky, media tycoon and former owner of the NTV and ORT journalistic media outlets, was blackmailed by President Putin to give up his shares of his media outlets because, on a few occasions, they painted the President in a negative light. In the trial of *Berezovskiy v. Abramovich*, Putin personally accused Berezovsky of corrupting the information presented on his media platforms. In response to the *Kursk* incident, where a submarine off the coast of the Arctic city of Murmansk sank on August 12, 2000 while Putin was vacationing in Sochi, Berezovsky's media outlets portrayed Putin in an inhumane, unflattering light. This free speech blunder by Berezovsky cost him

his media shares. Putin threatened Berezovsky with imprisonment if he did not sell his shares to his company.⁶⁶ At the trial, it was made clear that Putin had no monetary interests in acquiring Berezovsky's ORT shares. He merely wanted, "Mr Berezovsky and Mr. Patarkatsishvili to leave management of the company and relinquish control, stop influencing the content of the programmes."⁶⁷ This is just one example of many of how Putin threatened or blackmailed any Kremlin oppositionists out of power by enforcing the "law." The mass media of both the Soviet period and contemporary Russia both function in a similar way, "State-run news relies on its authoritative voice to shape the news agenda and frame key societal issues (or to virtually ignore some, such as the fighting in Chechnya or endemic bribery at the highest levels)." ⁶⁸ Within Putin's first year of presidency he had done away with any potential opposition control of state assets or media and implemented loyal Kremlin cronies from the presidential administration level all the way down to the local level.

Controlling the Political Opposition

The assassination of Boris Nemtsov, notorious critic and oppositionist to Putin, is a more recent example of how Putin uses terror, violence and coercion to establish his "managed democracy." Boris Nemtsov was gunned down on February 27th, 2015, with four shots to the back as he walked across a bridge

⁶⁶ *ibid*, 290.

⁶⁷ Testimony in the Berezovsky vs. Abramovich Trial November 8, 2011 cited in Dawisha, *Putin's Kleptocracy*, 83.

⁶⁸ Sarah Oates, "Media and Political Communication in the Digital Age: Developments in Russian Politics," *Developments in Russian Politics*, Chapter 8, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 135.

next to the Kremlin.⁶⁹ On September 1st, 2014 Boris Nemtsov published an op-ed piece titled, "This is Vladimir Putin's War" in regards to the war in Ukraine. Boris Nemtsov argues that, "Putin is trying to dissect Ukraine and create in the east of the country a puppet state, Novorossiya, that is full economically and politically controlled by the Kremlin."⁷⁰ Nemtsov goes on to detail the selfish political motives behind the invasion of Eastern Ukraine by Putin and states that waging war in Ukraine is nothing but a ploy by Putin to achieve "lifelong despotism."⁷¹ The op-ed piece appealed to the families of soldiers who had lost their relatives during the invasion of Ukraine. Opposition towards the invasion of Ukraine gained steam under the leadership of Boris Nemtsov. Despite this thoughtful op-ed piece by Boris Nemtsov the Russian media depicts the invasion of Ukraine as a predominantly smart, tactical move on the part of Putin, a political move that will rightfully restore a part of Ukraine that is comprised of majority ethnic Russians and has strong economic resources. This all-too-convenient killing of a leading figure in the political opposition to Putin is just another example of how Putin seeks to assert his total control of the Russian political arena. While Boris Nemtsov's assassination cannot definitively be traced back to Putin's ordering of Nemtsov's assassination, the predominantly state-monopolized Russian media depicted Nemtsov's convictions unfavorably and indirectly led to his assassination.

⁶⁹ Ben Quinn, "Boris Nemtsov's murder: Putin 'politically responsible' - daughter," *The Guardian*, Published March 12, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/12/putin-politically-responsible-for-boris-nemtsov-daughter>

⁷⁰ Boris Nemtsov, "'This is Vladimir Putin's war.'" op-ed *Ukrainskaya Pravda*, Published September 1, 2014.

⁷¹ Boris Nemtsov, "'This is Vladimir Putin's war.'"

On paper, political parties and politicians are allowed to disagree with Putin's presidential decisions but Russians are well aware that disagreeing with Putin on a national stage has grave consequences. While the assassination of Boris Nemtsov has not been directly linked to the Kremlin, the official investigation of this murder has been assigned to the same official that prosecuted oil tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky.⁷² This most likely means that the source of who ordered the assassination will most likely not be found. This type of corruption allows political assassinations to be seen as relatively normal, thus scaring the political opposition into never voicing their true complaints. Political scientist from the University of Wisconsin--Madison, Scott Gehlbach highlights that,

The more I think about Nemtsov's murder, the more worried I am about what comes next. Historical experience, in Russia and elsewhere, demonstrates that political terror doesn't require direction from the top. It simply needs a strong signal that terror is okay. And one could hardly ask for a stronger signal than the assassination of a prominent opposition activist a block from the Kremlin.⁷³

The fact that Putin has a virtual monopoly on the Russian media allows him to be portrayed in a mostly favorable manner, almost justifying the assassinations of political oppositionists. Boris Nemtsov's criticisms of Putin's heartless nature regarding the easy disposal of human lives is the same way in which Boris Berezovsky soon lost his political importance. While not as dramatic as four bullets to the back, Berezovsky's depiction of Putin as an emotionless, war-hungry tyrant regarding the *Kursk* submarine incident led to him being coerced

⁷² Joshua Tucker, "What does Boris Nemtsov's murder mean for Russia?" *All the Russia's Blog*, NYU Jordan Center, Published March 3, 2015, <http://us5.campaign-archive2.com>

⁷³ *ibid.*

by Putin into giving up all his shares of his media platforms. Acts of political terrorism, in whatever form they may be, are becoming more normalized in contemporary Russia, therefore demonstrating Putin's authoritarian will and power.

By using blackmail and FSB-ordered murders of any opposition players, Putin has established complete control of the Russian political system. He has created a pseudo-democracy that abides by the rule of law with the understanding that the law is always implemented in favor of the Kremlin.⁷⁴ Putin extracted wealth from the state and rewarded his loyal cronies dutifully. Oligarch control of state property is now Kremlin controlled but still functions in the same way it did during the Yeltsin era. A notable elite, Putin's inner circle, controls the country's vast amount of wealth, while the rest of the country is struggling to make ends meet. Russia has the highest percentage of billionaires of any country but also has wealth disparity equivalent to the country of Nigeria. The Putin regime enforces high taxes on the Russian population even though average income levels do not match the rate of taxation. The healthcare fund in Russia is heavily depleted and general quality of life is significantly low. All this inequality and suffering has sparked sharp discontentedness amongst the general Russian population. This is where the global gay and anti-gay legislation come into play. According to the Pew Research Center survey, "The Global Divide on Homosexuality," the wealth of a country as well as the religiosity of the country's population directly affects a population's attitudes towards the

⁷⁴ Dawisha, *Putin's Kleptocracy*, 305.

acceptance or rejection of homosexuality in society. Russia is an outlier in both regards because the wealth of the country does not coincide with other countries with anti-gay attitudes.⁷⁵ (See Appendix A & B). Since the wealth of Russia does not match the attitudes its population should have regarding societal gay tolerance, it means either the wealth of the country is highly concentrated among the wealthy elite or that Putin's regime actively tries to discourage gay-friendly attitudes in Russia. Both happen to be the case, given the evidence supporting Putin's inner circle elite as well as the legislation passed in the State Duma.

Putin promotes homophobia in Russia in order to distract from the corruption within his own government. The Kremlin is able to pin a multitude of societal issues gone wrong on the Western gay. For example, health care prices in Russia are exorbitantly high. Quality healthcare for the general public is hard to come by, therefore the Kremlin frames the topic of disease such as AIDS and Ebola around a minority that historically speaking, has struggled with the HIV epidemic. Using the gay minority as a scapegoat, the Kremlin uses a fear tactic to blame poor healthcare on disease epidemics such as HIV. The easiest target for this fear tactic happens to be the LGBTQ community, specifically gay men. This tactic further bolsters anti-Western sentiments in Russia, since Western countries have progressive attitudes toward the LGBTQ community. In accordance to the declining birthrate in Russia, the Kremlin frames this issue

⁷⁵ The Pew Research Center, "The Global Divide on Homosexuality," *pewglobal.org*, Published June 4, 2013, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2013/06/04/the-global/divide-on/homosexuality/>

around the selfishness and unpatriotic nature of gay relationships. The blaming of the gay community for all of the Kremlin's woes and greed also functions as a scapegoat to legitimize increased aggression and homicide by groups such as Occupy Pedophilia and Parents of Russia.

President Putin handcrafted his managed democracy long before increased aggression towards queer people was taking place. After Putin solidified his control of the media and the oligarchs, the Kremlin embarked on a massive public relations campaign to beef up Putin's image. This Putin hysteria created by the Kremlin paints President Putin as the manly Russian savior that defeated the oligarchs, did away with corruption in Russia and restored Russia's world image to that of a world superpower. President Putin even joined the Western governments in fighting the war against Islamic terrorism. The Chechen conflict that came to fruition during Yeltsin's presidency is how Putin decided to combat terrorism. The Chechen people longed to have their autonomous Republic recognized as an independent state from Russia since the predominant religion in Chechnya is Islam not Russian Orthodoxy.⁷⁶ Russia continued to claim Chechnya as a region of Russian territory, unwilling to recognize Chechnya as a sovereign republic. Chechen terrorism in Russia continued to occur during Putin's reign, the most notable instance being the 2002 Moscow theater hostage crisis in which forty to fifty armed, Chechen, Islamist separatists held 850

⁷⁶ "Regions and Territories: Chechnya," *BBC News*, Last Updated November 22, 2011, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/country_profiles/2565049.stm.

Russians hostage in the Dubrovka Theater in October 23, 2002.⁷⁷ As Masha Gessen notes,

Once the hostage-takings occurred, the government task forces acting under Putin's direct supervision did everything to ensure that the crises ended as horrifyingly as possible--to justify continued warfare in Chechnya and further crackdowns on the media and the opposition in Russia and, finally, to quell any possible criticism from the West, which after 9/11, was obligated to recognize in Putin a fellow fighter against Islamic terrorism.⁷⁸

Acts of terrorism in Russia committed by Chechens were swiftly followed by massive Russian airstrikes that obliterated large parts of Chechnya, killing thousands of people. Putin was determined to crush dissident groups that tried to mess with his vision of Russia. He then exaggerated the danger the Chechen rebels posed, thus legitimating his tightened control of the media and the freedom to speak out against the regime. These acts of military strength and brutality were just a glimpse of how Putin would continue to crush dissident peoples.

At the beginning of Putin's presidency dissent had not taken the form of the LGBTQ community since Russian and Western views towards homosexuality were somewhat similar. Western society did not support LGBTQ rights as vehemently as they do now, just as the Kremlin had not yet enacted anti-gay laws that infringed upon the rights of LGBTQ members. At the onset of Putin's first term Chechen rebels were the main focus of suppressing dissidents. Just as homosexuals are currently labeled as enemies of the state, the Chechen rebels

⁷⁷ Artem Krechetnikov, "Moscow theatre siege: Questions remain unanswered," *BBC News*, October 24, 2012, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-20067384>

⁷⁸ Gessen, *Man Without A Face*, 218.

were deemed dangerous to the stability of the Russian Federation. If one looks at the way Putin framed the Chechen conflict, it mirrors the anti-gay movement of current day, the main difference being that the LGBTQ community is characterized as an ideological threat to the state, whereas Chechens were deemed a threat to Russian civilian's livelihood. Both work to instill fear in the Russian populace and promote nationalism.

In response to questions asked about the fractured state of Putin's Russia in regards to a series of terrorist attacks that occurred during the Chechen conflict, Putin responded, "We have to act, we have to increase the effectiveness of the government in combating the entire complex of problems facing the country...I am convinced that the unity of the country is the main condition of success in the fight against terrorism."⁷⁹ This rallying cry around nationalism and unity was highly emphasized by the Putin administration to distract his nation's people from the true motives behind the tightening of governmental control. Putin is able to frame political opposition and media criticism as anti-state, a label that does not go over well when citizens are fearful of terrorist attacks or ideological beliefs that differ from their own. Using fear to promote nationalistic sentiment, Putin is able to easily crush dissidents that threaten his political power, which in turn promotes a patriarchal, hegemonic society that is easy to authoritatively rule.

⁷⁹ibid, 190.

CHAPTER FOUR

Sexualization of Politics: Pussy Riot Takes Down the Patriarchy

The phantom of liberty is in heaven,
Gay pride sent to Siberia in chains⁸⁰

The lyrics above are an excerpt from Pussy Riot's famous song, "Mother of God, O Virgin, drive away Putin, a Punk Prayer." Pussy Riot is a punk feminist group that achieved world notoriety through the performance of their song, "A Punk Prayer" in the most prestigious of Russian Orthodox churches, the Cathedral of Christ the Savior. On February 21, 2012, a group of five women, wearing colorful dresses and balaclavas that shielded their faces, marched into the Cathedral and began to play their "Punk Prayer" song that criticized the Putin regime, its ties to the Orthodox Church and its repressive laws that relegate women to the domestic sphere and criminalize homosexuality. From an American point of view I never understood why this protest by a seemingly radical feminist group received such worldwide attention or why these women were then put on trial and sentenced to two years in a penal colony. The reason why it received so much attention is because this act of defiance, in one fell swoop, exposed the underlying corruption of the alliance between the church and state as well as the misogyny and homophobia that the Putin regime seeks to exploit. Pussy Riot may not be the ideal feminism that correctly dismantles Putin's patriarchal rule of Russia, but the international attention their trial

⁸⁰ Amy Scholder *et al.*, *Pussy Riot! A Punk Prayer For Freedom: Letters From Prison, Songs, Poems, and Courtroom Statements Plus Tributes to the Punk Band that Shook the World* (New York City: Feminist Press, 2013), 13.

received highlighted the underlying motives of Putin's church and state alliance. While Pussy Riot's performance was geared towards attaining media exposure, in doing so, their "Punk Prayer" rallied differing groups of queer and feminist activists alike regarding the imprisonment of the Pussy Riot women and subsequently exposed the corrupt motives behind the alliance between church and state.

In Valerie Sperling's study, *Sex, Politics & Putin*, she discusses how the Putin regime uses sex as well as sexuality to gain power and enforce patriarchal rule. In her first two chapters she describes how the notion of gender performance is tied to patriarchal rule. She claims that Putin is depicted by the Kremlin as the "quintessential top," a hyper-masculine ruler that men respect and women desire as their lover. The "quintessential top" is a phrase that places the male sexual role, the insertive partner during sex, as the most powerful and prestigious position, one devoid of vulnerability. Sperling's thesis states that, "the cultural framing of masculinity under patriarchy makes the assertion of masculinity a vehicle for power."⁸¹ This vehicle of power is manifested through sex. Throughout her study, Sperling weaves the "Happy Birthday, Mr. Putin" calendar that scantily clothed Moscow State University girls made to commemorate Mr. Putin's birthday in October 2010.⁸² Sperling highlights how these women, with their sex appeal, reinforce his manliness and therefore his legitimacy to rule over the Russian state. This seemingly comical example of how

⁸¹ Sperling, *Sex, Politics & Putin*, 13.

⁸² "Russian students make racy birthday calendar for Putin," *The Telegraph*, Published October 6, 2010, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/russia/8047282/Russian-students-make-racy-birthday-calendar-for-Putin.html>

authoritative regimes manifest power through sex is actually a perfect example of how Russian politics has been completely sexualized in order to promote hegemonic masculinity.

The term "hegemonic masculinity" was first coined in the mid-1980's as a political and sociological term in reference to homophobia. Masculinity is a set of attributes, characteristics and behaviors that are assumed with being of the male sex. Characteristics such as assertiveness, strength, courage and heterosexuality are all attributes of a masculine man or boy. Gay men have stereotypically not been categorized as possessing these attributes. Therefore, in R. W. Connell's essay, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept" he explains that, "the idea of a hierarchy of masculinities grew directly out of homosexual men's experience with violence and prejudice from straight men."⁸³ Gay men, especially those that are the receptive partner of anal sex, were seen as lesser, feminine men. This term can be applied to contemporary Russia and the cultivation of hegemonic masculinity in Vladimir Putin's Russia. In 19th century Russia, the "active" pederast, or "top" was considered less homosexual than a "passive pederast." This concept was then further exploited by the GULAG prison literature of the Soviet time. Harlow Robinson noted that, "even today, most Russians tend to perceive homosexual couples in rigid 'active-passive' categories that developed and flourished throughout the GULAG."⁸⁴ Hegemonic masculinity has existed in many forms, most notably "machismo," the standard archetype of

⁸³ R. W. Connell, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept," *Gender & Society*, Vol. 19 No. 6., December 2005, 5.

⁸⁴ Baer, *Other Russias*, 37.

how a typical, emotionless, logical man should act. Only in the mid-1980's was it applied to the political realm.

Hegemonic masculinity was distinguished from other masculinities, especially subordinated masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity was not assumed to be normal in the statistical sense; only a minority of men might enact it. But it was certainly normative. It embodied the currently most honored way of being a man, it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men.⁸⁵

While not every man seems to possess this dominating masculinity, President Putin is definitely portrayed as fitting this archetype. If one searches the Internet for pictures of Vladimir Putin, the first few thumbnails that pop up on google images range from Mr. Putin fishing shirtless in army pants to him hunting with a gun to him caressing a leopard at the zoo. If these various images were to be equated to a modern day American reference, Putin would be the exact replica of the Dos Equis commercial man or Chuck Norris. All these men have one identifier in common and that is that they ooze manliness and that sexually attractive women flock to them. In 2014, artist Evgeny Feldman commemorated Putin by curating, "The 12 Labors of Putin." In each "labor" the artist shows Putin defeating a current issue that plagued the Russian state. In response to the sanctions placed on Russia by the US, EU, Canada and Japan, Putin is depicted as Hercules severing the heads of the Lernaean hydra. The head of the United States hydra is depicted as already severed as it bleeds out beneath Putin's (Hercules') feet (Appendix C).⁸⁶ While the Internet has inevitably disrupted the ability to

⁸⁵ Connell, "Hegemonic Masculinity," 5.

⁸⁶ Katie Zavadski, "12 Labors of Putin," *nymag*, October 6, 2014, <http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2014/10/putin-birthday-present-hercules-art-show.html>

hide the mass corruption that plagues Putin's Russia, the Kremlin has found a way to use publicity to their advantage. By playing up Putin's manly invincibility, the Kremlin's PR groups are trying to restore the stereotypical autocratic, Russian tsar of old. This authoritarian figurehead that the Kremlin has magnificently constructed embodies the authoritarian power of the Russian tsars, the work ethic and oneness of state of the Soviet times that also is well versed in modern day capitalism.

Since perestroika, many Russians are well aware of the corruption that plagues their country. Anna Temkina explains the radical shift in the sexualization of politics that followed the fall of the Soviet Union:

Since the state and capitalism have become one and the same thing, the government needs to be seductive--to not be like the Soviets; there was no profit there. Commodification and sexualization--this is also an anti-Soviet phenomenon. Putin is anti-Soviet, even if today's political structures are centralized and similar to (those of the Soviet era).⁸⁷

By framing the new regime in a sexualized manner, Putin is commodifying himself, using his public image to gain votes based on sex appeal. A good example of this is how Prime Minister Medvedev is comparatively depicted to President Putin. Medvedev took over as President of the Russian Federation in May of 2008. Despite his presidential position, most educated Russians were aware that Medvedev merely worked as a puppet president to Putin's rule. Elizabeth Wood notes that, "Medvedev was 'feminized' during the faux campaign as a means to highlight Putin's macho image."⁸⁸ While Putin is shown shooting

⁸⁷ Valerie Sperling, *Sex, Politics & Putin*. Interview by author with Anna Temkina, St. Petersburg, June 14, 2012. 63.

⁸⁸ Elizabeth Wood cited in Sperling, *Sex, Politics, & Putin*, 24-25.

Kalashnikovs and hunting in Siberia, Medvedev is seen meeting with a gathering of mothers and visiting sheep farms as well as maternity hospitals.⁸⁹ If rigidly defined homosexual roles were to be applied to the Putin/Medvedev team, Medvedev would be the passive partner to the active, more masculine Putin. This juxtaposition of contemporary Russian presidents gives President Putin more power, demonstrating that he is the unquestionable, masculine president that is needed to govern Russia authoritatively.

The quintessential "top" that Sperling discusses is the Russian "muzhik." In nineteenth-century Russian, a "muzhik" referred to a Russian peasant. In modern day Russia the definition of a muzhik has changed. It no longer connotes one's social status but the ideal masculinity. A modern day "muzhik" is a manly man who does not express feelings, believes women to be purely sexual objects relegated to the domestic sphere, is both economically and self-independent, and is a vigorous and strong man.⁹⁰ "A 'muzhik' does not agree with the liberal values of political correctness; sexism and homophobia are not considered faults in the (post-Soviet) environment."⁹¹ If we are to abide by the working definition of a "real man" or "muzhik," Putin treads a fine line between an insecure exhibitionist and the archetypal "muzhik." A "real man" would not parade his half-naked body as a PR stunt because the "real man" does not desire attention. The reserved nature of a real man is paradoxically what gains him attention.

⁸⁹ *ibid*, 30.

⁹⁰ Oleg Riabov and Tatiana Riabova, "The Remasculinization of Russia?" *Problems of Post-Communism*, (61:2, 2014), 26.

⁹¹ Sperling, *Sex, Politics & Putin*, 37.

Putin's highly sexualized image cannot help but display homoerotic undertones. Igor Kon asserts that, "when the male body is objectivized and made available to the gaze, it loses its phallic armor and becomes vulnerable."⁹² How then does President Putin confront this plausible truth? By signing off on a law that bans homosexual propaganda. If scantily clothed, sexually appealing men were to make a calendar with the same statements as the women in the "Happy Birthday Mr. Putin" Calendar it would undoubtedly diminish his "muzhik" image. If other men were to objectify this sexy Mr. Putin persona that is played up by the Kremlin, then Putin would undoubtedly lose some of his hegemonic masculinity and therefore lose some of his hegemonic power. However, this action is banned in Russia, therefore Putin is able to flaunt his muscular old torso freely and is immune to any homosexual criticism because discussion of homosexuality is banned on a national level. To combat any suggested homosexual undertones, Putin has his trusted group of sexy fan girls who sing songs praising his power and manliness. In a recent song devoted to Putin, Novosibirsk singer who goes by the stage name of Mashani sings мой путин or "My Putin." In this ode to Putin, Mashani starts off the song wearing bright red lipstick, a red, white and blue dress. "My Putin" is a song praising Putin's fearlessness about going to war with Ukraine and how manly and sexy he is. She sings that she can never forget Putin and that she wants to go "somewhere" with him. Not only does this song highlight Putin's manly physique but it also highlights his manly prowess regarding the annexation of Crimea.

⁹² Baer, *Other Russias*, 52.

Later in the video Mashani is wearing a yellow and light blue dress, signifying the Ukrainian flag, while she sings in a dark, brick-walled room with no light. By the end of the video the yellow-and-blue dressed Mashani is freed from the dark room symbolizing the annexation of Crimea.⁹³ The message of the video is pretty clear: Putin is an all-knowing, brave, strong man who is fearless when it comes to war. However, this is a war that he provoked, which consequently helps create a manlier, "muzhik" image for Putin. The emphasis of attractive women pledging their love for Putin bolsters their own credibility within the regime as patriotic and favorable as well as adds to Putin's image as a powerful, heterosexual leader. The anti-gay laws enacted in 2013 allow for the sexualization of politics from solely a heterosexual lens, therefore establishing Putin's hegemonic masculinity without question.

Russian politics were not always sexualized as they are in America. During Soviet times politics revolved around the Party as a whole entity and crushing dissident movements.⁹⁴ In Putin's Russia, the sexual is political and the assertiveness and dominance of the individual, Vladimir Putin, is now admired. However, the assertiveness and dominance of the "muzhik" male is the only individuality that is lauded. Therefore, homosexuality and feminism are discouraged by the regime because they dismantle patriarchal domination.

Performative masculinity is now linked to the political, therefore being labeled as a homosexual can destroy one's career. "Homosexual panic, Sedgwick

⁹³ Claire Bigg, "New Pro-Putin Song Gets Panned Online," *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, January 29, 2015, <http://www.rferl.org/content/russia-pro-putin-song-mashani/26820282.html>

⁹⁴ Baer, *Other Russias*, 71.

asserts, is 'the most private, psychologized form in which many twentieth-century western men experience their vulnerability to the social pressure of homophobic blackmail.'"⁹⁵ Anti-western critics such as Zhirinovskii claim that "western" notions of homosexuality coupled with identity politics discussed in the previous chapter have ruined undefiled homosocial bonds.⁹⁶ In a way, this is a valid point. The acknowledgement of homosexual archetypes and stereotypes has led both anti- and pro-Kremlin activists and politicians to use homophobic slurs in order to defame their rivals. Unfortunately, homophobic slurs, even aimed towards pro-Putin activists or politicians, play exactly into the hegemonic masculinization of politics that the Putin regime has constructed. While debasing their masculinity by "feminizing" pro-Putinists they in turn play into the misogynistic political structure that the Putin regime has created.

The Merging of Church and State

The post-Soviet reestablishment of a strong Orthodox religious presence is no coincidence. Religion was banned during the Soviet experiment; however, it was brought back during the Yeltsin era. Patronage to the Church increased heavily during the Putin era, amassing millions in "donations" from oligarchs for the reconstruction of Orthodox Churches. Putin coerces the oligarchs that are devoted to him to donate to the Orthodox Church and in turn the Patriarch and Orthodox Church support the Putin presidential administration.⁹⁷ The church's and state's motives also align perfectly. Both seek to rule by enforcing

⁹⁵ *ibid*, 73.

⁹⁶ *ibid*, 89.

⁹⁷ Dawisha, *Putin's Kleptocracy*, 295.

hegemonic masculinity. The Orthodox Church denounces homosexuality and believes that women should be confined to the domestic sphere. In binding church and state, the Patriarch enforces a Godly justification for the anti-gay laws passed by the Duma as well as violence towards queer activists and feminists. The connection between church and state gives the Church more access to the public sphere, which then allows the Church to promote their own agenda, which can then be enacted into law by the state. Sperling notes that,

The Russian Orthodox Church, newly empowered to take public positions after having been largely silenced and coopted by Soviet rulers, did not hesitate to embrace patriarchal and homophobic positions, endorsing amendments to Russian legislation that would dramatically restrict abortion access, while some Russian Orthodox Church personnel lauded hate crimes perpetrated against gays."⁹⁸

These political stances abide by the nationalist Party line the Putin administration seeks to implement. Russia's birthrate is lower than normal, therefore by having the Church legitimate stricter control of abortion rights and homophobic policies, the state is able to enact such laws through godly justification. Putin is able to use this godly justification any way he sees fit because of the mutual loyalty the church and state express for one another. The bond between church and state gives Putin almost unlimited power when it comes to justifying his own agenda when it comes to the public sphere, therefore allowing him to control the Russian people through coercive rule of law that is in line with the church's agenda.

On February 21st, 2012, the feminist punk group Pussy Riot sought to publicly demonstrate this corrupt alliance between church and state. Pussy Riot

⁹⁸ Sperling, *Sex, Politics & Putin*, 74.

performed in one of the most sacred churches in Russian Orthodox history, the Cathedral of Church Christ the Savior in Moscow. In 1931, at Stalin's order, the Cathedral of the Church Christ the Savior was demolished. During Gorbachev's perestroika, the anti-religion campaign of the Soviet times was lifted and open worship was allowed.⁹⁹ In 1990 the Orthodox Church received permission to rebuild the cathedral, which was completed in 1992. The plot of land the church sits on after being demolished was to be a monument to Stalin, which was then turned into a large Soviet swimming pool, thus tarnishing the reputation of the mystical Orthodox Church. The religious significance of the Cathedral of Christ the Savior is even called into question during the Pussy Riot trial by Defense Attorney Violetta Volkova as lacking religious rites because, "the church building belongs to the Foundation of the Cathedral of Christ the Savior. According to its bylaws, the foundation does not have a religious function. In other words, illegal religious rites take place at the Cathedral of Christ the Savior."¹⁰⁰ The members of Pussy Riot debunked the religious significance of the Cathedral when they published an official statement claiming that, "Rather than a place of spiritual life, the Cathedral of Christ the Savior looks more like a business center--banquet halls rented out for exorbitant prices, a dry cleaner and laundry service, and a parking lot protected by security guards."¹⁰¹ This center of the Russian Orthodox Church is where the women of Pussy Riot strategically chose to hold their "Punk

⁹⁹ N. S. Timasheff, "The Anti-Religious Campaign in the Soviet Union," *The Review of Politics*, Cambridge University Press, Vol. 17 No. 3 (Jul., 1955), 329.

¹⁰⁰ Dmitry Uzlaner, "The Pussy Riot Case and the Peculiarities of Russian Post-Secularism," First published in Russian as: Uzlaner, Dmitry. (2013). "Delo 'Pussi raiot' i osobennosti rossiskogo postsekularizma." *Gosudarstvo, religiia, tserkov' v Rossii i za rubezhom* 31 (2): 93-133. 40.

¹⁰¹ Dmitry Uzlaner, "The Pussy Riot Case and the Peculiarities of Russian Post-Secularism," 33.

Prayer" protest, choosing to sing their anti-Putin song on the sacred altar, where women are forbidden from entering. This physical act of defiance quite literally points to the sexism the Orthodox Church promotes.¹⁰²

Pussy Riot works to undermine the Putin regime in the same way that they present themselves: anonymously. Just as Pussy Riot wears balaclavas to conceal their identity, they work to disrupt the "feminist stereotype." The "sextremists" of Ukraine, FEMEN, use their naked women's bodies to draw attention to political issues and dismantle the feminist stereotype as well. However, FEMEN's use of their naked bodies reinforces the notion that women's bodies are the only power that female's hold in the political realm. This is not the type of feminist ideology the women of Pussy Riot use to show their opposition to the Putin regime. Pussy Riot remains fully clothed and virtually anonymous when they stage their protests, which prevents their bodies from being objectivized.¹⁰³ On the other end of the spectrum, Nadya Tolokonnikova, the leading spokesperson of the jailed Pussy Rioters, is beautiful, feminine, intelligent and married, disproving the ignorant stereotype that all feminists are angry lesbians that cannot get a man. In Putin's perfect world women would inhabit only the domestic sphere, spread their legs when their husbands needed, cook, clean, raise the children and vote for whoever their husbands voted for, which would obviously be Putin. Pussy Riot does not abide by this confined gender role. They occupy both spheres of gendered stereotyping, the radical "butch" feminist and the stay at home mother role, to produce a group of women

¹⁰² Sperling, *Sex, Politics & Putin*, 234.

¹⁰³ *ibid*, 241.

that are threatening to the Kremlin. Masha Alyokhina and Nadya Tolokonnikova, the spokeswomen of the group, both have children and are clearly not butch lesbian feminists, but they also are beautiful, feminine women therefore, they embody women that can do it all; women that can take charge of their domestic sphere as well as advocate for equality and critique Putin's authoritarian government. As women that can do it all they threaten Putin's sexist politics by masterfully displaying their insight into the immoral bond between church and state. Thus demonstrating that Russian women are equal to and as competent as Russian men. These empowered women threaten the "muzhik" by questioning his domineering ways. In response to this, Orthodox Church radicals refer to Nadya as a "she-devil" in the documentary "A Punk Prayer."¹⁰⁴ Because she is articulate, beautiful and feminine, she riled up Orthodox believers protesting against Pussy Riot in the Punk Prayer documentary resort to calling Nadya Tolokonnikova the devil. This cheap, religious cop-out mirrors that of a witch trial, invalidating empowered, individual-thinking women by referring to them as the anti-Christ.

Pussy Riot Lyrics

Despite the fact that Pussy Riot does not overtly sexualize their womanly figure, they are still sharply criticized by other feminist sects and activists. Sperling notes that, "In setting forth their ideas, however, Pussy Riot's lyricists made use of traditional gender norms and homophobia, wielding these against

¹⁰⁴ Mike Lerner and Maxim Pozdorovkin, *Pussy Riot: A Punk Prayer*, HBOgo documentary, 91 minutes, June 10, 2013, retrieved from *hbogo.com*.

their opponents in the regime and thereby reinforcing them in ways that other self-identified Russian feminists found problematic at best."¹⁰⁵ Some of the problematic lyrics that feminist theorists seek to critique are below:

It is never too late to become a dominatrix
The bludgeons are loaded, the screaming gets louder,
Stretch the muscles of your arms and legs
The cop is licking you between the legs

In this lyric, the call for aggressive, empowered women is assumed by the use of "dominatrix," however, the last line stating that, "the cop is licking you between the legs" diminishes the power of the first line by stating that the Russian state enforcers are basically raping women. This stanza is meant to be empowering but inadvertently designates women as merely sexual beings. The only way women can get their point across is by becoming dominant, sexual beings. Sperling poses the question of whether this is compliance or critique of the Putin regime but I believe it to be both.¹⁰⁶ Pussy Riot is merely working with the tools they are given. Feminist theorists that criticize Pussy Riot claim their lyrics to be misogynistic. While this may be true, spouting off academic forms of feminism that do not contain patriarchal dominated language does not create worldwide recognition in Russia. Academic theory is beneficial in many ways but not when it comes to anti-Putin opposition. In order to cause a stir in Putin's regime, one must be outrageous and creative using the little free media attention one can access to stir the pot.

Putin Has Pissed Himself:

¹⁰⁵ Sperling, *Sex, Politics & Putin*, 224.

¹⁰⁶ Sperling, *Sex, Politics & Putin*, 239.

Discontent with the culture of male hysteria
 Wild leaderism devours brains
 The Orthodox religion of a hard penis
 Patients are asked to accept conformity

These lyrics, in four lines, perfectly encapsulate the gendered politics that define Putin's regime. Male hysteria refers to not only the obsession of achieving "male-muzhik" status but also the hysteria that surrounds homosexuality. Homophobic militia groups such as members of Occupy Pedophilia hysterically try to weed out openly gay men over the Internet as the ever-present global gay still poses a threat to the Putin regime. The Orthodox Church's newly found state power gives them a "hard penis" or a big head, so to speak, therefore allowing them to legitimize homophobia and sexism through the word of God. "Patients are asked to accept conformity" works in a clever way to show that citizens, on paper, are able to diverge from conformity but in reality they must accept conformity under the Putin regime.

...A pack of bitches from the sexist regime
 Begs forgiveness of a feminist wedge

Death to Prison, Freedom to Protest:

LGBT, feminists, defend the nation!

LGBTQ members and feminists are called upon by Pussy Riot to defend the nation because they are the members of the fringe society, the ones that receive no benefits from hegemonic masculinity.

This sexually aggressive language of Pussy Riot stems from former members' participation in the oppositionist art collective group, "Voina" or "war." Although the group disbanded, Pussy Riot members, specifically Nadya

Tolokonnikova, use similar techniques to combat the regime's sexist laws. In one digital performance piece by Voina, female members went up to female police officers at metro stations in Moscow and forcibly kissed them if the officer responded helpfully to a question they had asked.¹⁰⁷ This theme of combining exposition with sex ties into the broader theme of Voina's mission. Voina realized that politics had been sexualized during Putin's reign and described Russian political life as pornography.¹⁰⁸ In another instance, the Voina group graffitied a giant penis on the drawbridge in St. Petersburg that directly faced the FSB headquarters. This penis symbolized the "fucking" of the FSB.¹⁰⁹ Again, the language of Pussy Riot and Voina is similar in its mission, using the Putin regime's own patriarchal language to expose the injustices of Putin's authoritarian state. Many feminists disagree with this discourse, seeing it as aggressive, violent and playing into Putin's model of patriarchal rule. Regardless of whether or not queer activists or feminists agree with the aggressive lyrics of Pussy Riot, these groups can agree that the imprisonment of the women of Pussy Riot was wrong and that activists and feminists alike must unite under the common goal of dismantling Putin's hegemonic, patriarchal rule.

Russian queer and feminist ideologies have drastically diverged into different subsets over the years. In Laurie Essig's study, *Queer in Russia*, she chronicles her time in post-Soviet Russia as a queer woman. She not only gives personal anecdotes but also describes and analyzes what she sees from a

¹⁰⁷ Masha Gessen, *Words Will Break Cement*, (New York: Riverhead Books, 2014), 58.

¹⁰⁸ Gessen, *Words Will Break Cement*, 35.

¹⁰⁹ *ibid*, 43.

sociological point of view. Her study compares the American way of tackling queer issues and contrasts it with Russian queer issues. A main point of hers is that Russia lacks a solid queer community because queerness is not a clearly identifiable identity. In the US, civil rights movements progressed due to the establishment of identity politics. "The American faith in identity has created the possibility of mass social and political mobilization. Identities as blacks, women, and queers have catalyzed civil rights, feminists, and gay/lesbian movements around the country."¹¹⁰ The lack of established identity politics in Russia is not a mere coincidence. Under the Putin regime, any identity that takes away power from patriarchal rule is an identity that is frowned upon by the Russian government. Herein lies the problem of feminists and LGBTQ activists alike. "As an ideology, feminism reveals and seeks to disassemble the patriarchal hierarchy that values masculinity over femininity and relies on homophobia as an instrument of power."¹¹¹ Many feminists and LGBTQ activists differ in the ways that they want to disassemble this patriarchal hierarchy of values. In post-Soviet Russia many radical queer activist sects critiqued the less radical activists for being too middle-of-the-road. The middle-of-the-road queer activists claimed that radical queer activism does not address the populace and is merely intellectual theory that is not disseminated to the greater Russian populace. These same issues plague differing feminist groups in Russia.

While feminists and queer activists alike have their critiques of the type of feminist language that Pussy Riot uses in their songs, they can all agree that

¹¹⁰ Essig, *Queer in Russia*, 56.

¹¹¹ Sperling, *Sex, Politics & Putin*, 223.

the imprisonment of the Pussy Riot members is unjust.¹¹² This is not the ideal collectivization of anti-Putin activism one would hope for but regardless, their imprisonment sparked controversy and brought activist groups together around a common goal. By incorporating LGBTQ rights into their songs, Pussy Riot banded feminists and queer activists together and further solidified this bond when they were unjustly imprisoned. The common goal is no longer fragmented, i.e. abortion rights or the abolishment of the anti-gay laws, but has been broadened in scope to the takedown of the Putin regime.¹¹³ If Pussy Riot has achieved anything, it is the unification of fragmented activist groups behind their unjust imprisonment. Most of these groups already knew of the corrupt bond between church and state as well as the power that came with it, but Pussy Riot was able to demonstrate this on a worldwide scale. Consequently, they were imprisoned for it. However, this imprisonment was the best outcome that Pussy Riot could have hoped for.

¹¹² Sperling, *Sex, Politics & Putin*, 237.

¹¹³ *ibid*, 259.

CHAPTER FIVE

Punishment Without Crime: The Pussy Riot Trial

Pussy Riot is not the first opposition group to publicly protest the corrupt connection between Church and state. While LGBTQ rights are not explicitly included in Pussy Riot's protests against the bond between church and state, their lyrics and official statements include the LGBTQ community as an oppressed group that Pussy Riot supports. Many opposition groups have publicly protested against Putin's regime and merely been fined for their actions. The reason this particular case study gained worldwide notoriety is because of the trial and unjust sentence that came with it. If Putin had just fined the women of Pussy Riot, then they would not have achieved worldwide fame. One can speculate that Putin wanted to use Pussy Riot as an example to current and future opposition groups that if you mess with the way he rules Russia then you will be unjustly imprisoned. However, this act of "topping" or domination backfired. Unlike his victories in destroying or killing off defiant oligarchs and politicians, the Pussy Riot trial caused far more political ruckus. The trial was highly publicized and the women of Pussy Riot gave eloquent testimonies not only proving their innocence but also exposing the immoral bond between church and state. In their testimonies they brilliantly touch on the immorality of the Church openly supporting a presidential candidate. The holy realm and the political realm, if combined, can wield enormous power, therefore church and state should be separate, in order to prevent unchecked power in a country's

government. President Putin and the Russian Orthodox Church have created a symbiotic relationship in which Putin rules Russia under the conservative, patriarchal values that the church endorses and in turn leading church officials publicly support the pro-Putin party, United Russia. This mutually beneficial relationship allows the church greater influence in social and political issues while Putin gains almost unanimous support from religious believers, who believe their faith is tied to the political party they vote for. The merging of church and state facilitates the creation of a homogenous Russian society, a society that will support the authoritarian rule of President Putin's regime.

The women of Pussy Riot see this desired homogeneity as a threat to the rights of women and members of the LGBTQ community. In her opening courtroom statement, Pussy Riot member Masha Alyokhina addresses Patriarch Kirill of Moscow, Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church, and says,

I am an Orthodox Christian, but I hold other political views, and my question is: What should I do?...the church loves only those children who believe in Putin. I never thought that the Russian Orthodox Church was meant to call for faith in any president; I thought its only role was to call for faith in God.¹¹⁴

Masha Alyokhina highlights the immorality behind a highly esteemed spiritual leader asking Orthodox believers to put their political faith in Putin. This basically promotes Putin to the status of demi-God. How does a devout Orthodox believer go against what the Patriarch of the Orthodox Church says to do? Devout Orthodox believers are obviously going to vote for Putin if their spiritual leader commands them to do so. This manipulation by both church and state is

¹¹⁴ Masha Alyokhina's Opening Courtroom Statement cited in *Pussy Riot! A Punk Prayer for Freedom*, 38-39.

what Masha Alyokhina so eloquently calls into question. The main issue that the women of Pussy Riot are getting at in their testimonies is the discord between the written law of the Russian state and the actual execution of this law by the Putin regime.

The trial is an interesting case study because it invalidates many Western notions of guaranteed human rights before the law. As Dmitry Uzlaner states in his article "The Pussy Riot Case and the Peculiarities of Russian Post-Secularism," "The West interpreted Pussy Riot's case primarily as a limitation of the group members' political freedoms and a denial of the artists' right to self-expression (e.g. Human Rights Watch 2013)."¹¹⁵ The trial became a worldwide phenomenon because it demonstrated the corruption of the Russian political system, denigrated the importance of human rights in Russia, and sought to imprison three helpless, democratically-oriented women. Western audiences could not grasp how a peaceful protest could warrant a two-year prison sentence. However, the issue of the trial is a complicated one. The Russian Constitution states that church and state are separate spheres of influence, therefore the indictment of Pussy Riot for their "Punk Prayer" performance cannot be carried out on behalf of the Russian Orthodox Church. As Legoida (2012) writes, "The Church does not have the right to directly interfere with the operations of the law enforcement agencies, which are working on this case

¹¹⁵ Dmitry Uzlaner, "The Pussy Riot Case and the Peculiarities of Russian Post-Secularism," First published in Russian as: Uzlaner, Dmitry. (2013). "Delo 'Pussi raiot' i osobennosti rossiskogo postsekularizma." *Gosudarstvo, religii, tserkov' v Rossii i za rubezhom* 31 (2): 93-133. 40.

seriously and conscientiously."¹¹⁶ The problem the court faced when deliberating over the "Punk Prayer" performance is one of categorization. Was the Pussy Riot performance an actual religious prayer, a political demonstration, or a blasphemous act of violence against the Russian Orthodox Church? Judge Syrova of the Pussy Riot trial had to come to a concrete resolution regarding the legitimacy of what constitutes a genuine prayer.¹¹⁷ Experts, Irina Levinskaya and Valentina Uzunova from the Institute of History, Russian Academy of Sciences and Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography were brought into court in order to analyze the contents of Pussy Riot's "Punk Prayer" and examine whether or not it constituted as a formal prayer or not.¹¹⁸ They deemed Pussy Riot's "Punk Prayer" a formal prayer, therefore supporting the argument that their guilty sentence was an unjust verdict. Their "Punk Prayer" performance cannot be deemed hooliganism if the act is defined as a prayer. The issue of defining the "Punk Prayer" as an actual prayer or not puts the Russian state in a difficult situation. Uzlaner notes that, "The state must definitively decide this dispute as the sovereign arbitrator, putting the contested religious-secular boundary into place and separating the opposite sides into distinct corners."¹¹⁹ The state had to make a decision on whether or not Pussy Riot's performance was a secular or religious performance, therefore creating a specific line between church and state, implying that they cannot merge. In having to create a clear religious-

¹¹⁶ Legoida (2012) cited in Dmitry Uzlaner, "The Pussy Riot Case and the Peculiarities of Russian Post-Secularism," 30.

¹¹⁷ *ibid*, 37.

¹¹⁸ Peter Saruhanov, "Virgin Mary against the Russian Orthodox Church," *novayagazeta*, Published, July 30, 2012, <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/society/53757.html>

¹¹⁹ Dmitry Uzlaner, "The Pussy Riot Case and the Peculiarities of Russian Post-Secularism," 37.

secular boundary, the court demonstrates how Russian society has desecularized. To the women of Pussy Riot, desecularization demonstrates that Russian society is reverting back to a more conservative, less liberal society that does not respect alternative ideologies and identities such as feminism or queerness.

Opening Courtroom Statement by Nadya Tolokonnikova:

In Nadya Tolokonnikova's opening courtroom statement, in which she pleaded not guilty of committing acts of hooliganism, she touches on the ethics of Pussy Riot's performance. She notes that ethically, their performance was wrong. However, while it may be ethically wrong, it is not punishable under the Russian law. "Our ethical--I emphasize ethical and not criminal--fault lies in the fact that we allowed ourselves to respond to the patriarch's call to vote for Vladimir Putin with our performance at the cathedral, to share our political position on his political statements with an audience."¹²⁰ She acknowledges that their performance alienated many Orthodox believers, which was the price to pay in order to expose the unfair patriarchal link between church and state. However, this ethical offense is not written into the Russian law. According to Nadya's Opening Courtroom Statement, two expert reports ordered by the investigation concluded that, "none of our song lyrics, our activities, or our video contain any linguistic features of dishonor or insult toward Orthodox Christians,

¹²⁰ Nadya Tolokonnikova's Opening Courtroom Statement cited in *Pussy Riot! A Punk Prayer for Freedom*, 44.

the Orthodox Church officials, or other religious groups."¹²¹ To most Russians, Pussy Riot's actions in the Cathedral of Christ the Savior were inappropriate and left many Russians feeling personally victimized. However, acts of defiance against the government occur every day all over the world. As long as they are peaceful, which Pussy Riot's protest act was, then there is no reason that the law can justly imprison the women of Pussy Riot.

Closing Statement by Defense Attorney Mark Feygin:

In Defense Attorney Mark Feygin's closing statement he poses the question of why Pussy Riot's "Punk Prayer" performance is deemed "dangerous to the public." In order for an instance to be labeled as "hooliganism" under the Russian criminal code, the act of hooliganism must be the "flagrant violation of public order expressed by a clear disrespect for society."¹²² There are two variations of hooliganism, one committed with a weapon or an act committed on the basis of "politics, ideology, racism, nationalism, religious hatred, or enmity with respect to any social group."¹²³ The Defense attorney calls into question the violent nature of Pussy Riot's "Punk Prayer" performance before the court:

What this means is, the act committed must be dangerous to the public, not just in a church but anywhere--in the street, in a theater, in the Arbat, which I just mentioned. Why? Because the element that qualifies something as hooliganism is its violent nature. The violent nature of the

¹²¹ *ibid*, 46.

¹²² Russian State Duma, *The Criminal Code of the Russian Federation*, Adopted May 24, 1996, Article 213, Sections 1-3, <http://www.russian-criminal-code.com/PartII/SectionIX/Chapter24.html>

¹²³ Ben Johnson, "Why Are Pussy Riot's Alleged Crimes Called 'Hooliganism'?" *Slate's Cultural Blog*, August 1, 2012, http://www.slate.com/blogs/browbeat/2012/08/01/pussy_riot_on_trial_for_hooliganism_what_does_hooliganism_mean_in_russia_.html

acts committed. Everything that happened at the pretrial investigation and at the trial itself proves that those acts did not have a violent nature.¹²⁴

If the prosecution argues that Pussy Riot's punk prayer is actually dangerous to the public, then the state asserts that the protection of Orthodox believers' feelings and consequently the Church's reputation are protected before the law. This assertion breaks Article 14.2, which states that, "Religious associations shall be separate from the State and shall be equal before the law."¹²⁵ By defining Pussy Riot's actions as dangerous to the public, the court is saying that protests against the government in place are illegal. By deeming the act dangerous, the court is limiting a person's freedom of speech, which is guaranteed in the Russian Constitution. By convicting the women of Pussy Riot for their act of hooliganism, the court is saying that "rule of law" does not truly apply to the Kremlin and that the Church, which is an extension of the state, is protected from any public criticism. Rule of law only applies to the Kremlin if it favors the political party in power, therefore demonstrating that the Russian system of order and justice is corrupt. This denial of the freedom to criticize the state in public spaces is how Putin controls the public sphere of Russian society, in order to curtail potential dissident movements. Putin's regime also strategically uses the state-owned media to portray Russia's conservative values as the victim of Western liberalism and criticism.

¹²⁴ Closing Statement by Defense Attorney Mark Feygin cited in *Pussy Riot! A Punk Prayer for Freedom*, 65.

¹²⁵ Chapter 1. The Fundamentals of the Constitutional System, *The Constitution of the Russian Federation*, Article 14, Section 2, <http://www.constitution.ru/en/10003000-02.htm>

Feminism as an Evil Ideology

In the court transcript, Nadya Tolokonnikova asks a state witness whether the witness thinks feminism is a swear word. In response, the witness replied that, "It is if it's said in a church." This witness later states that their actions were not a performance but "a witches' ritual."¹²⁶ In the trial, the prosecution tries to invoke the bitter and enraged feminist dialogue and compare the members of Pussy Riot to witches. In Russia, feminism is viewed as an ideology that is equated with Western liberalism. The Putin regime does not support liberalism because it detracts from the consolidation of power through patriarchal values. However, in the Russian Constitution, Article 13.1 states that in the Russian Federation ideological diversity shall be recognized.¹²⁷ Just as differing ideological groups are protected before the Russian Constitution, so are distinct social groups. The court defines Orthodox Christians as a social group, a social group that upholds a specific type of ideology. According to the logic of the court, the "Punk Prayer" performance by Pussy Riot, "entailed nothing but hatred toward the social group 'Orthodox Christians.'"¹²⁸ If a social group with a specific ideology is protected before the law, then the feminist ideology of Pussy Riot must also be protected. Furthermore, if a social group such as the LGBTQ community is protected before the law just as Orthodox Christians are, then the

¹²⁶ *Pussy Riot! A Punk Prayer For Freedom*, 50-52.

¹²⁷ *The Constitution of the Russian Federation*, Article 13, Section 1.

¹²⁸ Dmitry Uzlaner, "The Pussy Riot Case and the Peculiarities of Russian Post-Secularism," 39.

numerous instances of violence towards gay people in Russia must also be punished before the law. The indictment of the women of Pussy Riot for their unfavorable feminist ideology exposes the hypocrisy of the Kremlin controlled judicial branch of Russian society.

The prosecution in the Pussy Riot court case brought up consecutive witnesses who were enraged by their performance. Prosecution plaintiff S. V. Vinogradov stated that he still morally suffers and other prosecution witnesses stated that their souls had been damaged by Pussy Riot's performance.¹²⁹ The prosecution continuously used the emotional suffering that religious believers felt from Pussy Riot's performance in order to emphasize the immorality of the "Punk Prayer" performance. While religious believers' feelings are still legitimate, people's feelings are not legitimated under the law, as stated previously in Defense Attorney Mark Feygin's closing statement. Defense Attorney Nikolai Polozov highlights that insulting the feelings of believers is not an issue of the administrative circle and is not a criminal offense.¹³⁰ Shortly after the conclusion of the Pussy Riot trial the Russian Duma passed a bill that criminalizes insulting a religious believer's feelings.¹³¹ If the state is publicly insulted then the act can now be labeled as a criminal offense. The law also further demonstrates the unlawful merging between church and state. Feminist

¹²⁹ Court Transcript, "The Fourth Day of the Pussy Riot Trial at the Khamovniki Court," *novayagazeta*, August 2, 2012, <http://omvesti.ru/2012/08/02/chetvertyj-den-slushaniya-dela-pussy-riot-v-xamovnicheskom-sude/>

¹³⁰ Closing Statement by Defense Attorney Nikolai Polozov, *Pussy Riot! A Punk Prayer for Freedom*, 83.

¹³¹ "Duma approves criminalization of insulting religious feelings," *rt.com*, Published June 11, 2013, <http://rt.com/politics/responsibility-insulting-feelings-believers-526/>

and queer feelings must also be protected before the law but because feminist ideology and queer "social groups" are outside the framework of patriarchal values necessary for maintaining Putin's control of power, those ideologies and social groups are not protected before the law.

Closing Courtroom Statement by Katya Samutsevich:

In Katya Samutsevich's Closing Courtroom Statements, she questions the motives behind Putin's decision to exploit the Orthodox Church, in order to bolster his public opinion among the Russian populace. She highlights how secularly, he has controlled every aspect of Russian society. In her testament she asks,

Why did Putin feel the need to exploit the Orthodox religion and its aesthetic? After all, he could have employed his own, far more secular tools of power--for example, the state-controlled corporations, or his menacing police system, or his obedient judicial system.¹³²

She acknowledges the state-controlled corporations that Putin wrested away from the oligarchs and the top-down vertical of power that he has implemented in his government. She poses the interesting question of why must he also attack the spiritual realm. The Russian Constitution states that church and state are two separate entities, that function independently of each other. By publicizing this trial, the link between church and state is made apparent. It is common knowledge that secularly speaking, Putin controls every aspect of the government. However, by endorsing the Orthodox Church and attaching his

¹³² "Pussy Riot Closing Statements: Maria Alyokhina, Yekaterina Samutsevich, Nadezhda Tolokonnikova," *n+1*, August 13, 2012, <https://nplusonemag.com/online-only/online-only/pussy-riot-closing-statements/>

public image to the Orthodox Church, Putin's power blatantly assumes that of an authoritarian regime. Because Putin's values and public image are now associated with that of the Russian Orthodox Church, the reputation of the Orthodox Church is now protected before the law.

Closing Courtroom Statement by Masha Alyokhina:

And it is interesting that our situation was depersonalized from the start. This is because when we talk about Putin, we have in mind first and foremost not Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin, but Putin the system that he himself created--the power vertical, where all control is carried out effectively by one person. And that power vertical is uninterested, completely uninterested, in the opinion of the masses.¹³³

Masha highlights that Pussy Riot did not seek to offend Orthodox believers, merely the unjust merging of church and state. Pussy Riot is not personally criticizing Vladimir Putin, just the system he put in place. This highly intellectualized stance does not resonate with the general Russian populace. When push comes to shove, their performance in the Cathedral of Christ the Savior offended many Orthodox believers. Very few Russian Orthodox believers are willing to look past their disrespectful performance in order to see the intellectualized protestation that Pussy Riot is seeking to demonstrate: the desecularization of Russian society in order to benefit the Putin regime. Pussy Riot views this desecularization of Russian society as the degeneration of Russian progress and liberalism that Russia experienced during the Yeltsin era. Secularization of the Russian state entails the "'institutional segregation of religion,' which, in its turn, was incited by the more general process of social

¹³³ *ibid.*

differentiation."¹³⁴ Social differentiation allows for non-patriarchal fitting social groups such as feminists and queer groups to exist in society without being targeted as anti-state. Pussy Riot's "Punk Prayer" directed "Christian content against the prevailing policy of the country."¹³⁵ Unfortunately, in Putin's regime, Christian content and the image of the church are linked to the state; therefore Pussy Riot's actions are seen as radical. However, the women of Pussy Riot only sought to bring to light how the merging of two separate institutions works to marginalize social groups that are not approved of by the Russian Orthodox Church or state.

Closing Courtroom Statement by Nadya Tolokonnikova:

In Nadya Tolokonnikova's closing courtroom statement she explains how every institution in Russia is now under the control of the state:

We categorically oppose the following, which forces us to act and live politically:

The use of coercive and forceful methods for regulating social processes; a situation in which the most important political institutions are the disciplinary structures of the state: the security agencies (the army, police, and secret services), and their corresponding means of ensuring political "stability" (prisons, pre-emptive detention, all the mechanisms of strict control over the citizenry); imposed civic passivity among the majority of the population; the complete dominance of the executive branch over the legislative and judicial branches.¹³⁶

These political institutions that ensure "political stability" in Russia are the same political institutions that led to the guilty verdict the members of Pussy Riot received in order to maintain stability, i.e. complete political control. As I have

¹³⁴ Dmitry Uzlaner, "The Pussy Riot Case and the Peculiarities of Russian Post-Secularism," 44.

¹³⁵ *ibid*, 47.

¹³⁶ "Pussy Riot Closing Statements," *n+1*.

shown in previous chapters, these controlled political institutions work to suppress the voices of the queer rights movement in Russia. Security agencies, whether it is the state police with their silent inaction regarding violent acts committed against gay men or the ultranationalist groups that use the Internet to patrol queer meetups; The Church, by promoting the conservative values of the Russian Orthodox Church in political policy; and actual political legislation that prohibits queer visibility in Russian society. While there may be no visible sign of a contemporary Russian queer revolution in sight, Pussy Riot's articulate court testimonies have the potential to catalyze the formation of a queer liberation and feminist movement in Russia.

Nadya Tolokonnikova assumes the position of a martyr for the contemporary Russian dissident movement, championing the rights of women and the queer community. She asserts that, "Katya, Masha, and I may be in prison, but I do not consider us defeated. Just as the dissidents were not defeated; although they disappeared into mental institutions and prisons, they still pronounced their verdict upon the regime."¹³⁷ Nadya Tolokonnikova hearkens back to the dissidents against the USSR that were exiled or killed during the Soviet period for speaking out against the government. The women of Pussy Riot admirably stood up against Putin's authoritarian system of governance with their concise yet powerful testimonies, thus laying the foundation for further reactionary opposition groups to try and continue dismantling Putin's totalitarian, homophobic and sexist regime.

¹³⁷ *ibid.*

The Aftermath of the Pussy Riot Trial and its Implications

For the general Russian populace Pussy Riot's protest in the Cathedral of Christ the Savior was seen as insensitive, inappropriate and wrong. According to a survey conducted in 2013, 56 per cent of the Russian population felt their sentence was appropriate.¹³⁸ For the remaining minority per cent, it was not that they necessarily agreed with Pussy Riot's act of defiance but that they felt their sentence was unjust. For Russians, the women of Pussy Riot are not seen as martyrs for a just cause like they are in the West. The importance of Pussy Riot is not in the act itself, but the trial that followed. The trial exposed the undeniable link between church and state and how this link functions to consolidate power for the Putin regime as well as enforce patriarchal rule. The trial also showed the two-sidedness of Russian law by protecting the feelings of Russian Orthodox believers but actively discriminating against ideologies and social groups such as feminists or the LGBTQ community. However, the fact that this trial achieved worldwide notoriety is an interesting issue in and of itself. When Putin unjustly took down Boris Berezovsky, blackmailing him into relinquishing his shares of his media conglomerates, the Western media did not cover that trial nearly as much as the Pussy Riot trial. At the time of the Berezovsky or Khodorkovsky trials, the West did not fully understand the motives behind Putin's "managed democracy" or kleptocracy.¹³⁹ Also, the take down of filthy rich oligarchs in order to restore resources to the state was seen as laudable. Several years have

¹³⁸ Kathryn Hendley, "Assessing the Rule of Law in Russia," *Developments in Russian Politics*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 153.

¹³⁹ Masha Lipman and Michael McFaul, "'Managed Democracy' in Russia: Putin and the Press," *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, vol. 6, no. 3 (June 2001), 116-127.

passed since the take down of the oligarchs and the West is no longer fooled by the Kremlin's deceptive political maneuverings. Economic sanctions have recently been placed on Russia by Western countries further exacerbating the familiar Cold War climate between Russia and the West. The trial and subsequent imprisonment of these three, innocent, educated, democratically-oriented Western punk protesters was the perfect story to latch onto and run with. The court testimonies by these three women are both radical and appeal to the language of the West. In Nadya's appeal statement she asserts that,

Everything that is happening in Putin's third term is leading to the end of stability. In two years there will be civil war, because Putin is doing everything to ensure that.... We'll be going to a prison colony while civil war is brewing in this country. Putin is doing everything to make this happen. He is setting people against each other."¹⁴⁰

This radical prediction appeals to Western audiences in that it not only asserts that Russia is headed towards a radical shift in political authority but also invokes the feeling that protest movements actually do make a difference.

Western oriented youth are inspired by Pussy Riot's individualistic, strong-willed protest against everything that is seen as oppressive in Western society. Strong government encroaching on one's human rights as well as the influence of the Church in policymaking are two issues the West sees as anti-democratic and morally wrong. In principle, these issues are restrictive to individual-oriented, capitalist societies. However, in Russia, human rights issues are not seen as the pinnacle of importance. In periodic surveys conducted between 1994 and 2013, the data reveals that, "a majority of Russians think that

¹⁴⁰ *Pussy Riot! A Punk Prayer for Freedom*, 117.

maintaining law and order is more important than protecting human rights. Along similar lines, Russians tend to place more value on social and economic rights than on civil and political rights."¹⁴¹ While Russians may place greater importance on law and order rather than the protection of human rights, the trial against the women of Pussy Riot exposes the flaws within the Russian legal system. These flaws in the legal system also apply to the unequal treatment of the LGBTQ community and expose the hypocrisy of the state sanctioned laws favoring the Church, contrasted with the laws passed that actively discriminate against queer and feminist ideologies, rights and feelings. The Pussy Riot court transcript is important because three women eloquently dissect Putin's totalitarian system of government, thus disproving the assumption that women should be relegated to the domestic sphere of society. While the political implications may seem minuscule now, the fact that native Russian women were able to openly defy masculine President Putin is a feat in and of itself. Currently, the trial may not be important in the wake of the Ukrainian crisis but in years to come the recorded court transcript may be used as further evidence of the corruption of Putin's patriarchal, authoritarian regime.

While in the West, the Pussy Riot trial sparked immense controversy, in Russia the "Punk Prayer" performance was soon forgotten. The women of Pussy Riot were imprisoned for two years and were then released in December of 2013, out of amnesty to commemorate the adoption of a newly formed Russian Constitution. While it was framed as an act of amnesty, their release was most

¹⁴¹ Levada Center 2013c cited in Kathryn Hendley, "Assessing the Rule of Law in Russia," *Developments in Russian Politics*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 153.

likely connected to the upcoming Sochi Winter Olympic Games in 2014. In the international spotlight more than ever, Putin needed to appease the West. Releasing Pussy Riot from the penal colony early was sure to quell some of the staunch Western criticism that would accompany the Sochi Winter Games. In the West, the women were portrayed as dissident martyrs, who were "on a heroic mission to speak truth to power."¹⁴² However, Pussy Riot's heroic martyrdom was short-lived. Quickly forgotten in Russia, Masha and Nadya of Pussy Riot began to give talks and appear at high profile events in the West. In December of 2014, Pussy Riot performed at Vice's 20th anniversary party in Brooklyn.¹⁴³ Lauded in the West for their democratic protestations and strong will having endured the Russian penal system, these displays of exhibitionism in Western countries lessen their historical importance to some degree. One can view the disbanded Pussy Riot group members as sellouts, playing directly into the entertainment-industrial complex of the West. While Pussy Riot's moving and thought-provoking court statements still expose the corruption of the Putin administration and the unjust bond between church and state, their statements lose salience as they reap the benefits of Western entertainment-industrial fame. On top of all this, the Ukrainian crisis has diminished Pussy Riot's relevancy in Russia. Unfortunately, Pussy Riot as a triumphant, anti-regime case study does not wield the same power it did in 2012 and 2013. The recent annexation of Crimea and the Ukrainian crisis have brought nationalism to the forefront, and

¹⁴² *Pussy Riot! A Punk Prayer for Freedom*, 129.

¹⁴³ Jacob Bernstein, "The Virtues of a Celebration of Vice." *The New York Times*, December 11, 2014, sec. E, p. 11.

the marginalization of Russia's minority groups is no longer a strong, controversial headliner. Mass media has been further tightened by the Putin regime. The Ukrainian crisis has also been framed in a way that is anti-American, making queer and feminist activism seemingly unpatriotic in wake of a war in Ukraine. Nadya Tolokonnikova and Masha Alyokhina now work to reform the penal colony system in Russia as well as the prison industrial complex in America but are currently no longer a topical issue in Russia regarding the anti-Putin movement.

The Spirit of Revolution in Russia

Nadya Tolokonnikova's prediction that in two years time there will be a civil war in Russia did not come true but does have some historical backing. During the time of Russian Imperial rule, many assassinations and attempts were made by the People's Will radical revolutionary group before they achieved success in 1881 by exploding Alexander II's carriage and causing him to bleed to death. The People's Will radical revolutionary group carried out a series of assassination attempts in 1879 and 1880 before they were finally successful in assassinating the tsar in 1881. The revolutionaries were then put on trial and sentenced to death by hanging in April of 1881. The execution of the terrorists reminded the Russian public of the botched hangings of 1826 and lived on in the memory of Russians.¹⁴⁴ According to a centuries-old tradition, if any prisoner survives a botched execution then they are to be set free. However, Nicholas I

¹⁴⁴ Philip Pomper, *Lenin's Brother: The Origins of the October Revolution*, (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company Ltd., 2010), 163.

merely ordered another set of ropes for the hanging of the Decembrist's, having them executed correctly the second time around.¹⁴⁵

At the time of the assassination many Russians disagreed with the radicals' act of violence. However, after their brilliant trial in which the People's Will revolutionaries defended their position against the oppressive autocracy of the time, their memory lived on as a romanticized image of European liberalism. They were heroes to the liberal public but their trial was over before it started. According to Philip Pomper from his study on the origins of the October Revolution, the trial was doomed from the start: "Although defendants contradicted their own depositions and those of others, their earlier statements and police reports had already biased the proceedings against them."¹⁴⁶ The court was already biased and the radicals' statements regarding the unfairness of the autocratic system in place were completely invalidated. The prosecution, often members of the gendarmerie, went after weaker members of the radical revolutionary group in order to invalidate the revolutionaries' group cohesion, therefore quieting the potency of the radical's position against the government. Their act of radical defiance and violence soon led to severe counterreforms by Alexander III, undoing many of the liberal reforms achieved during this period. Before Alexander II's assassination took place, liberal reforms were being implemented but these reforms were not liberal enough for the People's Will members. They saw these reforms as a loosening up of control under the same

¹⁴⁵ Peter Julicher, *Renegades, Rebels and Rogues Under the Tsars*, McFarland and Co. Publishing, (August, 2003), 173.

¹⁴⁶ Pomper, *Lenin's Brother*, 166.

oppressive system that prevented a free society. However, the tightening of control by succeeding tsars made the tsarist revolutionary trial that much more salient. The People's Will revolutionaries were portrayed as heroes of the revolution in years to come, which kick-started the future October Revolution that overthrew the tsarist government.

While the women of Pussy Riot are yesterday's news in the wake of the Ukrainian crisis, their trial will live on. The prosecution took a purely emotional approach to the trial, demonstrating how offended devout Russian Orthodox believers were by Pussy Riot's protestation in the Cathedral of Christ the Savior. The women of Pussy Riot stayed strong willed in their statements against the Putin administration despite their inevitable imprisonment. Their strong will and determination mirror that of the Decembrist revolutionaries who so bravely opposed tsarist Imperial rule in 1825. Unaware of just how serious their trial would turn out to be, the women of Pussy Riot were aware that their actions would have consequences. They went through with their performance anyway for the sake of exposing Putin's corrupt autocracy for what it is: a denial of a free, democratic society that is outlined in the Russian Constitution. The Pussy Riot trial was then followed by a tightening of control by the Putin regime, reminiscent of the counterreforms enacted under Alexander III and Nicholas II. If history is to repeat itself, which it often does, the Pussy Riot Trial may function as a contemporary model of the tsarist revolutionary trials of old. The women of Pussy Riot's eloquence in exposing the corrupt bond between the Putin's system of government and the Russian Orthodox Church will live on and only time will

tell whether a full-scale revolution will take place in Russia against Putin's patriarchal system of rule after the Ukrainian crisis reaches a resolution.

CONCLUSION

While Pussy Riot is no longer a relevant dissident group in Russia, their court transcript and testimonies will live on forever. Boggled down by the Ukrainian crisis, nationalistic fervor is sweeping the nation. Forgotten events such as the unjust imprisonment of the women of Pussy Riot are not as important when there is a war going on in Ukraine. However, once the Ukrainian crisis is resolved the Pussy Riot court transcripts will then have the potential to uproot President Putin's authoritarian government. Russia's political climate has been steadily worsening; the political opposition is being gunned down in broad daylight. In spite of this, the people will eventually rise up against the Putin regime. In a recent example of public protest, demonstrators from the city of Novosibirsk contested the increased censorship of artistic expression. On April 5th, 2015 in Novosibirsk, Russia's third largest city, between 2,500 and 5,000 people gathered to protest the increased cultural censorship enforced by the Kremlin. This gathering was in response to the Tannhäuser case, in which the director of the Novosibirsk Opera and Ballet, Boris Mezdrich, was fired over the staging of the Wagner opera, Tannhäuser. The activists drafted a resolution stating that,

We citizens of Russia and residents of Novosibirsk, are concerned by the cultural situation in the country and the violation of Article 44 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation which guarantees freedom of literary, artistic, scientific, technical and other kinds of creativity express our anger at the persecution of theater workers of The City of Novosibirsk, the activity of radically inclined citizens directed at the blocking of cultural measures, and efforts by representatives of the

Russian Orthodox Church and a number of other political figures to introduce censorship of artistic creativity.¹⁴⁷

The demonstrators are concerned with the state of cultural affairs in Russia and how the Kremlin has taken an increasingly obscurantist, reactionary policy towards freedom of expression in Russia. This increased awareness can be partially attributed to the Pussy Riot case. Members of the artist community are confused as to what is considered acceptable in Putin's Russia when it comes to freedom of expression. The staging of Wagner's *Tannhäuser* opera is a much more benign performance than that of Pussy Riot's "Punk Prayer," thus demonstrating the lengths to which the Kremlin will go to suppress artistic expression that is not directly in line with the Orthodox Church's newfound political correctness. The censorship of freedom of expression that is guaranteed in the Russian Constitution has only worsened since the Pussy Riot trial, therefore validating the statements made by the women of Pussy Riot.

Now that the Russian Orthodox Church has narrowed the scope of what is considered acceptable artistic expression, the Russian people are realizing the limitations they have as sovereign people. During the time of the Pussy Riot trial, feminism and the LGBTQ community were deemed the main threat to patriarchal values. Feminism and queerness are seen as Western concepts; therefore the oppressive measures taken by Putin to quell these groups were not seen as unfounded by Russian citizens. The women of Pussy Riot group feminists

¹⁴⁷ Paul Goble, "More than 2,500 Novosibirsk Residents Demand Moscow Reverse Its Obscurantist Policies," *The Interpreter*, April 6, 2015, <http://www.interpretermag.com/more-than-2500-novosibirsk-residents-demand-moscow-reverse-its-obscurantist-policies/>

and the LGBTQ community together as marginalized groups that do not fit the framework of Putin's patriarchal and hegemonic Russian society. In Mikhail Iampolski's article, "Judging the Victors: Why Victimhood Is a Bad Fit for Russia," Iampolski argues that Russia assumes a "projective identification." Projective identification is the "denial of one's ego and the identification with a strong leader and an all-powerful ethnic, social, or political group."¹⁴⁸ This identity is the product of previously experienced "weakness, poverty and humiliation."¹⁴⁹ The collapse of the Soviet Union and the turbulent 90's undoubtedly questioned what it meant to be Russian. The constant failures of the state consequently created a Russian inferiority complex. This inferiority complex has now manifested itself as a fascist type government ruled by the idealized and narcissistic President Putin. Fascist governments reject differing ideologies, seeing them as personal attacks against the country's undifferentiated masses.¹⁵⁰ This claim is substantiated by the way in which Putin seeks to crush dissidents in any way he can. He uses the state-owned political institutions to his advantage in order to make sure that Russia remains on its path to becoming a world superpower. In a 2013 study conducted by the Russian Public Opinion Research Center regarding the Ratings of Social Institutions in Russia, "the percentage of Russians expressing approval for the armed forces had risen to 58 per cent, with only the media and the Russian Orthodox Church being rated more highly

¹⁴⁸ Mikhail Iampolski, "Judging the Victors: Why Victimhood Is a Bad Fit for Russia," *All the Russia's Blog*, NYU Jordan Center, Translated by Eliot Borenstein, published March 5, 2015, http://jordanrussiacenter.org/news/judging-victors-victimhood-bad-fit-russia/#.VSYXB5TF_38

¹⁴⁹ Iampolski, "Judging the Victors."

¹⁵⁰ *ibid.*

(VCIOM)."¹⁵¹ The majority approval of increased militarization, the media and the presence of the Russian Orthodox Church are all aspects of Russian society that do not bode well for feminists or the LGBTQ community. Increased militarization is promoted through hegemonic masculinity and patriarchal values. These same values are supported by the Church and enforced by the state-owned media. Consequently, feminists and members of the LGBTQ community are depicted as weak and selfish citizens because they are associated with Western liberalism and democracy, two ideologies that do not contribute to the mission of the strong Russian state.

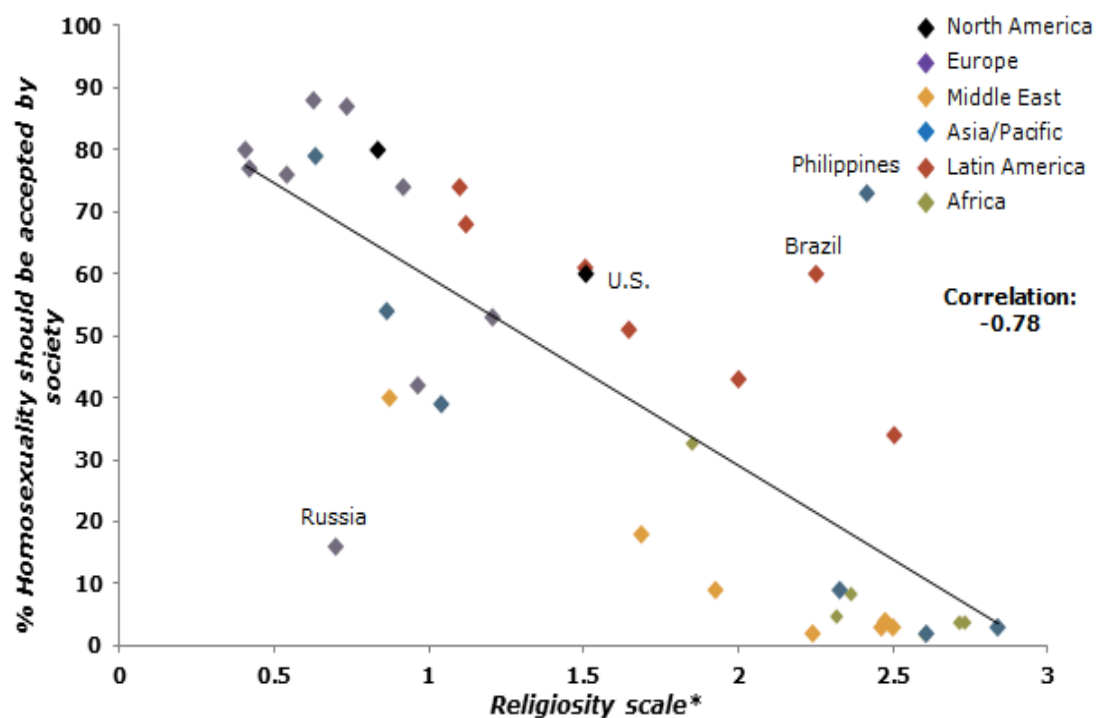
Pussy Riot tried to show that these state-owned political institutions limit freedom of expression and equality before the law. However, their legitimacy was undermined by the radical manner in which they conduct their protests. Their court testimonies are what truly expose the unfair monopolization of political institutions under Putin's reign and are what I believe to be the building blocks to increased Russian consciousness regarding the restrictive, authoritarian measures taken by the Kremlin to ensure a homogeneous Russian society. Increased consciousness will allow for differing ideologies and social groups that deviate from patriarchal values to be accepted in Russian society. Until then, the LGBTQ community will continue to be used as a pawn by the Kremlin in order to instill fear in the Russian populace and alienate Russia from the West. Western liberalism and democracy threaten Putin's consolidation of

¹⁵¹ "Ratings of Social Institutions" from the *Russian Public Opinion Center* cited in Jennifer G. Mathers, "The Military, Security and Politics," *Developments in Russian Politics*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 245.

power and takeover of Ukraine, therefore the queer community will continue to be labeled by the Kremlin as the ideological enemy until Putin is either overthrown or Russia rids itself of its projective identification.

Appendix A, B, & C

Less Tolerance for Homosexuality in More Religious Countries



* Religiosity is measured using a three-item index ranging from 0-3, with "3" representing the most religious position. Respondents were coded as "1" if they believe faith in God is necessary for morality; "1" if they say religion is very important in their lives; and "1" if they pray at least once a day. The mean score for each country is used in this analysis. Religiosity scores for the U.S., Britain, France, Germany, Spain and Japan are from the Spring 2011 Global Attitudes Survey.

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Appendix A

Age and Views of Homosexuality

<i>% Homosexuality should be accepted</i>	18-29	30-49	50+
	%	%	%
U.S.	70	64	52
Canada	87	82	75
Britain	79	82	71
France	81	79	74
Germany	87	90	84
Italy	86	80	67
Spain	90	91	85
Greece	66	62	40
Poland	47	43	38
Czech Rep.	84	87	72
Russia	21	17	12
Turkey	9	7	10
Egypt	3	2	3
Jordan	5	1	1
Lebanon	27	17	10
Palest. ter.	5	3	--
Tunisia	3	2	1
Israel	40	44	35
Australia	--	83	77
China	32	19	15
Indonesia	4	2	3
Japan	83	71	39
Malaysia	7	10	11
Pakistan	2	2	2
Philippines	78	71	68
S. Korea	71	48	16
Argentina	81	78	62
Bolivia	53	43	27
Brazil	74	60	46
Chile	78	70	57
El Salvador	43	33	24
Mexico	70	60	52
Venezuela	57	51	45
Ghana	3	3	2
Kenya	7	9	--
Nigeria	0	1	3
Senegal	5	2	2
S. Africa	35	32	28
Uganda	3	2	7

Appendix B



Appendix C

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