

**Final paper**

**POLS 630**

**Queer Theory**

**“Politicization of homosexuality in Russia”**

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**Introduction**

*“Sorry, it is Russia...bearded men, kissing each other, cause only vomiting”*

Deputy of State Duma, Ivan Nikitchuk

(in support of his bill The bill № 916716-6 “On Amendments to the RF Code of Administrative Offences (in terms of establishing responsibility for the public expression of non-traditional sexual relations)

Recently in a Russian newspaper called *“Literaturnaya gazeta”* (Literature newspaper) the article “Who stole Europe – 1. The coronation of perversions”<sup>1</sup> was published. The article mainly discusses the chain of events currently happening in Europe while the main task, it seems, is to show the dusk of Europe. Setting aside the quality of written material, the article named the French 20<sup>th</sup>-century philosopher Michael Foucault the main cause of the problems as disconnected as HIV/AIDS and racism and as dispersed in time and space as terrorist attacks in Europe and legalization of gay marriage in the States. The author blames Foucault for opening “the Pandora’s box” of “sexual perversions”. Anatoli Levri writes:

Foucault introduced the system of normalization of perversions to French universities and proclaimed the deadly psychopathy a healthy form. Having implemented the image of “acceptable” sodomites and lesbians in universities, Foucault set to spread his ideas within the society. Is it the reason why political and economic sects which gave him a forum in Europe, transported him to the USA shortly after, so that he, chairing departments all over from New York City to

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<sup>1</sup> See (Who stole Europe - 1. The coronation of perversions, 2016)

California, could “infect” the political elites of the western world whose Indo-European civilization was so deeply hated by him. Hysterically despising the Hellenic cultural roots of the continent and its people, Foucault simplified them by debasing the nature and the process of acquiring knowledge, proclaiming the “relativity” of wisdom. And philosophical science increasingly turned into a shelter for charlatans. The real policies of demography, migration, religion, and gender in the Western countries followed the new “leader”<sup>2</sup> (Levri, 2016).

Levri does not stop at just that. He goes on to criticize Judith Butler for picking up Foucault’s ideas and methods, calling her “the advertising agent of the prophet of perversions” (Levri, 2016). Finally, after his severe critique has been made, Levri makes his point: Russia is the last citadel of traditions and family values which stay strong against the final twilight of humanity.

The article, in its derogatoriness, presents the only uncontested opinion of the Russian majority about such controversial issues as same-sex practices. The state has used both media and legislation to maintain the notion of “non-traditionalism” of homosexuality for Russia. They present homosexuality as if it had never existed and was “brought” from some other place, making it look alien and dangerous.

My argument is in the contemporary Russia different definitions of homosexuality are being used by different groups in struggle over individual freedom and Russian values.

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<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Russian into English are mine.

**Literature review**

Since the theme of the study covers origins of contemporary political discourse of homosexuality, the sources available are in predominantly Russian. However, several American scholars have done research on Russian and the history of homosexuality there. Western scholars concentrated their attention on especially dramatic periods for the country and its homosexuals. Such events as the Communist Revolution of 1917 and its possibly liberating potential drew the attention of scholars of homosexuality. Dan Healey's book *Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia: The Regulation of Sexual and Gender Dissent* explores the circumstances of homosexuality in Russian and the Soviet Union. He argues that homosexuality in Russia throughout the twentieth century was mapped geographically to present "a comparatively 'innocent' Russia positioned between a 'civilized' Europe and a decidedly 'primitive' or 'backward' East that depicts Russia as universally, naturally, and purely heterosexual" (Healey, *Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia. The Regulation of Sexual and Gender Dissent*, 2001, p. 253). Moreover, he wrote a number of articles covering different periods of mostly soviet "homosexual history" (1993, 2002, 2003) as does the sovietologist Laura (1995)

While Healey and Engelstein have done a historical analysis, Brian James Baer in his book *Other Russias. Homosexuality and the Other Russias Crisis of Post-Soviet Identity (2009)* undertakes another approach – namely an attempt to look at the changes in discourse on homosexuality:

This work does not pretend to uncover the realities—grim and otherwise—of homosexual-identified men and women living in Russia. Rather, it is an examination of the often extravagant discourse on the subject that has been

generated from the late 1980s through Vladimir Putin's presidency, a discourse that may not only influence the ways in which homosexual-identified men and women there imagine themselves and construct their identities, but also say something about the ways in which Russians in general—and Russian men in particular—imagine their post-Soviet identity, their cultural predicament” (Baer, 2009, p. 5)

There are also works that conduct sociological research on gay rights in Russia. Laura Essig's *Queer in Russia: A Story of Sex, Self, and Other* and Daniel P. Schluter's *Gay Life in the Former USSR: Fraternity without Community* measured public opinion of Russian about LGBT rights.

Russian scholars have also researched the issue of homosexuality. One of the leading names in this field is Igor Kon. He has written a number of books and articles about homosexuality from czarist Russia to the present time. His first book on this issue *Faces and Masks of homosexual love: Moonlight at dawn (2003; 2006)* was a “breakthrough” on a forbidden subject in Russia. The book summarizes recent data on same-sex love, not only from the standpoint of biology and medicine but also in terms of the social sciences and humanities. Kon examines various theories of homosexuality, history, ethnographies of same-sex relations among Russians, the psychological characteristics of homosexuality, and stages of its decriminalization and depathologization. When in 2005-2006 the new round of homophobia began to take place in Russia, Igor Kon wrote two articles (2006, 2007) where he argued that homophobia is organically linked with other forms of Soviet-Russian xenophobia.

Although scholars have done substantial research on homosexuality in Russia highlighting linkages between major historical events and consequences for homosexual people, the contemporary political discourse on homosexuality has not been studied thoroughly. Moreover, the research does not provide specifically political deployment of homosexuality by Russian authorities in 21<sup>st</sup> century. I will use this research as a historical base to provide the origins of current discourse on homosexuality.

## **History of homosexuality in Russia**

### **Imperial period and the “flourishment” of homosexuality**

Although my focus is political use of homosexuality in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries a brief description of the previous periods is useful. In the history of Russia different attitudes towards homosexual behavior has existed – from various “gentle” reproaches to the death penalty. Evidence shows that in Russian Empire male homosexuality was treated leniently. Female homosexuality was treated as if it had never existed (Klejn, 2000; Kon, 2006). In part, because of women’s inequality, female homosexuality was considered a kind of female masturbation (Herberstein, 1988).

Prior to seventeenth century homosexual practices were punished “by up to seven years in prison which was the same for any kind of heterosexual assaults. Age, previous records, marital status, and who initiated the act were taken into account” (Kon, 2006, p. 320). For the first time, as historical documents claim, Russia began to execute homosexuals under Peter the Great in 1706 following Swedish example. However, this punishment only concerned military personal and did not extend to the civilian population. In 1716, it was replaced by corporal punishment and in the cases of violence – the eternal exile. In XVIII century, Kon mentions, homosexual contacts became shameful activity as

contacts with Europe grew (Kon, 2006). Nevertheless, homosexual practices remained within aristocratic circles and bureaucracy as a part of the corruption and political promotion while in the peasantry such relationships almost ceased to exist (Kon, 2006). Homosexual relationships also flourished in closed schools and military educational institutions. They were so widespread that it caused anger of the Russian Emperor Alexander I and his personal concern for the matter (Lermontov, 1988).

Before 1832 in Russia, same-sex affection was a matter of morality and religion, not the law. In 1832, under Emperor Nikolai I, the first criminal law against homosexual contacts was introduced. The penalty was the exile to Siberia and the loss of all possessions. Although the law was hardly ever applied, “relative disregard of sodomy by the judiciary shows more of the inefficiency of law enforcement rather than tolerant attitudes toward the diversity of sexual practices” (Engelstein, *Homosexuality: its origins and historical roots*, 1995).

Along with the criminalization of homosexuality (and its exclusion from the authorities of the church), the shift in its perception happened. Now it was “a aristocratic activity” widespread within closed communities of the powerful.

With the expansion of medical science and medicalization of society, along with their European colleagues, Russian doctors and psychologists started considering homosexuality a perversion of sexuality and looking for ways to treat it. Healey mentions that “homosexuality in males was usually associated with the “disease” of masturbation; in females it was viewed as one of the attendant evils of prostitution.” (Healey 1993, p. 29 )

Evidently, same-sex practices have always been considered as “western” influence and “physicians en masse refused to contemplate the possibility that peasant women might

indulge in promiscuous sex, except under the compulsion of economic necessity and then only once having left the countryside behind” (Engelstein, 1987, pp. 169-208).

Despite the fact that during the czarist period of Russian history, homosexuality was not used politically but it laid down the foundations for treating homosexual practices as not inherent to traditional Russian population, aristocratic in nature, alien to Russian values, and brought from abroad.

### **The Soviet period**

Seventy four years of Russian history which started with the Bolshevik revolution in 1917 and ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union is characterized by the political usage of homosexuality. Under Stalin, homosexuality became a tool for destroying political opponents and achieving political goals. It also laid the foundation for the current discourse of homosexuality in contemporary Russia.

### **Was political revolution a “sexual revolution”?**

The beginning of twentieth century brought intense political, social and economic changes in Russia. In 1917 the Bolshevik revolution caused instabilities and anxieties, including ones about family, gender and sexuality. The Bolsheviks took power and introduced the soviet (council) republic of workers and peasants. Obsessed with the idea of private property abolition, the Bolsheviks “condemned family as a bourgeois institution and promised to free women from marriage, considering it the main difficulty on the way of the emancipation of women” (Shapovalova, 2010). The Bolsheviks also dismantled and wiped out Christian discourse, ideology and the Christian pastoral. The leading Bolshevik expert on the gender equality A.M. Kollontai in 1923 declared that the Soviet government “will remove the burden of motherhood from women's shoulders and put it on the state”.



She also added that “the family in its bourgeois sense will die out” (Kollontai, 1928, pp. 146, 161–162). Kolontai based her judgment on Friedrich Engels’s book *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State: in the Light of the Researches of Lewis H. Morgan*, where Engels traces roots of capitalism to the family structure (Engels, 1933).

Eventually, after the communist revolution succeeded, the new government demolished all existing, including the statute of 1832 punishing homosexuality. In the criminal codes of Soviet Russia (1922 and 1926), homosexuality was not even mentioned. Soviet Russia was seen as an example for other countries during the Copenhagen Congress of The World League for Sexual Reform (1928). However, this move of the Soviet government should not deceive researchers. While publicly the Bolsheviks declared equality among citizens of the newly born republic, they still prosecuted homosexuals<sup>3</sup>. “The state had relinquished the instrument of the anti-sodomy law by which to limit public and private displays of homosexuality, but it soon found a new instrument by convicting the men for disorderly conduct” (Healey, 1993, p.34). It led, as put by Bear, to “gradual dawning of gay visibility and acceptance of homosexuality in Russian society” (Baer, 2002, p. 500).

So at this time, the government, at least de jure, kept itself aloof from the issue of homosexuality. However, in the absence of the church, medical science and psychology picked up on this issue. Soviet official medical doctors treated homosexuality as abuse rather than a legal crime. As Healey writes:

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<sup>3</sup>During spring of 1922 in Petrograd (Saint-Petersburg) a court hearing took place. The group of marines was tried for the practice of sodomy. Another "loud" case is the prosecution of two lesbians, one of whom changed her name from Evgenia (female name) to Evgeni (male name) and the couple refused to break the factual marriage they had (Engelstein, 1995).

Changes in the discipline of criminology in the post-revolutionary era suggest two potential approaches which might have developed in relation to homo- sexuality. One strand, looking for biological causes of crime, suggested an analysis of the “authentic” homosexual as not responsible for his or her abnormality, and therefore due sympathy, not punishment. Another, more authoritarian, strand derived from the fashion for social engineering strategies which gained currency in the discipline; it saw the environment as the chief determinant of sexual deviance and sought to identify social changes which might eliminate it (Healey, 1993, p.35).

A soviet researcher Mark Sereiskii wrote about “*gomosexualism*” (homosexuality) in *Bolshaia Sovetskaia Entciklopedia* (Big Soviet Encyclopedia):

Having understood the abnormal development of a homosexual, the society does not and should not put the blame on the barrier of it. Having understood the origins of it, our society uses any mean available to make contacts between homosexuals as harmless as possible, so that the alienation inherent in them, get dissolved in the new collectiveness (Sereiskii, 1930).

This reaffirms the notion that Bolsheviks believed that same-sex practices “were the province of aristocratic roués and petty bourgeois degenerates” (Engelstein, 1995, p. 160). They believed that when the new “soviet personality” and “proletarian consciousness” replace the old class structure of society homosexuality – a remnant of aristocratic practices – would disappear altogether. That was the narrative of the soviet physiological science and medicine. For the state, it was one of the most important levers of modernization and transformation of the entire national economy. The political goal was to promptly replace capitalist economy was the socialist one. To accomplish that, a strong

state was needed. Lenin wrote: “the dictatorship of the proletariat is a stubborn struggle, bloody and bloodless, violent and peaceful, military and agricultural, educational and administrative – against the forces of the old society and traditions” (Lenin, 1999, p. 27). Therefore, homosexuality as the nobility practice was used as a political tool to legitimize the state. To make homosexuality invisible was to make the state stronger. The population of the country, predominantly illiterate, supported this agenda.

Moreover, devastating World War I and the Civil War in Russian led to the creation of the party program which established the preventive direction of Soviet medicine. The full recovery of the population was a task for Soviet medicine (Semashko, 1962). Doing so required psychology to turn down from Froude and reconsider itself based on the new state philosophy of Marxism. Psychologists now concerned themselves with “mechanistic psychology that denied any scientific validity to subjective concepts such as “consciousness” regardless of how they might be studied” (Wozniak, 1975, p. 25).

The early period of the new Soviet republic reaffirmed the existing image of homosexuality as an inherently “aristocratic” practice, unsuitable for the proletariat and the peasants. Despite the formal abolition of the anti-homosexual law, the state continued to discourage homosexual practices as alien. It used homosexuality in two ways. To legitimize the new government, the Bolsheviks supported the suppression of homosexuality as a part of their populist agenda. Publicly condemning homosexual practice as bourgeois, the state gained public support. Homosexuality was also a useful tool in presenting the state in international arena. Here, the Soviet government made a progressive image. Not only did it provide women with the right to vote, it decriminalized homosexuality. Hence, homosexuality was employed by the state for different purposes.

**Stalin's war on homosexuality and his successors**

The already difficult situation for capitalist-thinking Soviet homosexuals was aggravated once Joseph Stalin took power. The new wave of homophobia started in 1933, when the Soviet government conducted the first raid on homosexuals. As the result, 130 people were arrested. Tolts writes that “in the report about the arrest prepared for Stalin, those people were accused of creation of homosexual network of salons and brothels with the further restructuring them into the counterrevolutionary and spy network”<sup>4</sup> (Tolts, 2002).

Homosexuality, thereby became not simply illegal, it was politicized. To be a homosexual became the same as to be a traitor to your own country. The figure of the “national traitor” was used by the government especially often till Stalin's death. As Tolts writes, “gay cases began to be considered by the state as classified and were dealt with “out of court” as political crimes” (Tolts, 2002). Moreover, secretive court hearing was not enough to make homosexuality a political issue. In 1934 famous soviet novelist Maxim Gorky wrote in his article *Proletarian humanism*:

Not tens but hundreds of facts speak to the destructive, corrupting influence on Europe's youth. To recount the facts is disgusting but ... I will point out the following, however, that in the country which is bravely and successfully ruled by the proletariat, homosexuality, and the corruption of youth is socially understood

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<sup>4</sup>From the report to Stalin from a KGB agent:

“...during the liquidation of centers of homosexuals in Moscow, agents identified a gay man, a head of the protocol department of the People's Commissariat of culture. He is reported to be a paid German spy since 1918”.

In the response, Stalin noted: “It is necessary to punish the villains and the legislation must be introduced to prevent it”.

KGB has prepared an anti-homosexual bill in September 1933. (Tolts, 2002)

as a crime and punished, but in the ‘cultured’ country of great philosophers, scientists, musicians it exists openly and unpunished (Essig, 1999).

Gorky goes further, connecting homosexuality to fascism by saying that the destruction of homosexuality will eventually lead to the disappearance of fascism in Europe. (Gorky, 1934, p. 3). Therefore, to already existing “spy-traitor” identity of soviet gays, an association with fascism was added. The article was published about two months prior to “the night of long knives” when Hitler destroyed the SA, many of whom were engaged in practice of homosexuality. Although there was no empirical connection between fascism and homosexuality, for the purposes of propaganda, the connection remained.

The changed political attitudes towards homosexuality were soon reflected in the new edition of *Bolshaya Sovetskaya Encyclopedia* (Big Soviet Encyclopedia). An extended article interprets homosexuality as an ancient practice used by the ruling classes to exploit the population most of whom were slaves. It was then carried over to the capitalist societies to pervert and corrupt its members. The article then states that “the Soviet morality” condemns such a criminal practice, and the state punishes it. (Sheglov, 2000). The article left did not regard homosexuality as an illness, nor did it mention its treatability. From now on it was residue of bourgeois class comparable with exploitation of workers.

The definition appeared to be “useful” in an instrumental sense. Political usage of homosexuality as anti-proletarian practice helped Stalin conduct so-called “cleanings” – imprisonments and killings – of members of the Communist Party, bureaucracy and dissidents who fall out of favor (Kon, 2006). About a thousand men were condemned by

the anti-homosexual law annually.<sup>5</sup> Indeed not all of those imprisoned were homosexuals. Sodomy was a functional cause to oust Stalin's opponents. The secretive practice of court hearings of such cases hid them from people's agenda.

The Stalin's politics of terror and mass imprisonment created an extensive network of political prisons (GULAG) where a different dimension of homosexuality appeared. The Soviet prison system produced homosexuality and used it as a mean for its goals. Homosexual rape was a way to establish a relationship of power among inmates of the prisons. It was means of humiliation and submission. As Kon writes:

Criminal sexual symbolism, language, and rituals everywhere were closely linked to the hierarchical relationships of power, domination and submission; they are more or less stable and versatile in almost all closed male communities. In the criminal world – whether real or symbolic – rape is primarily a mean of establishing or maintaining power relations. The victim, however hard he resisted, lost his masculinity and prestige, and the rapist, on the contrary, increased them. When 'the power changed' former leaders, in turn, were raped and, thereby, irreversibly moved down the hierarchy. It is not a sexual orientation but the domination based on the brute force of social relations and subordination. Such system is imposed on every newcomer and passed down from generation to generation (Kon, 2006, p. 355).

Through such practices, even people who never had any homosexual contacts prior to imprisonment were forced to have them. However, it was only the receptive sexual

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<sup>5</sup> At the end of 1980, their number began to decrease. According to the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation, in 1989, under article 121 in Russian 538 were sentenced, in 1990 - 497, in 1991 - 462, in the first half of 1992 - 227 people (Tolts, 2002).

practices that were socially condemned. Persons who were exposed to such violence were given abusive nicknames such as “rooster”.

From the prison subculture, that penetrated every aspect of life in the Soviet society, such practices permeated in the army. The tyrannical power of old soldiers over new recruits often included explicit or implicit elements of sexual violence. Kon mentions, that “neither the victims nor the rapists are necessarily gay, just the weak are forced to obey the stronger, and the homosexual act establishes this relationship” (Kon, 2006, p. 357).

Indeed administrations of the prisons and the army were informed of such violation of the human rights. However, instead of dealing with it, they preferred to make use of it. People exposed to sexual violence were often used as informers to help the administration keep control within a prison. The fear of being disclosed was so great that even after their release from prisons, people exposed to homosexual acts were easily used by the KGB to find political opponents of the regime.

Eventually, image of homosexuality in general from “western disease”, “spy”, “traitor”, and “fascist” was transformed into “the rooster”, someone who lost masculinity (turned into a woman via sexual act), was humiliated in the worst way, cannot be trusted and dealt with and, therefore, must be ostracized and despised.

The period following Stalin’s death slightly eased the quality of life of homosexuals in the USSR. Khrushchev, who came to power in 1953, started rearranging previous political practices of terror. He generated new hope with the idea of “Ottepel” (Thaw). The famous speech *On the Cult of Personality and Its Consequences* delivered secretly by him during the 20<sup>th</sup> convention of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union aimed at Stalin's nomenklatura.

Despite the fact that under the Khrushchev administration, the Soviet Union did not substantially change its political conditions, political killings ceased and the rate of political imprisonment greatly declined. Many political prisoners of Stalin's were rehabilitated and disimprisoned. Although Khrushchev did not attempt to decriminalize homosexuality, it was no longer used as a political tactic to eliminate political opponents. The government in 1960s was concerned with rebuilding the country after the Second World War and homosexuality was rather left neglected. However, the rights of gays and lesbians were not protected by the state. On the contrary, police blamed homosexuals for rising crime rates.

The Soviet government refused to recognize catastrophic conditions of a portion of its own citizens. Homosexuality, deemed to be an immoral behavior, could not exist in a socialist utopia. Some heterosexual activities were considered reproachful. Just as it was mentioned by Michael Foucault in regard to Victorian Britain, soviet sexual practices were limited to the bedroom of adults (Foucault, 1978). The Soviet government since Stalin cultivated the Marxian idea that sex has only one function – a production of humans. It could not be named enjoyable or desirable (Sandomirsky, 1951). Party control over all aspects of people's lives managed to replace the word "sex" with the pronoun "it". Unnamed but practiced, sex and sexual discourse found its way through especially popular in 1970s political anecdotes<sup>6</sup>.

Although the whole time period between Stalin's leadership and until 1982 when Gorbachev came to power is characterized by hostility toward homosexuals, the two main periods can be distinguished. Stalin used homosexuality politically to control elites and to

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<sup>6</sup> For example, "The party gives birth to us", "There is no sex in the Soviet Union". Later at the beginning of 1990s another joke came out: "They said there was no sex in the USSR. Look, there is sex but there is no the USSR".



rearrange power relations within the party leadership. Constant fear of being accused of homosexuality helped keep top party bureaucrats and politicians loyal to Stalin. After Stalin's death, Khrushchev and his successors abandoned such a practice. However, with the growth of the dissident movement and instabilities in the Soviet bloc, the government still used homosexuality politically by blackmailing homosexuals and making them denounce politically dangerous behavior within their communities.

The soviet government politicized homosexuality, turning gay men into the "people's enemy". The Soviet law perpetuated it as a criminal act against the Soviet society. The "traitor" image often utilized by Stalin, was gradually erased and demasculinized, female-looking man replaced it. Such image is still prevailing in modern Russia.

### **Gorbachev's "perestroika" and "socialism with the human face"**

Real changes started happening in 1982 when Gorbachev came to power. Unlike all his predecessors, the new leader of the "red state" saw another future for the country and its people. The 1980s was the time of real political, social and economic hopes for all soviet citizens. The politics of *Glasnost* (Openness) aimed at bringing openness and transparency to the Soviet government. Its installation led to free flow of information. It also meant a liberalization of the media. Journalists covered information about problems such as HIV/AIDS, homosexuality, alcoholism, governmental misconduct, and corruption. In 1986, Deputy Minister of Health and Chief Sanitary Doctor of the USSR Academy of Medicine Nikolai Burgasov publicly stated,

In our country, there are no conditions for a mass spread of the disease: homosexuality as a serious sexual perversion is punishable by law (Article 121 of

the Criminal Code of the RSFSR), and we conduct a constant work to raise awareness drug harm (Kon, 2006, p. 359)

When AIDS had already appeared in the Soviet Union, the leaders of the state epidemiological institution in their public speeches kept blaming homosexuals for it, portraying them as sexually irresponsible perverts who carried not just AIDS but other evils as well. Even on the pages of the liberal magazine *Ogonyok* the first Soviet victim of the terrible disease – a homosexual engineer infected in Africa – was described with disgust and condemnation. The epidemic of HIV/AIDS spread quickly within the Soviet borders. “In 1989, the concept of ‘spidophobia’<sup>7</sup> appeared in the Soviet Union. People with HIV and their families found themselves in the ring of alienation and anger. They caused fear and hatred of others, no one talked about compassion. People on the streets pointed at them and changed the sidewalk. “HIV-positive lives here” - this inscription was on the door of each apartment, where infected people lived. It was not surprising, because the western epidemic was interpreted as follows: “AIDS is a deadly disease transmitted by airborne droplets, infected dies within a year” (Bobrova, 2002). The media even wrote that the virus was deliberately created in the secret CIA labs to destroy the inhabitants of the countries of the “third world” who oppose US imperialism (Nesterov, 2014). The Soviet leadership used the virus and homosexuals as its main cause to support an anti-Western sentiment and distract the population from growing internal political, social and economic problems.

Nevertheless, the policy of glasnost, combined with the threat of AIDS, made more or less open discussion of sexual orientation issues possible. Firstly among scientists and later among a broader audience, sex and sexuality became a part of social agenda. Since 1987, the question of what homosexuality is and how to classify homosexuals – whether

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<sup>7</sup> SPID is a Russian acronym for AIDS.

they are mentally ill, criminals or just victims of fate – became widely discussed on the pages of the media, especially media considered to be for young people, such as *Moskovsky Komsomolets*, *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, *Sobesednik*, *Ogonyok*, *Molodoi Communist*, *Argumenti i Fakti*, and others, on radio and on television. From journalistic essays and published letters of homosexuals, lesbians and their parents ordinary Soviet people first began to learn about the crippled destinies, police brutality, judicial persecution, sexual violence in prisons, camps, the army and the tragic, inescapable loneliness of people who are doomed to live in constant fear and are not able to meet their own kind<sup>8</sup>. Each publication caused a flood of contradictory responses.

Brian Baer in *Russian Gays/Western Gaze* describes a letter to *Literaturnaia Gazeta* (1989) from a mother of a homosexual kid. She could find little information on the subject in the medical literature. “Why,” she lamented, “is science silent?” This broad repression of sexual discourse produced a variety of silences that complicates any attempt to map the landscape of male (homo) sexual desire in the Soviet period” (Baer, 2002, p. 499).

During Gorbachev’s rule fewer people were tried and convicted for homosexuality and the problem of decriminalizing homosexuality had been discussed among specialists of law for a long time. Authors of the 1973 textbook of criminal law for soviet lawyers mentioned irrationality of Article 121 of the RSFSR Criminal Code. They wrote,

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<sup>8</sup> Approximately in that period the *Unsent Letter to a Straight Friend* was written. It became famous later with the spread of the Internet. In the letter, the author who lived in the USSR shares his thought and feeling about his life in a hostile environment. The letter is addressed to the author's friend who's a priest. The author himself mentions that he had to marry a woman and have kids because of the social pressure. (Gurko, 2006) Regardless of the authenticity of the letter it represents the conditions of soviet homosexuals.

In the soviet juridical literature attempts to bring a scientific basis for criminal liability for voluntary sodomy have never been made. The only argument that is usually used – the moral depravity and a violation of the rules of social morality - cannot be considered sufficient and the negative properties of the individual cannot be the basis for criminal liability, and the immorality of the act is not sufficient to declare this a crime ... There are serious doubts about the wisdom of criminal responsibility unqualified for sodomy (Shargorodskii M., Osipov A., 1973, p. 656)

However, soviet elite never tried to alleviate fate of homosexuals regardless of the weakening of political oppression and a democratization of Soviet society. And despite the fact that homosexuality remained outside of legality, the discourse began to circulate, people started to familiarize themselves with the existence of same-sex practices.

## **Contemporary Russia**

### **“Spring of sexualities” in “crazy 90s”<sup>9</sup>**

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the enthusiasm about embracing western way of life rapidly and significantly increased. The “iron curtain” failed and flows of goods, services and ideas from the West streamed into Russia. Changes in economic and political life happened rapidly and the government of the day not always managed to control them. Therefore, inability of the Russian leadership to run the economy in the new circumstances led to sharp impoverishment of the population and disappointment in Russia's ability to live according to Western models. The government and the president Boris Yeltsin were deemed “pro-western puppets” who agreed to every proposition the

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<sup>9</sup>Crazy 90s" is the common descriptive name for the period of 1990s after the collapse of the Soviet Union. It is linked to the presidency of Boris Yeltsin, huge economic and political turmoil and unlimited freedom in Russia.

Western leaders made often neglecting traditional Russian values. Nevertheless, the president and its government accomplished the task of creating a new legal base in the country. The process of decriminalization of homosexuality was a part of it. Homosexuality was officially decriminalized on 27 of May, 1993, when the Law on Amendments to the Criminal Code, the Criminal Procedure Code of the Russia and the Corrective Labour Code of the Russia was published. These Amendments repealed Article 121.1. However, it is hasty to think that new government was so attentive to human rights in general and the rights of homosexuals in particular. As Kon states, “this was done mainly under the pressure of international public opinion, in order to facilitate Russia's accession to the Council of Europe, without extensive warning and explanation in the media” (Kon, 2006, p. 361). For the new Russian government a membership in international organization was vital. It gave access to open markets and increased the prestige of Russia in the world arena. Moreover, Russia needed external borrowings of money and for that was ready to make concessions to Western governments. The population often saw it as a weakness. The idea of lost Soviet greatness grew along with anti-Western sentiments. Therefore, the government did not want to attract criticism of the population, most of whom were against to homosexuality and decriminalized homosexuality quietly.

In the new Criminal Code, which was adopted on January 1, 1997, a special article about sodomy was not mentioned but Article 132 *Violent acts of sexual nature* provides that “sodomy, lesbianism or other sexual acts with violence or threat of violence to the victim or other persons, or with use of a helpless victim position shall be punished by imprisonment for a term from three to six years” (ConsultantPlus, 1997). The statement existed earlier “the satisfaction of the sexual needs in perverted forms”, disappeared in the new Code. However, Article 133 punishes for “forcing a person to sexual intercourse,

sodomy, lesbianism or other acts of sexual nature by means of blackmail, threat of violence, damage or seizure of property, with the use of material or other dependence of the victim” (ConsultantPlus, 1997).

The usage of lesbianism, which had not existed in any of the previous Russian criminal legislation, represents formally a retrograde step, but in fact, it is a tribute to the principle of gender equality. The legislators dared not to abandon “sodomy” but now the law punished only violent acts. Kon writes in this regard that “no matter how the law varied, the real situation of sexual minorities depends not only and not so much on the norm of the law, but on the state of social psychology” (Kon, 2006, p. 362). Soviet society in this regard was extremely intolerant of any dissent and unusual behavior, even completely innocent. In the middle of the 1980s the word “Blue” became to denounce homosexual people who were the most stigmatized social group. According to the opinion poll conducted in November 1989 to the question “How should society deal with homosexuals?” 33% of respondents said – “eliminate them” 30% - “isolate”, 10% - “let them be” and only 6% said they would help (Levada, 1995). Attitudes toward gays and lesbians were much worse than towards prostitutes, drug addicts, handicapped people, AIDS bearers, vagrants, alcoholics, and “rockers”. Later polls showed that Russians became more tolerant.

During 1990s homosexuality became a popular image among musicians, pop-stars and other show business figures (Zosimov, 1997). The problems of gays and lesbians were openly discussed on TV and in mass newspapers. In movie theaters and on the television classic movies Jarman and Visconti were shown. Homosexual allusions shocked fewer people.

Much has changed in everyday life. “Blue” clubs and bars opened in Moscow and Petersburg. Gays and lesbians created regional human rights and cultural organizations in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Barnaul, Rostov, Nizhny Tagil, Kaluga, Murmansk, Omsk, Tomsk, Yaroslavl and some other cities. However, gays and lesbians continued to experience psychological and sometimes physical violence towards themselves even today<sup>10</sup>.

The 1990s did not eliminate the negative image of homosexuals. The Yeltsin administration did not put efforts to destigmatize gays and lesbians. Doing so would have created a negative assessment of the homophobic population, which by the end of the 1990s, began to hate the West and all that was connected with it. “Western-style homosexuality, or what Dennis Altman has referred to as 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)” (Baer, 2009, p. 6). For the government juridical decriminalization of homosexuality was tool in negotiations with international organizations and foreign governments. Therefore, homosexuality was used politically in two ways. In domestic affairs the government was silent about rights of homosexuals in order not to attract unnecessary criticism of the public. In foreign affairs, homosexuality was used to show ongoing democratization of the country.

Nevertheless, the period of 1990s brought more open discussions about gays and lesbians into the agenda of media. People were exposed to information about homosexuality including translated sources from abroad. Problems of the body and

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<sup>10</sup> Along with lots of written evidence of violence against gays and lesbians, there is a video on the network YouTube, created by two young men (not gay), who decided to walk through the center of Moscow, holding each other's hand. In the process of “the experiment” people were subjected to psychological violence. The experiment had to be stopped on the grounds that the experimenters could be beaten. See. (Reaction to gays in Russia social experiment, 2015)

connections between bodily and social started being studied in universities (Podoroga, 1995). All that led to a better scientific understanding of homosexuality.

### **Empire Strikes Back<sup>11</sup> or Russia concentrates**

The situation began to change when Vladimir Putin became the president of Russian Federation. He started in 2000 with bringing back the Soviet anthem with slight changes in the lyrics as a new national anthem of the Russian Federation. In his public speeches, Putin includes conservative and nationalist rhetoric. Words such as “nation”, “greatness”, “patriotism”, and others came into the public discourse<sup>12</sup>. In such circumstances homosexuality and appeal to human rights has no place in political agenda.

Almost immediately the Putin administration formed an alliance with the Russian Orthodox Church. The church was traditionally hostile to homosexuality since sixteen century when a Russian monk Vasily the Third criticized men for “following foreign fashion, shaving beards, using smelling waters and smearing ointments which make them look like women” (Gudzy, 1966, p. 264). Orthodox Christianity perceives homosexual practice as a sin alien to Russian. In his interview, the Orthodox leader patriarch Kirill mentioned that “this [legalization of same-sex marriage] is a very dangerous apocalyptic symptom, and we must do everything in our powers to ensure that sin is never sanctioned in Russia by state law, because that would mean that the nation has embarked on a path of self-destruction” (Gribovsky, 2013). The state and the church implicitly and explicitly encourage anti-gay organizations to combat human rights activists in Russia. According to Human Rights Watch report, there is an attack on the civil rights of LGBT people in Russia,

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<sup>11</sup> The name came as an inspiration from the S. Stone’s article *The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto* (Stone, 1992).

<sup>12</sup> See *Addresses to the Federal Assembly (2000 – 2015)*



the space for the discussion of homosexuality has reduced, the censorship in the media has been introduced and there is persecution of dissidents (Human Rights Watch, 2007).

With the proliferation NATO closer to European borders and growing pressure on Russia, president Putin had no reasons to appease the West with human rights and democratic reforms. After his come back to presidency in 2012 following Moscow mass political protests against electoral fraud, Putin introduced a bill “On Amendments to Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation regarding the Regulation of the Activities of Non-profit Organisations Performing the Functions of a Foreign Agent” (often referred to as the Russian “foreign agent” law). The bill which quickly became law on 20th July, 2012 required NGOs involved into politics register as foreign agents. Such a mark had strong reference to the Cold War era and has been criticized extensively (Lally, 2013). That law did not particularly aim at homosexuals but the majority of LGBTQ organizations in Russia are financed from abroad, therefore they had to re-register as foreign agents. From now on, the image of homosexuality and foreign agency of it coincided.

The Putin administration with ideological support of the Church has made homosexuality a main goal of its anti-Western propaganda campaign. Politically, it allowed the government to shift public attention to the minor problem, whereas the real social and economic issues remained without substantial public criticism. The parastatal media effectively accomplished the task. LGBTQ-rights organizations in particular became an exclusive aim of governmental criticism as agents of the western countries, especially the Unites States. It found support among the population. That environment encouraged Russian regions to adopt their own legislation to further limit gay-rights and create a discourse of hatred. A suitable example was provided by Ryazan Oblast where the General Assembly on May 24, 2006 adopted a supplement to the local Law on Administrative

Offences: “Section 3.13. Public actions aimed at propaganda of homosexuality (sodomy and lesbianism) among minors”. The law uses the Soviet medical term “homosexuality”<sup>13</sup> combined with the outdated term “sodomy” that has religious connotations and the relatively new “lesbianism” which was not used in the USSR. The law was contested in the Constitutional Court in 2009. In its decision the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation on January 19, 2010 N151-O-O, declared, that

...as such the prohibition of the propaganda – as a purposeful targeted and uncontrolled activity of the dissemination of information that may damage the health, moral and spiritual development, including misconceptions about the social equivalence of traditional and non-traditional marriage – among persons deprived due to there are of ability to critically evaluate such information cannot be considered as violating the constitutional rights of citizens (The Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation, 2010)

In 2012 the decision was appealed to the UN Human Rights Committee. “The Human Rights Committee found that the applicant’s conviction under the Ryazan Law on Administrative Offenses (Ryazan Region Law) which prohibits “public actions aimed at propaganda of homosexuality among minors” violated her right to freedom of expression, read in conjunction with her right to freedom from discrimination, under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)” (UN Human Rights Committee, 2012). However, that decision did not change the situation.

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<sup>13</sup> It should be noted that The Russian language often uses words “homosexuality”, “lesbianism” while in relation to heterosexual practices the word “heterosexuality” is used. The suffix “ISM” in many languages (Russian is not an exception) is used to create ideological concepts (socialism, capitalism, feminism, etc.). I would argue that artificially made mistranslation of homosexuality aims at showing political nature of the homosexual practices as if homosexuality was an ideology.

In 2011 a few other Russian regions (Arkhangelsk in 2011, Kostroma in 2012, Saint Petersburg in 2012, Novosibirsk in 2012, Magadan in 2012, Samara in 2012, and Krasnodar in 2012) started adopting similar regional gay propaganda laws. The Saint Petersburg anti-gay law “On Amendments to the Law of St. Petersburg On administrative offenses in St. Petersburg” adopted on 30 of March, 2012 offered a translation for the acronym “LGBT” using the repressive language of “sodomy, lesbianism, bisexuality, transgenderism” (Smirnov, 2011). It is a complex combination of historical, political and social processes that gave rise to the text. Those factors appealed at the same time to the familiar and still desired imperial and Soviet past, the word “sodomy”, and the Western concept of political and social rights (“LGBT”).

The federal law “For the Purpose of Protecting Children from Information Advocating for a Denial of Traditional Family Values”, that was unanimously passed the State Duma (one deputy abstained), put an end to regional legislative initiatives on 30 June 2013. The law was shortly named the “gay propaganda law” or the “anti-gay law”. It faced main criticism from abroad, while inside the country only a small number of democratically oriented organizations and human rights groups opposed the legislation and tried to appeal it but did not succeed.

The anti-gay law introduced the concept of “non-traditional sexual relations”. Dan Healey analyzing the idea of “traditional” sexual relationships refers to the Soviet Union where “there was no explicitly sexual discourse” and , therefore “it is hard to know precisely what commentators who use the term “traditional sex” actually mean” (Healey, “Untraditional sex’ and the “Simple Russian”: Nostalgia for Soviet innocence in the polemics of Dilia Enikeeva’, 2008). At the same time “non-traditional” sexuality is understood as sex not related to the emergence of children as a result of sexual activity and

for that reason considered new, previously inaccessible to people. Since the historical (Healy, 2008) and biological (Mondimor, 2002) arguments do not support the thesis that homosexuality can be classified as such a phenomena, it falls under that definition for the political reasons. Therefore, the information about the latest should be censored to stop the spread of its dynamic.

Now the state explicitly politicized homosexuality, making them a political force that is capable of influencing discourse and hence change it. Homosexuals thus became “representatives” of the western culture, alien and dangerous to Russian traditional values. Now they were the agents of the foreign government, traitors and spies. The Putin administration to some extent resurrected Stalin’s approach to homosexuality. Indeed it is “a light version” and homosexuals are not sent to prisons or executed. However, accusation of homosexuality deprives oppositional politicians of a chance to be elected. Governmental and Orthodox groups are often used to attack NGOs that work to shed light on government misconduct. Suspicion of promoting LGBTQ-rights is utilized as an excuse for such actions. The Putin government uses the homosexuality and those groups to blame the West for attempts to change the current political regime in Russia. It allows the leadership to intensify censorship and to press protest activity.

### **Homosexual discourse usage by different groups**

As Foucault showed in his *History of Sexuality*, power and science are closely related to each other (Foucault, 1978). The configuration of power relations in Russia does not allow the scientific discourse to play the same role in producing knowledge. It favors nationalistic and patriotic language and groups that promote it while censoring dissenting voices. The media controlled by the government produces the language of homophobia. A Russian TV-anchor of the state TV-channel “Russian One” proposed to “burn hearts of gay

people and bury the ashes” during one of his telecasts (Petrovskaya, 2012). The state generously supports patriotic groups of Cossacks, Orthodox activists and Russian Orthodox Church. Attempts to challenge “the speaker’s benefit” using Foucault’s term are rare and censored. Gay people cannot publicly speak about themselves.

Such an aggressive language of power made Russian homosexuals to develop their own vernacular. “Tema” (theme) – one of the most widespread and mobile terms to denote sexuality outside heteronormative culture framework. Derived from it adjectives such as “temny”, “po teme”, “tematichesky” (all those words relate to the term “theme”) – quoted and without them, in combinations with other words – describe a number of situations and phenomena, the meaning of which denounce “having something to do with the fact that you yourself know very well”.

I would argue that this word is not even a secret code or a language of discretion because the word was used by a once popular homosexual magazine in Russia. This word is the most accurate reflection of homosexuality in the form in which it exists in Russia – its occasional usage may signify something homosexual, it may not mean homosexual, it can be neutral and inconspicuous. It can say a lot about the person using it, or describe the plot of the conversation and participants; it can quickly change the meaning to protect the speaker or let the communicators know what is happening. In other words, this term is the best characterization of Russian version of queer. Since looking and behaving differently may provoke aggression and physical violence, the language is the area of queerness.

“Tema” also involves the active participation of speaking subjects in the production of word meanings. At the time of speaking and at the moment of perception of “tema” each participant of the conversation contributes to the design of linguistic convention. This

convention is certainly based on predetermined conditions of perception of the speech in a manner that allows communication to continue. However, it is also produced in the process of communication as a result of a particular situation. Meaning, produced in this situation, may never take the same shape again; it may be lost forever because it is situational and unstable. Nevertheless, such instability is not perceived as a weakness so often associated with the notion of instability. Immediate production and the disappearance of the convention describes the free, anti-authoritarian and mobile language which does not involve the categories of pressure, power relations and orientation to the eternal reproduction of the same sense. Such as McCune writes about sexual practices of discretion, Russian language of homosexual sex must be discreet (Jeffrey Q. McCune Jr., 2014). Discretion protects the speaker and it also protects the language.

Unlike fixed and perpetuated LGBT identities in the western countries, Russian homosexuals base their identity on fluid language. The casual dictionary adequately conveys the atmosphere around homosexuality; it does not involve the imposition of a certain meaning. The casual dictionary is not institutionalized and, therefore, presupposes a certain degree of freedom but it also implies the absence of the eternal and the predetermined conventions that are so cherished by government institutions. The discourse of power, by contrast, tends to have definitions, against which scientific debates may take place or debates in the courts.

It is important to say that the federal law “For the Purpose of Protecting Children from Information Advocating for a Denial of Traditional Family Values” pursued two objectives. From the one hand, it was necessary to create definitions *per se* and link homosexuality with propaganda. From the other hand, the legislators deliberately left unclear what “homosexuality” (homosexuality) is and how to understand the

“propaganda” of it so that “propaganda could not be distinguished from enlightenment” (Alekseev, 2012). Ambiguity of the definitions helps law enforcers interpret the law, depending on how the political authority will command. Any group can be classified and objectified as transgressors of the law. Once those transgressors are identified, they can be used politically. The law can name particular groups or people national traitors, foreign agents to silence, oppress or marginalize them. At the same time, the groups that stand against homosexuality gain power. So that the leadership uses ones against other to retain control and stay in power.

I argue that the main purpose of the law is not to limit propaganda *par excellence* but to regulate discourse around homosexuality with the use of normative language as the main tool because the ban on “propaganda of homosexuality” generates a certain social norms and beliefs about homosexuality. For many Russians, homosexuality, which legally stopped being treated as a mental illness in 1999,<sup>14</sup> never actually stopped being so in the public consciousness. Kondakov writes in this regard that “juridical discourse has the power and the ability to determine the truth through appeal to “justice”. The mechanism of media discourse in this respect - the appeal to the fact that the consumer is already familiar with the truth, which is indisputable” (Kondakov, 2001).

Widespread usage of propaganda makes it an ideological clichés. It is emotionally biased and bears an ideological component, expressed as a negative evaluation of homosexuality and the need to combat it. The Russian Constitution bans propaganda of social, racial, national or religious superiority. The discourse of homosexuality as

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<sup>14</sup> Homosexuality is not considered a disease in accordance with the ratified in 1999 by the Russian Federation of ICD-10 (International Classification of Diseases Tenth Revision)

propaganda can be compared to and recognized as dangerous for the society and the state. Therefore, the state has moral and legal grounds for prohibiting it.

Moreover, the ban is justified by the reference to so-called “traditional values”. Courts have repeatedly referred to “traditional values”, from which they conclude “social disparity” between homosexuality and heterosexuality. Scientific or legal justifications of the “disparity” are not provided by the courts. Legal and medical documents, defining homosexuality as a variant of normal sexual orientation on a par with heterosexuality are not considered. Modern scientific knowledge has consistently been ignored. The anti-gay law defines family as follows:

“The family, motherhood and childhood in their traditional, ancestrally perceived sense are the values that provide a continuous change of generations” (Explanatory Note to the Draft Federal Law No44554-6 "On Amendments to the Code of Administrative Offences", 2013).

Legislators and courts consistently identify sexuality with reproduction, which is also used for the construction of heterosexuality as a legitimate norm and perpetuate homosexuality as something “nontraditional and brought from the West”. The explanatory note to the bill introduced in the State Duma in 2013 which proposes establishment of the administrative responsibility for “propaganda of homosexuality” begins with the words: “the promotion of homosexuality in modern Russia took a wide sweep. Such propaganda is carried out both through the media and through the active implementation of public actions that promote homosexuality as normal behavior” (Osetinskay, 2013).

There is nothing new in treating homosexuality as explicitly “western”, “nontraditional”, “brought from overseas” phenomenon. Such ideas have been artificially



cultivated in the Russian Empire and the USSR for centuries. Stalin effectively used criminalized homosexuality to combat his political opponents and control elites. His successors attracted dissidents and oppositional intellectuals using homosexuality as an excuse. Yeltsin employed homosexuality as a tool in negotiations with the western governments to obtain benefits.

Homosexuality obtained new sound with the new circle of escalations between the USA/Europe on the one side and Russian on the other. Putin promoted the law which made the LGBTQ rights advocates “foreign agents being funded by international groups to undermine political stability and order within the Russian borders”<sup>15</sup>. Such hostile discourse and policies based on it led to the creation of an image of a homosexual as deceitful, mentally unstable and dangerous traitor with messed gender identity who tries to spoil kids with nontraditional ideas and, therefore, destroy the society. Surprisingly the state has not yet started blaming homosexuals for the epidemic proliferation of HIV/AIDS in Russian. (Feinberg, 2015).

## **Conclusions**

Heteronormativity and homophobia, encouraged by the state policies, compel Russian gays and lesbians to stay in the closet. Since coming-out from the closet is possible but not always available to homosexuals I find the concept of *passing* used in transgender study useful, especially the approach applied by R. Snorton in his article “*A New Hope*”: *The Psychic Life of Passing* (2009). His idea of “passing to yourself” as the valuable tool to approach the everyday psychic life of Russian homosexuals seems to be capable of explaining the importance of coming-out to yourself while political logic demands you to do

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<sup>15</sup> See for example (How the US State Department is funding Russian LGBT Liberals, 2015)

that publicly. As he puts it, “a deeper consideration of the psychic life of passing requires an exploration of the interstitial relationships among articulation (we are who we say we are), performance (we are what we do), and practice (we are routinized bodily actions)” (Snorton 2009, p. 79).

It is important, however, to be able to find recognition, Snorton seems to be saying. Russian LGBTQ people just as Snorton himself “may find legibility among friends, family, support groups, and other *LGBTQ* [*my correc.*] people. They may also find recognition in their own minds” (Snorton 2009, p. 82). The outside world still remains hostile to them. Although, it is important to be recognized “the sense of feeling misrecognized also serves as a site for resistance in forms of identification governed by the politics of recognition, as the possibility of misrecognition carries with it the opportunity for deliberation and the potential rejection of social scripts” (Snorton 2009, p. 83).

Social a political acceptance of homosexuals in Russia is yet to come. The mixed and messed image of gays and lesbians inherited from the imperial period as “something that the aritscorats do” was changed by Bolsheviks to mean “anti-revolutionary mentally ill bourgeois agents who seek to undermine the soviet regime from within”. Stalin’s gulag-system and the politicization of every activity that was considered “not normal” along with criminalization of “sodomy” changed the image of homosexual men again. Now they were demasculinized and humiliated people. Such image has persisted till today when the state – an institution which should be morally neutral – encourages homophobia and brings back to life the old image of gays as “national traitors”, those who are usually paid from abroad to “rock the boat”.

While the government excluded homosexuality from the list of illnesses, the “collective unconsciousness”, using Jung’s concept never dropped the idea of gays being

sick (Jung, 1927). The government did not publicly announce the exclusion and, therefore, did not have a chance to change the image. The current political elite uses that image to their advantage to sexualize, to be more precise, homosexualize domestic problems, to oppress civil society groups, human rights advocates, and independent politicians. However, such “blame gays” campaign also brings attention to problems of homosexuality in Russia and raise awareness about our existence.

Despite such political and social climate homosexuals do exist in Russia and they make their way into public sphere often putting their health and life in. Russian political leadership uses language which appeals to abstract concept such as “traditions” and “Russian values” regardless of the simple truth that the humanity no longer lives in the traditional world. We send vessels into space to explore our galaxy, have nuclear powers to turn all life on Earth to ashes in no time, use artificial fertilization to produce people, and even have capacities of changing the human genome. Everything mentioned, would not have been thinkable a century ago and a hundred years from now other inventions will continue to reform human categories. Despite all of that, a conservative society as Russian, for instance, denies its citizens the rights the others possess. Not only is it unfair but creates tensions among people, raises hostility, violence, and ostracism.

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