

HOW SHOULD WE READ QUEER RUSSIA?

Guest Editor: Dan Healey (Swansea, UK)

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QUEER RUSSIA: IMPOSSIBLE TO IGNORE

editorial

Impossible to ignore: the gay-pride disputes that erupt every springtime in Moscow.

Depressing to recall: since Moscow Pride was first proposed in 2005, Mayor Yurii Luzhkov and the Russian Orthodox Church have deemed the march 'satanic,' against Russian mores, and City Hall has consistently banned it. In May 2007, pride marchers and their EU supporters were assaulted by nationalist and religious zealots and arrested by police.

Amazing to report: on 1 May 2008, citizens bearing a huge banner denouncing workplace discrimination against gays and lesbians marched in Moscow's annual May Day parade. Joining young anti-fascists, their protest banner was not confiscated by police who, according to organizers, 'reacted calmly' to it. Yet the battle over Luzhkov's latest annual ban on a specifically gay-pride parade rumbles on in the courts.

Two Russias now confront each other: the 'straight' Russia of 'traditional' gender and sexual conformity, and the 'other Russia', a Russia of queer genders and sexualities. Russians are engaged in a wrenching debate about the future of sexuality. The heritage of decades of silence fuels these passions. It's a debate that began in the late perestroika era when Russia's first LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) organizations and periodicals appeared; and it accelerated when male homosexuality was decriminalized in 1993.

Like many 'accursed questions' of national life, the problem of the queer in Russia has found more resonance in culture than in politics. Agonizing over desired knowledge versus willed ignorance, spectacle versus invisibility, 'everything is permitted' versus strategies of containment, artists have accessed queer Russianness for multifarious purposes. In their essays, Brian Baer, Adi Kuntsman, and Eliot Borenstein show us how the spectre of the queer has been a key to post-Soviet Russian identity. One historical pathway of signifi-

tion has emphasized queer spiritual refinement, and offers a means of putting same-sex desire and gender alterity 'at the very heart of Russian tradition' (Baer). Another equally enduring pathway ties queerness to criminality and 'monstrosity'; writers and artists have turned to these metaphors to explain, and distance themselves from, Gulag same-sex relations (Kuntsman) or today's criminal hierarchies (Borenstein).

Queer Russians live out these conflicting vectors. Francesca Stella shows us how the presence of the 'monstrous' gender Other destabilizes families with lesbian and bisexual offspring as much in Russia as elsewhere. Yet she also reveals how some queer women negotiate lives of dignity and accommodation. Ivan Saburoff's gay lexicon illustrates how the historical burden of criminality has marked queer speech; yet his work also foregrounds the 'weapons of the weak' that LGBT people used to lighten their lives: gender irony and performance, and the surreptitious practice of claiming urban 'cruising grounds' (*pleshki*). Today's queer generation, that 'other Russia', using sharper weapons to claim public space in the Russian capital, is in fact the latest generation of Russians who have confronted the culture of 'everyday homophobia'. How that culture imagines them, and how they respond, is the subject of this issue.

ABOUT THE GUEST EDITOR:

Dan Healey is a historian of Russia and of sexuality and medicine teaching at Swansea University, Wales, UK. He is the author of *Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia: The Regulation of Sexual and Gender Dissent* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), now translated with updated bibliographical material as *Gomoseksual'noe vlechlenie v revoliutsionnoi Rossii: regulirovanie seksual'no-gendernogo dissidentstva* (Moscow: Ladimir, 2008).

TEXTS, CONTEXTS, SUBTEXTS:
READING QUEERNESS IN CONTEMPORARY RUSSIAN CULTURE

Brian James Baer

analysis

Queer sexuality in Russia, as seen from the West, can be confusing, since some phenomena closely resemble Western forms of sexuality but mean something quite different in the Russian context. In this article, Brian James Baer examines philosophical, cinematic, and popular Russian images of same-sex love to guide the reader through this confusing terrain. In Russia, homosociability can easily be misread, while the spiritual and national dimensions of love between men and between women pose challenges to Western notions of the queer.

Westerners trying to ‘read’ queer sexuality in Russia – or in any foreign country for that matter – often fall into traps. Some things look and sound more or less like Western queerness, some things seem utterly unique, and other things at first glance resemble Western ones but mean something quite different on closer inspection. To avoid these traps, it might be helpful to look at Russian queer culture via these categories, paying particular attention to that last one – the things that seem similar but turn out to be different.

The phenomena easiest to understand are those that look and mean much the same as in the West. In this category, I would include much of the conservative, homophobic rhetoric figuring homosexuality metaphorically as a disease, infecting the entire body politic and the nation’s youth in particular. One might also place in this category expressions from the opposite end of the spectrum: those homophilic representations of ‘global gay’ culture, celebrating homosexuality as a way of life, as a sophisticated, sex-positive, urban lifestyle. The glossy Moscow journal *Kvir* (Queer) would be a perfect example, even if here ‘queer’ appears to signify ‘gay male’ identity only. Despite these similarities, some Russians see participation in a global gay culture as confirmation that homosexuality is a borrowing from the West, an unintended consequence of the opening of Russia’s borders and the lifting of censorship. Phenomena belonging exclusively to the category of

things that look and signify something ‘uniquely’ Russian are much more difficult to find. Russia participated in European culture for centuries and even during the most repressive years of Soviet rule had contact with the West. Moreover, well before the Bolshevik Revolution ‘gay and lesbian’ sub-cultures evolved in Russia’s major cities; transformed and battered by Stalinism and ‘mature socialism’, their successors emerged after the fall of the Soviet Union. An underground life, in many ways similar to European queer twentieth-century experience, of friendship and sociability, cruising, argot, and artistic

activity ebbed and flowed during the Soviet years. Given this heritage, there seem to be few unique expressions of ‘queerness’, differentiating Russia from the West. The category that has produced perhaps the most ‘mis-readings’, however, is the third: the one consisting of phenomena that appear

on the surface to resemble Western phenomena but, I contend, mean something very different. An obvious example would be the 1993 repeal of the law which criminalized male homosexual activity (Article 121 of the Criminal Code of the RSFSR). At first glance, this seems a herald of a new post-Soviet tolerance of homosexuality, but most scholars now agree that it originated in Russia’s eagerness to enter the Council of Europe, not a desire to show tolerance toward sexual minorities. This interpretation is supported by the fact that there are today no legal protections against discrimination for gays and lesbians in housing or the workplace, and that



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since 2006 Mayor Yuriy Luzhkov opposed gay pride parades in Moscow. Those who assembled to march in 2007 were violently dispersed. Therefore, when interpreting expressions of and reactions to queer sexuality in Russia, one must consider the unique contexts and subtexts of post-Soviet culture.

QUEER (IN)VISIBILITY

The re-emergence during perestroika of queer visibility in Russia followed decades of official silence on the subject not only in the press but in academe as well. As a result, in the last years of the USSR and in the Yeltsin era, virtually any expression of queer sexuality inevitably carried the effect of an anti-Soviet gesture. That anti-Soviet aura helps in part to explain why homosexuality became a popular theme in movies and fiction, not at all aimed at a 'gay' audience. Even more important, perhaps, is the fact that the fall of the Soviet Union ushered in a period of economic, political, and social chaos, and a much-touted 'crisis of masculinity', reflected in, among other things, plummeting life expectancy for Russian men and demographic decline, much ascribed to alcoholism and suicide. So while the lifting of censorship made flamboyant expressions of queer more visible, many Russians came to see this visibility as a symptom if not a cause of their contemporary Time of Troubles.

Official Soviet-era silence resulted in a dearth of first-person testimonies and sociological data,

making Russia appear as something of a queer *terra incognita*. While this made Russia intriguing to Western scholars, journalists, and writers, who began to visit the country during perestroika, it also made it dangerous, from a scholarly point of view: it meant there was little empirical research against which to evaluate the largely anecdotal evidence they collected. Intriguing work by sociologists Dan Schluter and Laurie Essig, and journalist David Tuller's intelligent travelogue, revealed much about that queer *terra incognita* but suffered from the lack of a wider contextual map.

Canadian filmmaker and photographer Steve Kokker, who also travelled to Russia in the early 1990s, offers an interesting perspective on the question of reading sexuality in Russia. In two short films, *Berioza* (Birch, 1995) and *Komrades* (2003), Kokker documented, perhaps unwittingly, his own (mis)reading. Impressed by the unabashed physicality of Russian men, Kokker became convinced that vodka-fuelled Russian male bonding (*homosocial* interaction) might lead seamlessly into homosexual interaction. He tested his hypothesis first in *Berioza*, by filming a young Russian soldier in his apartment. Egged on by Kokker and a Russian friend, the soldier undressed and posed for the camera, flexing his well-toned musculature. Before turning in for the night, Kokker offers him a massage and then turns the conversation to sex. The Russian, uncomfortable, cuts the conversation

VASILI VASIL'EVICH ROZANOV (1856–1919)

Religious and philosophical thinker of Russia's fin-de-siècle Silver Age. First came to public notice for his philosophical-literary study *Legenda o velikom inkvizitore F. M. Dostoevskogo* (F. M. Dostoevskii's Legend of the Grand Inquisitor, 1891). After 1900 his output included reflections on education, religion, and sexuality, including homosexuality in his *Liudi lunnogo sveta* (People of the Lunar Light, 1911). He was a contradictory figure, a neo-slavophile with anti-Semitic, anti-rational but pro-sexuality views. His later books of aphorisms (among them, *Opavshie list'ia* [Fallen Leaves, 1913]) are highly prized by Russian stylists, and gave rise to the label 'Rozanovshchina' (Rozanovism) to describe the aphoristic essay genre (an ancestor of the blog) in Russian.

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short. Returning the next day, the soldier makes clear he is not open to homosexual advances, ending their budding friendship.

The longer film *Komrades* conducts this experiment with a larger test group. We see Russian sailors walk the streets with their arms over each other's shoulder and wax poetic on their intense friendship for their male comrades. Kokker then invites several sailors back to his apartment for vodka, snacks, and on-camera interviews. In a scene that provocatively depicts the interpretive pitfalls of this project, one sailor, lying on his stomach naked on a bed before going to sleep, responds to a query by Kokker concerning his feelings about homosexuality. He explains that the sailors hate homosexuals because they are 'outside' the military and are free to sleep with women, but don't. That's why, when they see them, these sailors beat them up. The closed military world fears the homosexual; its hazing rituals (*dedovshchina*), ignored by Kokker, resonate with homophobic violence too. So much for the seamless transition from homosociality to homosexuality.

NATURE, NURTURE AND THE SPIRIT

Another aspect of queer discourse in Russia that might perplex the Western observer is the fact that for many Russians the debate over homosexuality does not come down to the question of nature versus nurture. Russians appear to recognize two sources of homosexuality: biology *and* culture. And so, it is not uncommon then to see pleas for tolerance (of natural homosexuality) side-by-side with impassioned rants against homosexuality perceived as unnatural trend, foreign borrowing, cultural aberration. This categorization can be traced back at least as far as Vasilii Rozanov in his book-length philosophical investigation of homosexuality, *People of the Moonlight* (Liudi lunnogo sveta, 1911), in which he distinguished between 'true' homosexuals, representing a fixed minority, and

'spiritual homosexuals', whose homosexuality is attributable to the influence of Christian aestheticism. Following Rozanov, many Russian writers, commentators, and even doctors today typically recognize biological and cultural sources of homosexuality. It's a surprisingly popular duality. The British sociologist Hilary Pilkington noted among the young Muscovites she interviewed the opinion that it was necessary 'to differentiate between "genuine" gays, who "can't help themselves", and those just following trends imported

EVGENII VLADIMIROVICH KHARITONOV
(1941–1981)

Writer whose homosexual-themed stories and poetry went unpublished until the 1990s; yet they circulated in samizdat, and the KGB seized some copies in raids of dissidents in the 1980s. In the 1970s, Kharitonov made a career as a director in Moscow's experimental theatre world, and also taught in Moscow State University on correcting speech defects. An English translation of his best-known stories, translated by Arch Tait, appeared in 1998: *Under House Arrest* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1998).

from America'.

Rozanov's views on homosexuality also underscore a feature of queer discourse that Western observers might miss: the association of homosexuality and spirituality. The strict asceticism of Russian Christianity had produced a large number of latent homosexuals, whom he described as 'spiritual homosexuals'. For Rozanov, the spiritual homosexual was characterized above all by an aversion to carnal relations. Similar to Freud's theory of sublimation, Rozanov thought that the homosexual's refusal of sex allowed him to devote more energy to the creation of works of art and culture: 'what an enormous amount of work they have brought to the altar of mankind'. Although described as essentially pas-

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sive creatures, lacking the active energy required for heroism, the homosexual, Rozanov acknowledged, does play an important role in the civilizing process: 'And just as the sugar gives taste to the tea, so does the *essentia sodomica* give sweetness, pleasantness, lightness, relief, coherence, and sociality to all of life'.

The association of homosexuality with spirituality and refinement has endured well into the post-Soviet period, in part because those spiritual values and the suffering they imply have been central to the ways in which Russians have defined themselves against the prosperous and luxurious West for centuries. The construction of a spiritual homosexual then places homosexuality, paradoxically, at the very heart of Russian tradition. The émigré gay poet Yaroslav Mogutin suggests precisely this when he argues that Evgenii Kharitonov's fictional characters fit neatly within a literary canon that has long 'celebrated' individual suffering and humiliation: 'If I were to reduce the concerns of Kharitonov's works to the level of a simplified analogy, the literary fate of the homosexual is the fate of the "insulted and injured", of the Gogolian "little man", of Dostoevsky's "underground man", and of Zoshchenko's tragi-comic characters, and of the many, many "superfluous men" in the Russian literary canon'. So it should come as no sur-

prise that the flamboyant, openly gay pop star Boris Moiseev would include the following in his autobiography: 'Physical love isn't the main thing for me. I was never blinded by it. Much more important for me is spiritual love. For example, my relationship with Alla Borisovna Pugacheva'. Moiseev conflates art and spirituality in keeping with a long Russian tradition to which his mentor, the great pop-music diva Pugacheva also belonged (consider her hit 'Maestro').

PERVERSE GEOGRAPHIES

Finally, the fact that queerness in Russia is interpreted through the lens of national identity is another unique feature of queer discourse there. Not simply, as I mentioned above, that queer sexuality is often seen as a foreign import, that is, a direct effect of Western influence, but also that Russia has defined itself *sexually* against what in its view were its historically more developed neighbours in the West and its less developed neighbours in the East. In this way, Russia imagined what Dan Healey has described as a 'tripartite geography of perversion', in which 'a comparatively innocent Russia [was] interpolated between a "civilized" Europe and a decidedly "primitive" or "backward" "East"'. This, Healey argues, 'permitted and permits Russians to imagine their nation as univer-

BORIS MIKHAILOVICH MOISEEV (*1954)

Dancer, choreographer, pop-music singer. His dance-trio *Espressiia* performed with Alla Pugacheva's "Song Theatre" during the early 1980s and toured Europe and America in the perestroika years. In 1991 Moiseev returned to Russia and began composing popular music with an emphasis on 'shock and *épatage*'; he openly admitted his homosexuality. In July 2006 President Vladimir Putin named Moiseev a 'Merited Artist of the Russian Federation'.

Recently Moiseev's concerts have regularly been accompanied by protests from Orthodox organizations demanding that his appearances be banned and that Article 121 of the old Russian criminal code (banning sodomy) be restored. The singer, who is himself a member of the Kremlin's 'United Russia' party, has appealed to the party for support against these attacks, but his party comrades have been reluctant to come to his aid.

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sally, naturally, and purely heterosexual' (253). This sexualized geography has proved to be an enduring structure within the Russian cultural imagination. Indeed, it would be difficult to make sense of the 2004 film *You I Love* (*Ia liubliu tebia*) without reference to it, although the film does give a distinctly post-Soviet spin to the meanings traditionally associated with East and West. In this film, a young, attractive Moscow professional, Timofei (Evgenii Koriakovskii), works in an advertising firm that represents multi-national corporations and is run by an English-speaking African-American, John, with lecherous designs on his young male employees. Timofei begins to date another young, attractive professional, Vera (Liubov' Tolkalina), a successful television anchorwoman. Timofei and Vera are in many respects representative of the post-Yeltsin era. They have, for example, happily remained in Russia, while their parents have all emigrated to the West. In one exchange, Timofei declares: 'I love Russia', and Vera responds: 'Me, too'. However, the hero's world is turned upside down when he meets a young Kalmyk, Uliumdzhi (Damir Badmaev), a new migrant to Moscow working without papers at the zoo. They have an affair, while the hero also still sees the anchorwoman.

In the film's imaginative geography, the Buddhist Kalmyk is associated with spirituality and simplicity, on the one hand, and with an exclusive gay identity on the other; he's the only character in the film that is described as *goluboi*, or 'gay'. Timofei's African-American boss represents the decadent global culture of the West; one of Timofei's co-workers calls him a *pidor*, or 'faggot'. Moreover, while John wears a shirt and tie at the office, he appears at the gay club wearing traditional African robes. But there, amid the drag queens and the club kids, the garb is inauthentic – just another costume. Within this tripartite developmental geography, Timofei's cosmopolitan Russian bisexual-

ity appears as an alternative modernity, mediating between the sincerity and simplicity of Uliumdzhi's 'eastern' love – Vera comments: 'Buddhism teaches us to find joy in simple things' – and the globalizing decadence of John's 'western' lust. The importance of this developmental geography as an explanatory tool should not be underestimated. For example, survey data from the late 1980s revealed that intolerance of homosexuality was greatest in those republics (Georgia, Azerbaijan, and the republics of Central Asia) with a tradition of male-male sexual interaction (typically age- and/or gender-stratified). It may be that the association of homosexuality with traditional, pre-modern culture, that is, with under-development, inspired greater antipathy. That view prevailed in the early Soviet years, when the article criminalizing homosexual activity was removed from the Criminal Code of the RSFSR, yet at the same time remained in force where male-male sex was seen as widespread: Georgia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. The statute served to mark them as under-developed, still struggling with traditional forms of queer sexuality. Of course, it may also point to a conceptual gap; the word 'homosexuality' may denote for survey respondents a Western 'life style', suggesting that traditional 'tolerance' for queer 'acts' rested on silence and discretion, while the intolerance expressed in the survey is inspired by visibility and the idea of a totalizing identity. In any case, we clearly have too little data to defend or reject any of these hypotheses. What we do know is that queer sexuality exists everywhere – to paraphrase Laura Engelstein, there is homosexuality in Russia and always has been – but we don't always know how to read it.

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tions explore the connections among gender, sexuality, and national identity in Russian literature and film. He is writing a book on the meaning and uses of homosexuality in post-Soviet culture.

READING SUGGESTION:

- David Tuller. *Cracks in the Iron Closet: Travels in Gay and Lesbian Russia*. Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

SHADOWS OF THE PAST:
MEMOIRS OF THE GULAG AND CONTEMPORARY HOMOPHOBIA

Adi Kuntsman

intervention

Russian homophobic hate speech – in daily encounters, in on-line discussions and sometimes even in the printed media – often deploys criminal imagery. Words such as *petukh*, *pidor* and *pidaras* are used as swear words, and as a form of verbal ‘gay bashing’. These and other names originate from criminal jargon, and originally refer to those who were seduced or forced into the passive homosexual role destined for verbal, physical, and sexual abuse. The use of criminal jargon to describe lesbians is rarer, but not uncommon. Another notable aspect of the homophobic attitude is a passionate resentment of queer visibility: often what causes rage and disgust is not the fact of same-sex relations, but the visible gender bending of ‘effeminate’ men and ‘masculine’ women. As a queer woman growing up in Soviet Russia and later in the post-Soviet émigré diaspora, I was closely familiar with both the use of criminal jargon and the fear of queer visibility. In recent years, I turned my scholarly gaze to the relations between the two.

The use of criminal jargon and the rage towards the visibility of same-sex relations are closely linked: queer gender bending (in particular, in relation to masculine lesbians) is often associated with criminality and low classness. But where does this connection come from? My ethnographic research of homophobic hate speech led me to a past that is both tangible and ungraspable, but is deeply felt by both victims and perpetrators of contemporary homophobia. I refer to the Gulag memoirs

of former political prisoners, repressed during the Stalinist terror and during the years of Stagnation. Many of the memoirs describe same-sex relations in the camps among men as well as women. These descriptions are often saturated with contempt, disgust and scorn towards homosexual and lesbian relations; less often such relations are described with pity. The authors are particularly negative towards those who transgress the norms of femininity and masculinity: effeminate ‘passive’ homosexuals, who use female names with their male surnames; and masculine women, ‘active’ lesbians, who cut their hair short, wear trousers and sometimes adopt male names. What seems to disturb the authors most is the highly visible, almost compulsive, presence of such men and women in the camps, and the way their sexuality is put on display. But, importantly, practically all the memoirs draw a clear line between the author (and other political prisoners like him/her), and the criminal inmates who engage in same-sex relations. These relations are usually constructed as part of the distorted and monstrous criminal world, a world juxtaposed to the values and morals of the intelligentsia to which the authors themselves belong, a world that has nothing human, a world where the educated political prisoners struggle to survive, physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

The Gulag memoirs are seen by many as the main source of knowledge about same-sex relations in the camps; for example, they are frequently referred

intervention

to by scholars, journalists, and activists who use the memoirs as historical evidence. The memoirs also played an important role in the formation of the collective memory of the period during the Thaw and later, during the years of Perestroika, when many of the memoirs became widely available for the first time. Secretly read in *samizdat* and then later embraced as the 'true revelation' of the past, the memoirs of the former political prisoners have the almost sacred status of both historical truth and high moral authority on all topics described there. Because of the enormous suffering experienced by the authors, their literary constructions are rarely questioned; the textual and discursive violence of the memoirs with regards to the criminal inmates, and specifically, homosexuals and lesbians, is naturalized. This is how scorn, disgust, and hatred travel from the memoirs to our perceptions of same-sex relations: the unquestioned authority of the texts shapes contemporary affective formations of sexuality, morality, and humanness.

Homophobic violence can be particularly powerful when it evokes horrors of the past, the past whose memory and commemoration is so troubled – first by years of silencing, and later by very particular literary figurations. I believe that in order to fully understand the violence of criminal imagery in homophobic hate speech one has to examine the affective formations of sexuality, morality, and class in the memoirs. Rather than simply shaming the homophobic attacks as unacceptable (which they undoubtedly are), looking back into the shadows of the past will allow a more complex understanding of the social and psychic scars of the Soviet labour camps and the enormous difficulty in shaking off the naturalized connection between criminality, monstrosity, and same-sex relations.

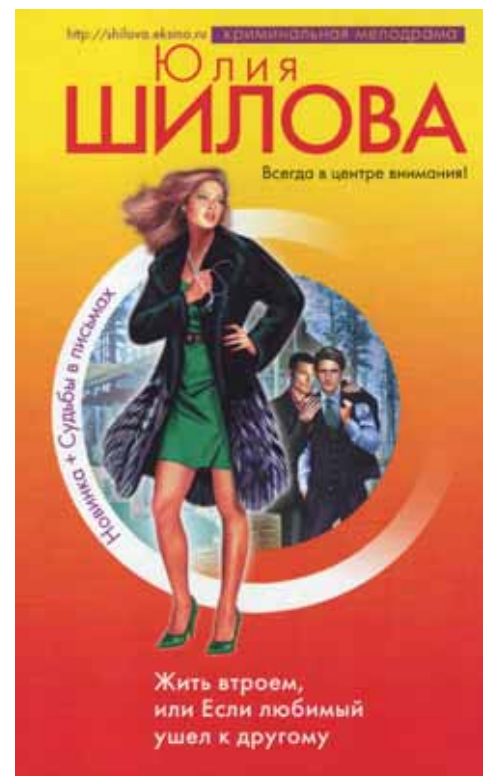
ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Adi Kuntsman received her PhD at Lancaster Uni-

versity, UK, and currently teaches media and cultural studies at Liverpool John Moores University. Her research deals with affective formations of sexuality, class, and race. She is currently working on two projects. The first one analyzes narratives of same-sex relations in the GULag memoirs and, in particular, the role of disgust and pity in addressing such relations. The second explores hatred in the post-Soviet new media and, more specifically, the relations between homophobia, Islamophobia and anti-Semitism.

READING SUGGESTION:

Kuntsman, Adi. 'Between Gulags and Pride Parades: sexuality, nation and haunted speech acts'. *GLQ: Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies*, 14 (2–3) 2008, pp. 263–287.



Yulia Shilova: Ménage à Trois, or When Your Beloved Man Has Found Another Man. Moscow: Eksmo 2008. – Despite the general public's violent rejection of homosexuality, pop culture regularly uses this topic to titillate and speculates on their interest in the question 'what are they up to'.

TOWARDS A RUSSIAN GAY LEXICON

Compilation: Ivan Saburoff

work in
progress

The author, a gay Russian émigré, began writing a gay lexicon of the Russian language in 1995. This lexicon of words and expressions on homosexual themes gathered since the mid-1960s to the present day, encompasses all aspects of gay life in late- and post-Soviet Russia, both from gay and lesbian usage, and from the language of the media and culture. Saburoff's lexicon constitutes an historical source book of 'everyday homophobia' and homosexual culture in late twentieth-century Russia.

The entries presented here are a few examples of expressions and words sourced from all regions of the former Soviet Union. The complete entries include the provenance of each word or expression, explanation, and examples of use from oral or written sources. Lacking space, we reluctantly publish this extract minus Saburoff's extensive referencing.

The project, still in progress, has yielded in manuscript form the first of two volumes, covering letters A to M, with over 3,000 words and expressions.

Fragments from the lexicon:

A

'ADEL'FE' [Gr., sister, girlfriend] (hom.) – name of a Russian periodical publication; a literary journal for lesbians. First prepared in 1994 in Moscow but not then published; supplements to 'Adel'fe', photocopied in small quantities, circulated at the time.

'While the organization operated it held several lesbian concerts; in collaboration with the non-governmental organization "SPID-infosviaz" it organized a conference entitled "Women and Society", and it collected materials for the first Russian lesbian artistic and journalistic periodical to be called "Adel'fe" (in the language of the immortal Sappho this word means "girlfriend").' Lit.: 'MOLLI – the Moscow Association of Lesbians in Literature and Art,' *Triangle Centre: Informational Bulletin*, no. 2 (1995), p. 3.

B

BABA [married peasant woman; wife, old woman; pl. *baby*] 1. (hom., conv.) – passive male homosexual (said contemptuously).

'I almost never go to that cruising ground. One sight of those *baby* is enough to make me sick.' (1973)

2. (hom.) a mature passive male homosexual

'At that point only *baby* were appearing on the market.' (1966)

3. (hom.) effeminate male homosexual

'You wouldn't believe it. Last night at the cruising ground I couldn't even recognize our girlfriend. I thought, "What kind of *old woman (baba)* is sitting on our bench?"' (1978)

4. (hom., conv.) effeminate man

'And you call these men!?! Nothing but *old women!*' (1978)

5. (crim.) passive homosexual partner in prison

'So, you used to be Babushkin, but now you've become a *baba!*' (2003)

aktivnaia baba [active *baba*] (hom.) lesbian fulfilling masculine functions

baba/babets s iaitsami [*baba/male-baba with balls*] a) (crim., conv.) active lesbian

'She's a real *baba* with balls. The way she gives it, you'll be working for the rest of your life at the pharmacy!'

b) (conv.) masculine woman

work in
progress

'*Baba s iaitsami* – (obscene) adult person of the female sex, resembling a man in her appearance or actions' (Bui, 1995).

pianaia baba – pizde ne khoziaka! [lit. **A drunken baba is no mistress of her cunt!**] (hom.): a drunken passive male homosexual is not responsible for his actions.

'*Pianaia baba – pizde ne khoziaka!* Popular wisdom resulting from a plethora of observations.' (2007)

D

DEMOKRAT [DEMOCRAT] (conv.) – 1. an impotent person.

'A pure *democrat* – his cock hasn't stood up for ages.' (urban speech, 1992).

2. homosexual.

'Look at how the *democrats* are breeding! That's democracy today!' (urban speech, 1993).

'Is he one of those, um, *democrats*?' (urban speech, 1995).

'Are the *democrats* meeting in their usual haunt?' (urban speech, 1997).

seksual-demokrat [sexual democrat] (hom., conv.): a homosexual (play on: 'social democrat').

'Sexual democrat. M[asc.] Jocularly, a homosexual. Sexual democrats. Pl. Jocularly, name for "the party of homosexuals"'. (1986)

'This is a café for sexual democrats only.' (1999)

b) homosexual-supporter of democratic transformation in the USSR/Russia (end of 1980s to beginning of 1990s).

"'She's always so busy now, now she's a sexual democrat.'" "And who's going to suck soldiers' cocks then?"' (1990).

'Every last queen has signed up to the sexual democrats.' (1991).

ZH

ZHENOLOZHSTVO [literally, 'women-lying-together'] (bookish) – 1. female homosexuality.

2. sexual contact by a male homosexual with a woman (by analogy with 'muzhelozhstvo' [sodomy], ironic).

'He got married to allay suspicion. To a beautiful Chinese woman who only wanted a green card. The most emotional scenes in the film are first when the pair are required to kiss at a grandiose wedding banquet (how disgusting, having to kiss a woman) and later, when the husband is forced into bed, and the bastard falls for his wife's temptations (and how he suffers afterward for this totally sinful *zhenolozhstvo!*).' Lit.: 'The Gay Train is Coming, Coming [review of films "Wedding Banquet" and "Edward II"]' *Segodnia*, no 163, 27 August 1994, p. 12.

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IZBUSHKA [literally, dim. of *izba*, 'peasant cottage'] (hom.) – 1. abbr. form of word *lezbushka* = lesbian.

'Do you know that *izbushka*?' (1995).

'That *izbushka*'s gone crazy for the lesbian movement.' (1997).

'She's always got *izbushki* coming round to her place.' (1997).

2. anus.

'I want to warm myself in your *izbushka*.' (gay men's toilet graffiti, 1996).

'*Izbushka, izbushka*, show me your ass!' (hom.): playful invitation to the anal act.

HOMOPHOBIA BEGINS AT HOME: LESBIAN AND BISEXUAL WOMEN'S
EXPERIENCES OF THE PARENTAL HOME IN URBAN RUSSIA

Francesca Stella

analysis

The author conducted interviews with lesbians in Moscow and Ul'ianovsk, a city of 700,000 in the Middle Volga Region, in 2004–05. For this article, she has focused on younger women still living with their parents. She examines how the parental home is perceived both as an intimate, comfortable space and as a site where 'everyday homophobia' is most commonly experienced, and she looks at how gender expectations are at the root of hostility to the lesbian family member. Research conducted elsewhere in Europe also indicates that the family home is one of the most difficult spaces to negotiate for young LGBT people, not only in Russia.

The controversial Moscow gay-pride parades of 2006 and 2007 showed how contentious the public visibility of homosexuality still is in contemporary Russia. Western media coverage of Moscow gay-pride parades has highlighted issues of exclusion and discrimination of LGBT individuals in *public* space. Yet my research indicates that Russian non-heterosexual women see *private* spaces and *private* relationships as more treacherous and uncomfortable to negotiate. The parental home seems to epitomize the discomforts and dangers of private space. For many, the parental home affords little privacy, and 'coming out' to the family is often not a deliberate choice but a case of being outed, or of coming under suspicion of being gay.

FAMILY MATTERS

The word 'home' typically conveys feelings of comfort and authenticity: to 'feel at home' is to feel safe, at ease, in a familiar, intimate place where there is no need to hide behind a 'public persona', where one can 'be oneself'. However, most of the women who took part in my study experienced the parental home ambivalently, because the parental home was often experienced as a site of scrutiny and control, where disclosing one's sexual orientation could have negative consequences.

Women whose sexuality was disclosed at home, either intentionally or accidentally, experienced a variety of immediate reactions from family members, ranging from hostility to acceptance. Family conflict or tension was a typical consequence;

hostile reactions included being taken to a psychologist, being locked in the family home, emotional blackmail, physical assault, leaving the family household, and, in Dasha's case, becoming homeless:

'I ran away from home a few times, this happened in [*her hometown*] and in [*her grandmother's city, where she went to stay*]. It was pretty tough, I mean, independence was hard to obtain. At the time I didn't have any qualifications, so I had to work as a cleaner and as a letter carrier. But I stood up for myself. [...] The first time I was 17. It was really horrible, I had to starve, but in the end I got the best of them. [...] In the end my parents said: "Come back, do what you want, we won't hassle you." The first time, when I left home at 17, it was because my dad hit me. I had brain concussion, for this reason I left. I think this is unacceptable [...] In [*her grandmother's city*] I left home when I met a butch girl [*who became her girlfriend*] and my parents started to object; I left home for five months. I had to leave the music school and say goodbye to this career, because it was tough; I didn't have anything to eat, I was hungry and cold, my fingers didn't bend, and I could not play and practice. I had to leave, and I still regret it.'

As Dasha's¹ story illustrates, affirming one's sexual identity in a hostile family environment can

¹ Not her real name. In the interest of anonymity, all first names have been changed; details which may identify the respondents, such as place names, have also been omitted or changed.

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come at a very high price. Homophobia is therefore not 'just' a form of 'cultural' oppression, as it is sometimes portrayed; it can have very real and material consequences for young women. Research conducted in the UK has suggested that homosexuality can represent an additional 'risk factor' for youth homelessness, particularly among those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Although conflict was fairly common, not all women experienced this to the same degree. Some parents accepted their children's homosexuality, although this acceptance was often tempered with reservations and a sense of loss:

'She [*her mother*] came home, this was when I was still living in [*her hometown*], and she was crying. I say, 'Mum, why are you crying?'. She says: 'I fell out with the woman from the canteen'. 'What happened?'. 'She said that you love a woman'. 'And what did you say?' 'I said, this is my daughter, and I will always love her the way she is'. It was as if a burden fell off my shoulders. I didn't have to tell her; *she* told me openly that she accepts it.'

Ira's mother clearly signalled her unconditional love for her, and this gesture greatly relieved Ira. However, her mother was also deeply upset: as Ira pointed out later, she was not just hurt by the woman's judgemental attitude, but also concerned that Ira would not have children and a 'proper' family. Ira's story highlights two crucial issues in young women's negotiations in the family home. Heterosexuality is both assumed and expected in the family. These expectations are deeply rooted in normative notions of femininity.

NEGOTIATING SEXUAL IDENTITY AT HOME

Women negotiated their sexual identity in the parental home with varying degrees of openness, depending on personality, family relations, and personal circumstances. Most employed strate-

gies of dissimulation and secrecy, often playing on assumptions that they were 'naturally' heterosexual, particularly those women who were acutely aware of family members' strong homophobic views, as this Ul'ianovsk woman explained:

'My mum has a very negative attitude to this [*homosexuality*]; she doesn't know. She understands, but doesn't want to believe it. She is waiting for me to say that I have a girlfriend, but she doesn't want to hear it. For her, this is the worst thing that a person can do; it's worse than drug addiction. For her, they [*homosexuals*] are not persons. She said that if she learns something [*about her*], she will disown me and kick me out.

How do you know she'll do that?

She often talks to me about this. Because I am 20 and I only hang out with girls, and because of my looks [*very androgynous*]. And when she asks me questions, or tells me about things she's heard, she would always tell me how she doesn't like it. And she takes it out on me. When she abuses lesbians, I defend them, and this upsets her. And it gives me away.

You stand up for gay people, but don't tell her about yourself?

Yes. I don't tell her because I don't want to lose my mum. Only for this reason.'

Still living with her parents, Maia is torn between conflicting loyalties: first, her need to affirm her identity and defend lesbians in general; and second, her love for her mother. Maia interpreted her mother's anxiety over her sexuality and her demand that she goes to see a psychologist as misplaced maternal concern.

The awareness of negative attitudes at home prompted guarded behaviour. For some women, this meant 'coming out' to their families only after they had moved out, or had achieved some degree of independence within the parental home. Still

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others deferred the exploration of their sexual and emotional desires to a time when they had secured a safer, independent living space:

'I had my first girlfriend when I was 21. I was already at college [*in Moscow*]; I lived in a student hall, separately from my parents [...]. We met at the beginning of my first year, but I called her only a year later. At the time, this was not out of character for me. I was so stressed out; I had left my parents' home for the first time – a serviceman's household, in a small military town [*in the Moscow Region*], where I had finished school. I couldn't see anything apart from these obstacles; I didn't have a social life. I wanted to stand on my feet and quietly finish my first year, get used to my new environment. So that they would not kick me out, they would not know about me; of course I was afraid that there may be consequences. I wanted to establish myself in this new place. When I finished my first year and I started to feel freer, I called this girl.'

Again, Alia's anxieties are based on her previous experience: her mother had found out about her attraction to women by reading her mail, and Alia was told to change her ways or lose her family's emotional and financial support.

Concerns about causing unnecessary anxiety to family members were also an important factor in women's strategies of identity negotiation. Particularly when living with old or vulnerable family members, women were reluctant to cause them needless pain, as this Moscow respondent revealed:

'I had a hard time when some girls called home; they called my mum and told her that, you know, your daughter has this [*lesbian*] lifestyle. Well, I tried to demonstrate to my mum that of course that's not true; I have a husband [*although at the*

time she had divorced him and moved back with her family of origin], and everything's normal. My mum is just a person of very strict principles; she would not get over it. She has a weak heart; I don't want to traumatise her; I don't want her, or my granny, to know.'

Indeed, some women did not view 'coming out' as a necessary or empowering act: apparently, authenticity ('being oneself') was not paramount in their approach to disclosing their sexual orientation. They often assessed the benefits and risks pragmatically. Rather than using flat denials, they exploited grey areas and commonly held assumptions in order to *remain invisible* as a lesbian or bisexual woman.

It is often thought that 'coming out' is necessary for the healthy emotional development of LGBT youth. The evil of 'internalized homophobia' as a form of shame is commonly invoked to explain why youngsters stay 'in the closet'. Yet this quasi-medical definition risks pathologizing those who suffer most from anti-gay attitudes. As Russian sociologist Elena Omel'chenko argues, the experience of homophobia is a compound of fear for oneself (of losing support), fear of others' reactions (of conflict and rejection) and fear for others (of hurting family members). This fear, however, is rationally grounded in women's experience and awareness of their surroundings. Negotiating their everyday environments, including the family home, often requires fine balance.

Whilst 'coming out' is typically represented as an individual act, a revelation of one's 'true' sexual identity, in my interviews it emerged as a collective process, with significant others actively involved. Disclosure could be involuntary (being 'found out' or 'suspected'), rather than voluntary. Moreover, disclosure requires acknowledgement: in order to come into being, identities need not only to be declared or made visible, but also to be

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validated by others.

In some families women's sexuality was ultimately accepted and acknowledged. In others, however, uncomfortable topics were conveniently 'swept under the carpet'. For some women, ignorance helped to preserve family peace since 'to guess and to know are very different things'. For others, silence can mask dormant conflict, surfacing from time to time as emotional blackmail or criticism. A family's refusal to support or acknowledge a lesbian relationship can continue to influence relations long after women leave the parental home.

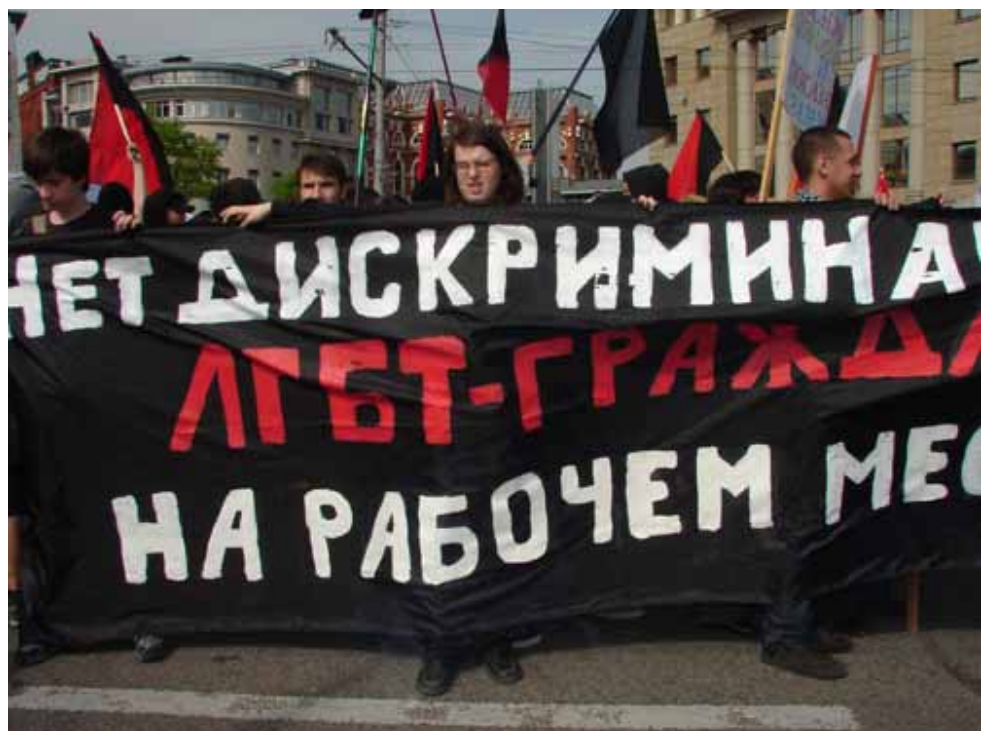
WOMANHOOD, SEXUALITY AND ADULTHOOD

To understand the origins of 'everyday homophobia', we have to consider that families' expectations about young women's proper development into adults, as well the kind of relationships and fam-

ilies they are supposed to start, are deeply rooted in gender norms. The parental home is the site where 'proper' gender norms are naturalized and passed on to children. In my interviews, families considered motherhood, heterosexual coupledness, and marriage symbols of transition into adult life. Young women's refusal to go through these 'rites of passage' was often met with painful disappointment, pressures, and hostility by family members, particularly by mothers:

'She saw everything [*her daughter kissing her first girlfriend*]. But, funnily enough, she didn't say anything at the time. I learned that she had seen us only after three or four years. It turned out she knew everything, but she didn't say a word. But later, when I grew up, [*her mother started to say*], one way or another, you need to have kids; I want grandchildren. And she began to talk about it with

A banner during a demonstration by anti-fascists and anarchists on 1st May 2008 in Moscow. The slogan reads: No Discrimination of LGBT Citizens in the Work Place. There were no objections to the banner, and the march was not obstructed despite the large police presence. ©lgbtrights.ru, link: http://lgbtrights.ru/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=98&Itemid=30



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me all the time. She began to push me, to make a scene. She was very aggressive. [...] She tried to interfere in my relationship. She said it's a game, and it will all end. [...] Childhood will end sooner or later. When will you change your mind? At your age you should have children, and so on and so forth. And you just go on playing games. Perhaps she still doesn't understand that it's not a whim, that it comes from the head, and I was born with this. There is no way you can change it.'

For Ania's mother, a sexual relationship with another girl can be tolerated if it represents a passing phase; beyond the threshold of adolescence, however, it becomes a sign of immaturity and reluctance to become a responsible adult. Several other young women recounted how their lesbian relationships were considered 'nonsense' [*erunda, pridur'*], a period of carefree fun [*razvlechenie, eshche ne nagulialas'*], or teenage rebellion [*bunt, pokazukha*]. Lesbianism was often considered a passing phase in the transition towards more 'serious' heterosexual relationships, with their corollary of family responsibilities. Women typically experienced pressures from family members to 'get over' their attraction to females, pressures which sometimes continued even after they left home. Ania's story also suggests that families saw motherhood and parenting, rather than heterosexual relationships as such, as an essential part of a woman's life. The idea that motherhood is the 'natural' fate of every woman is deeply rooted in dominant Russian ideals of womanhood. Lesbian women's perceived inability to become mothers positions them as 'incomplete' women, as Ira's experience illustrates:

'Of course, she knows everything. She knows that we live together, and that we have lesbian friends. But from time to time she asks, when are you getting married? [...] I mean, I didn't have to tell her

[*that she is a lesbian*], she told me openly that she accepts this, although periodically she has a fit of hysterics: give me grandchildren! She thinks that if I give birth this means I am not a lesbian.'

For Ira's mother, the association 'lesbian'+ 'mother' is simply unimaginable. Interestingly, in many families *motherhood* was deemed more important than heterosexual relationships or marriage for young women. This can perhaps be explained with the fact that a considerable number of women involved in this project came from single (female) parent households: they had either been born outside a stable heterosexual relationship or their parents had divorced.

One young lesbian described to me how her mother, a single mum, imagined the idea that her daughter too could have children outside of a heterosexual couple. Lesbian motherhood, however, remains a concept alien to her. While not essential, families saw a heterosexual relationship as a desirable base to start a family. It supposedly offered women a more secure financial position, as well as social status and emotional support. This security was often contrasted with lesbian relationships, seen as immature, sterile, and highly volatile. The parental home was the one space where young women experienced the strongest pressures to conform to 'normal' gender and sexual roles.

The pressures non-heterosexual women are exposed to in Russia, and the outcomes of disclosure, do not seem radically different from those experienced by lesbian and bisexual women in other countries, such as Britain. The display of homophobia in public space is a continuation of mechanisms of exclusion, stigmatization, and shame starting in the family home. Mechanisms censoring and controlling the public visibility of homosexuality in Russia may be different from those operating elsewhere; however, the essence of 'everyday homophobia' is strikingly similar.

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Francesca Stella is lecturer in Central and Eastern European Studies at the University of Glasgow, UK. She is completing a doctorate on lesbian identities and everyday spaces in contemporary urban Russia. In addition to her work on Russian lesbian and bisexual women's experiences of the home, she has published on the appropriation and use of private and public space by lesbian networks, on global and Russian perspectives on LGBT rights and sexual citizenship, and on representations on (homo)sexuality in the Russian media and popular culture.

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BAND OF BROTHERS: HOMOEROTICISM AND THE RUSSIAN ACTION HERO

Eliot Borenstein

analysis

By rights, the Russian *boevik* (action story) should be the last place in post-Soviet popular culture to find sympathetic portrayals of queer sexualities. In the openly gendered taxonomy of Russian genres, the *boevik* is marketed exclusively to men, often labeled 'men's fiction' or 'men's detective stories'. Aggressive, self-confident heteronormative masculinity is not just a defining feature of the genre, in both fiction and film, it is the *point* of the genre. The *boevik* came of age in the 1990s, when Russian media and culture continually lamented the decline of Russian manhood as a function of the collapse of Soviet statehood. In the action story, the pathos of the country's weakened international position played itself out allegorically in repeated tales of beautiful young women rejecting their pathetic local suitors in favour of Western men. The *boevik*, together with the pro-Russian boosterism that characterized mainstream heterosexual pornography, fostered an ideology of compensatory masculinity: the rugged heroes' defence of their beautiful and willing sex partners countered the narrative of Russian helplessness with one of Russian power.

Potent and indefatigable action heroes foiled the plots of evil foreigners hell-bent on destroying a country they feared and envied; Afghan war veterans revisited the sites of Soviet defeats and turned them into victories; Russia's spiritual virtues were highlighted whenever possible; and the hero always got the girl (even if she conveniently died when he was finished with her).

Casual viewers and readers of the *boevik*, if asked to recall any role for homosexuality in the stories, would be most likely to remember the occasional gay villain. A recent example is Kordon, the man responsible for blowing up a Mercedes belonging to heroic gang leader Sasha Belyi in the 2002 television miniseries *Brigada* (*The Brigade*). Kordon is not just gay – he hates all straight men ('all straights are pigs'), and his eventual murder has a homophobic soundtrack (he's killed while 'Tainted Love' plays in the background). But the *boevik* cannot be reduced to mere gaybashing. The genre's anxious and self-conscious preoccupation with heteronormative masculinity can easily shade into homoeroticism, since the pervasive homosociality

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of a quasi-military milieu and the ethos of manly physical strength provide an obvious 'back door' for a butch gay aesthetic. In fact, I would argue that homoeroticism is even more central to the genre. In part, this is the inevitable result of the genre's obsession with brotherhood and male cohesiveness, as the ties between warriors are usually imbued with a spiritual depth and strength absent from the emotionally anaemic relationships that the authors of the *boevik* try to pass off as heterosexual romance. This emphasis on brotherhood, which echoes early Soviet traditions of revolutionary brotherhood, is conditioned by the ideological underpinnings of compensatory masculinity; yet even brotherhood is only a secondary source of the genre's implicit homoeroticism. A closer look at the *boevik* reveals that homosexuality is the genre's original sin. Where homosexuality is accommodated by the *boevik* rather than denied, the conventional sex/gender system is upheld through a familiar Russian sleight of hand: essentialism is rigorously maintained by invoking the male and female principles continually, while 'deviant' sexuality is carefully bracketed to protect the gendered essence of the characters themselves.

THIEVES' WORLD: LIFE IN THE 'ZONE'

The Russian *boevik* owes something to US Cold-War *Rambo* films, yet the genre is deeply rooted in Russian and Soviet culture, as is its homoeroticism. The *boevik* is merely one example of the near-total criminalization of post-Soviet popular culture, the preoccupation with crime as a subject matter in virtually every narrative genre. This criminalization brought with it an unprecedented focus on the culture and folkways of the Soviet-era *blatnoi mir*, the 'thieves' world' until recently celebrated only in song. The 'thieves world' provided the character types, stock scenarios, and even language that would become essential to the *boevik*. It is telling that *Srok dlia Beshenogo* (*Mad Dog*

in Prison), the first novel in the series by Viktor Dotsenko that established the 'action' genre in Russian fiction and film, contained an appendix listing prison slang that might have been unfamiliar to readers untouched by life behind bars. By the end of the decade, none of the later novels needed such a glossary, even though the same words are featured throughout the series; prison slang had rapidly entered mainstream Russian vocabulary.

With crime serving as the dominant feature defining Russian popular culture in the 1990s, the focus on life in the 'zone' (the Soviet prison camp system) was probably inevitable. But nowhere was the zone such an important setting as in the *boevik*. The *detektiv*, which is vaguely equivalent to the Anglo-American mystery even as it plays by its own rules, tends to focus on those whose job it is to catch criminals; the *boevik* is immersed in the world of the criminals themselves. This is true even when the protagonists work for the beleaguered forces of law and order, in part because the heroes spend so much time undercover.

The 'zone' was always an integral part of Soviet criminal culture, rather than simply a place of punishment. Indeed, prison time was an essential apprenticeship for any would-be crime boss, and ties between the 'inside' and 'outside' worlds were always strong. In the zone, criminals lived by their own code, one that was no less restrictive than that of the wardens, and this code became the basis for life outside of prison as well. Criminals who were no longer incarcerated certainly had a wider variety of sexual options than they did in prison (or, at least, a more traditional sexual outlet), but the lives of thieves still followed a homosocial structure (thieves were not supposed to marry or have families). Within the zone, the most obvious sexual restriction was the absence of women, and, as in prison systems throughout the world, this meant an abundance of homosexual sex performed by (or, arguably, for) straight men.

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ZONE SEX AND CHANGING SPECIES

In 2002, viewers throughout the Russian Federation flocked to see *Antikiller*, a *boevik* directed by Egor Mikhalkov-Konchalovskii. Fans of the source material, a minor best-selling novel by Daniil Koretskii, were treated to action scenes unmatched by the novel's serviceable, if uninspired prose (indeed, the film's marketing stressed how much money was spent on the action scenes, and how many cars were destroyed in the filming). But those who were unfamiliar with the novel would have had no idea what was left out, from convoluted plotlines involving a presidential assassination attempt to a panoply of sexual deviance. Lys, the novel's hero, starts the story in the zone, which serves as the excuse for long descriptions of the inmates' sexual habits. Koretskii establishes for the reader the long-standing prison tradition of *opushchenie*, homosexual rape of weaker or disobedient inmates that permanently transforms the victim into a feminized sexual slave. Zone sexuality leaves the active participant metaphorically unsullied by the encounter: anal or oral penetration of a male sexual slave does not impinge at all on the top's heterosexuality. Koretskii takes this power structure to its logical extreme, following through on the animal metaphors that frame zone sex. The standard slang for a man who has been turned into a sex slave is *petukh* ('rooster', which does not carry the same connotations as the English 'cock'), a term that is now familiar to most consumers of criminal narratives. Koretskii, however, deliberately plays up the bestiality of the encounter. Indeed, in addition to metaphorical *petukhi*, Koretskii shows his zone inmates having sex quite literally with animals: from a perfumed pig named Lizaveta to a carefully restrained cat, not to mention a dog whose teeth have been knocked out. Here zone sex is drained of its homosexuality by reconfiguring it as bes-

tiality: it is not sex with a person, but simply with an available orifice.

This early attention to bestiality, however, does not prevent Koretskii from indulging in a long, pornographic depiction of homosexual rape later in the novel. In this case, the earlier chapters establish the victim as a violent, repulsive transgressor who gets what he deserves. The man in question starts out with an animal nickname ('Byk' or 'Bull'), but when the gang bosses decide that he has committed the worst of all possible offences (*bespredel*, the violation of criminal norms), they give the order to have him turned into a *petukh* in prison. After he is tied up and his teeth have been knocked out, he is gang raped by everyone in his cell. His fate is now sealed: 'the former gang leader nicknamed "Bull" [...is now...] the passive prison cell faggot called Sveta'. The Bull's punishment is horrific, but it is also consistent with Koretskii's



Russian Gay-monthly Kvir (*Queer*), March 2008: www.kvir.ru

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framing not just of homosexuality, but sexuality in general. Men have sex not with people, but with orifices; now that he has been thus used, he is no longer a man. He has not 'simply' been subjected to brutal torture, but has been both metaphorically and essentially transformed. From 'Bull' to 'Cock,' the 'passive faggot' has changed species.

'I AM IN YOU, AND YOU ARE IN ME'

Homosexuality gets its most through exploration, fittingly enough, in the series that inaugurated the genre: Viktor Dotsenko's novels and films about Savelii Govorkov, a.k.a. 'Mad Dog.' The 'Mad Dog' novels recapitulate the evolution of the *boevik* itself: the first novel is less an 'action story' than a narrative of imprisonment, suffering, and escape. Though we learn more about the hero's past in later novels, *Mad Dog in Prison* establishes the hero's origins in the all-male collectives of the orphanage, the army, and, most important, the zone. The Mad Dog novels all contain highly detailed, if somewhat monotonous, sex scenes. *Mad Dog in Prison* shows Dotsenko to be surprising ecumenical with his sexual prose: early in the novel, a prisoner is raped by two other men in the zone. Where Koretskii focuses almost exclusively on the violence, Dotsenko appears more interested in the sex itself, lavishing the same amount of detail on the scene, and showing the rapists to be sexually aroused by the very sight of their naked victim. Mad Dog watches, but diplomatically refuses to participate.

In the Mad Dog series, male relationships have the greatest pathos, if for no other reason than that almost all of Savelii's girlfriends (with the exception of his eventual bride, Rozochka-Julia) are quickly dispatched by his enemies, serving primarily as excuses for a revenge plot. Mad Dog surrounds himself with comrades and blood brothers whose bond is stronger than anything biological or heterosexual. Indeed, their connection transcends genetics, since Mad Dog's son and that of

his blood brother look practically identical. Occasionally, he meets other men who studied with the same Teacher (an extraterrestrial posing as a Tibetan monk), who schooled him in mysticism and extrasensory perception, and they always exchange the ritual greeting 'I am in you, and you are in me'. All of them underwent the same initiation rite, exchanging blood with the Teacher. Mad Dog's faux fraternal bonds are always haunted by an abject other, particularly the Great Brotherhood of Masons that becomes his primary enemy in the later novels. The gang rape scene that occurs so early in the first novel is a nightmarish counterpoint to Mad Dog's brotherly ideals, a literalization of the Teacher's greeting.

As the series progresses, Dotsenko shows a great deal of sympathy to homosexuals in other circumstances. In the fourth novel, *Mad Dog's Team* ('Komanda Beshenogo'), when the criminal henchman Pretty-Boy Steve is hiring underage prostitutes for a party, he engages a boy for a comrade who reveals that he is gay. In the course of the orgy, Steve allows the boy to fellate him, after which he praises the boy's technique, making sure to add 'But, all the same, it's better with a girl'. Mad Dog himself never has sex with a man, but an odd digression in the fourteenth book hints at a queerer potential. As he is about to have sex with yet another woman, he lies passively while she takes complete control of the situation:

It was as though Savelii wanted to turn into a subordinate, controllable, creature for a short time, to subject himself to a tender female force, perhaps even to violence. It suddenly occurred to him that within every person there are two principles: female and male. Depending on which one is dominant, a person becomes either a man or a woman

For the next two pages, the narrator speculates on the dual nature of humanity, calling for tolerance

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of 'sexual minorities' based on nineteenth-century notions of gender inversion.. Certainly, Dotsenko's liberal views on homosexuality are commendable, but, for the purposes of the present study, the way he sets the scene for this digression is far more important. When Pretty-Boy Steve allowed himself to be serviced by a boy prostitute, the occasion was unusual enough for him to comment on it. But Steve's status as a heterosexual man was not threatened. When male prisoners rape weaker victims, their sheer aggression and violence make them more masculine, rather than less. But Mad Dog's manliness is far more challenged by simply letting a woman take control than if he had actually topped another man. Mad Dog's queerest moment takes place with a woman, necessitating two pages of exculpation, before Mad Dog proves himself again by having 'normal' sex with the woman who had just topped him.

Thus homosexuality in the *boevik* is predicated on an essentialism that is metaphysical rather than biological. Gender and its sexual deployment are not entirely dependent on biological sex, but neither are they seen as socially constructed. Instead, metaphysically essential sex and gender construct the individual subject. Dotsenko's essentialism allows his heroes to have it both ways, without making them sexually suspect. The father of the *boevik* refuses to turn a blind eye to the rampant, coercive homosexual activity of the zone (the all-

male world that spawned the genre). By the same token, his repeated panegyrics to the virtues of warrior brotherhood do not lead him to be reflexively defensive of heterosexual purity. The issue for Dotsenko (and, arguably, for the genre he created) are not sexual acts, but rather the metaphysical essences of manhood and womanhood. As long as a male character is truly a man of action, both in battle and in bed, then his masculinity cannot be questioned.

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Eliot Borenstein is Professor and Chair of the Russian and Slavic Department of New York University. In his research, he concentrates on Russian literature and culture in the 20th and 21st centuries, with an accent on gender (masculinity) and sexuality, especially in the field of popular culture, and theories of cultural transmission and cultural change.

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ON THE CONFLICT OVER GAY PRIDE 2008 IN MOSCOW ON 28 OR 31 MAY 2008

A statement by the Moscow city council: '...as in the past, the city council will take decisive and uncompromising action to suppress the attempts to introduce these (LGBT) measures because the overwhelming majority in society do not accept this type of thing, the gay way of life and their philosophy. (http://lgbtrights.ru/index.php?option=com_content&task=blogcategory&id=1&Itemid=30 30 April 2008).

The mayors of London, Berlin, and Paris were invited by the organisers to take part in Moscow Pride 2008. So far, only Klaus Wowereit (Berlin), who is openly gay, has supported the parade and called

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upon the Moscow city council finally to uphold democratic standards. Bertrand Delanoë (Paris), who is also openly gay, has yet to comment; the Londoner Ken Livingstone is no longer mayor due to his failure to win re-election. The organizers are looking into legal steps to ensure that the demonstration goes ahead. (<http://www.gayrussia.ru/events/detail.php?ID=11373>, 6 May 2008)

Nikita Alekseyev in an interview by the German radio station 'Deutsche Welle':

In my opinion, the gay parade is a human rights event [...] In the application to the office of the mayor of Moscow [the parade] is defined as a demonstration in support of a tolerant attitude to, and the adherence to the rights and freedoms of, people with a non-traditional sexual orientation in Russia. This was included in the applications of 2006, 2007, and 2008; there never was any talk of a parade in the Western sense of the term, but of an event in support of human rights ...

... in order to attract the attention of society and of the authorities to the discrimination and the violation of the rights of sexual minorities in Russia. I would like to say that without this event it would not be possible to attract attention to this subject in our country [...]. This is why everything is linked to the necessity to change existing legislation and add anti-discriminatory clauses to sectoral laws ... (<http://www.gayrussia.ru/actions/detail.php?ID=11383>, 12 May 2008)

Activists from the Moscow LGBT alliance, led by activist Nikolai Alexeyev, called on president Dmitry Medvedev to intervene on their behalf and allow them to gather at Alexandrovsky Sad on May 31. As [this is] a federal holding, the president has the right to overrule the city on the grounds of the park. (<http://www.gayrussia.ru/en/news/detail.php?ID=11421>, 19 May 2008)

PREVIEW:

The next issue of *kultura* will be published in late June. It will discuss new and old architecture in Moscow as an aspect of the city's self-representation. Diana Zhdanova from Moscow will be the Guest Editor.