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***Quantum Leap*¹ 2.0 or the Western gaze on Russian homophobia**

Introduction

The most pressing question this article addresses is how to criticize and condemn anti-gay sentiment, prejudice and violence in Russia and elsewhere publicly through media without perpetuating notions of western hegemony and without exercising what Robert Kulpa calls "leverage pedagogy" (Kulpa, 2014). In the article, I will revisit some of the most prominent English-speaking media discourses addressing homophobic sentiment and violence in Russia. I will focus especially on the temporal aspects of such media narratives – notions of progress, backwardness, modernity, timeliness or untimeliness – as well as the visual aspects of such discourses. I argue that the narratives in media reports follow a developmental logic that presents anti-gay violence not just as tragic and unjust, but more

¹ Quantum Leap is an American sci-fi TV-show about a physicist who time-travels through history. It starred Scott Bakula as Dr. Sam Beckett, and originally aired on NBC, from 1989 through 1993. Every episode, the fictional Doctor arrives at a new historic point of crises, where mistakes or wrong decisions had been made.

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importantly as facts to be considered in the evaluation of Russian modernity, progress and sovereignty. Visually, the same discourses use western symbols that are connected with gay-pride, such as the Rainbow flag, or with the European past, such as the Pink Triangle. Additionally, articles often present photographs of gay victims, either during an attack at gay-pride events or in beautiful melancholic arrangements and settings, to enhance their tragic fate and victim status. Individual young white gay men become the focus of such media discourses which showcase Russian homophobia. They often carry western symbols reminiscent of past and, most importantly, 'won' struggles. The discourses follow a dichotomous logic that victimizes gays as ultimately vulnerable group without agency. Through the focus on the respective homophobic act as one of many examples, or a sign of increasing homophobic violence in Russia, this violence becomes understood as first of all spatial or local. Russia, and 'the East', in other words become signified as a dangerously homophobic space, whereas the subjects that are threatened by homophobic acts become understood as not-of-Russian values or non-Russian. Ironically, this logic is exactly the logic the Russian media and national state discourses proliferate, yet towards the contrary end, which is to legitimize Russian nationalism as only way to preserve civilization.

Western media construct Russian and Chechen homophobia as a cultural or regional characteristic whereas the West becomes signified and confirmed as liberal, progressive and tolerant, hence superior. Visual aids or representations of Russian homophobia are most often images of the Russian president Vladimir Putin, Orthodox believers or symbols, and lately, the Chechen regional leader Ramzan Kadyrov (who is seen as Putin's puppet gone rogue). Media uses the nation's most well-known and feared figures to visually connect the Russian territory, religion, homophobic legislation and acts of homophobic violence in public spaces. Symbolizing legal and societal homophobia, but also religiousness, through the image of one person implicitly shifts the 'blame' to this individual. It creates a formula where Orthodoxy can easily be replaced by Islam. In this way, media can move smoothly from Russian Orthodox homophobia to Chechen Muslim homophobia, without having to drastically change any modes or frameworks of evaluation. Moreover, by using the formula Russian authoritarian figure means homophobia plus religiousness, media re-invoke western liberal thought that positions religiousness as anti-modern with the ideas of Russia and the East as backward or behind, inherited by the enlightenment. Against this assemblage of meanings and symbols, western nations and their institutions appear as homo-tolerant. Homosexual citizenship in turn becomes interpreted as marker of pro-

gressive, forward and modern element. Furthermore, this alleged 'developmental advance' becomes the base for Western nations and its institutions to 'teach' the world what is right and wrong. Interestingly enough, religiousness in this construction, becomes completely invisible within the western model, along with all other aspects that run contrary to this bundle of meanings and significations.

Teaching the Enemy: Western leveraged pedagogy and the construction of the Eastern Other

Following Robert Kulpa and Joanna Mizielińska (Kulpa & Mizielińska, 2011) and their critical reflections on the geographies of sexuality, 'the West' as well as 'Russia' and 'the East' must be understood as discursively constructed categories. Kulpa and Mizielińska show that these categories are assemblages of different meanings and significations, and hierarchically arranged according a geographical and temporal developmental paradigm (Kulpa & Mizielińska, 2011, p. 15). Within this paradigm, the 'developmental' stage of the regions is assessed according to their stance towards a selection of social and moral, racial, gender and sexual issues. One of the most important points of evaluation of the 21st Century is the issue of homosexuality. Decolonial scholars such as Jasbir Puar (2007, 2013) or Joseph A. Massad (2007) equally identify the sphere of (homo)sexuality as demarcation point for the construction of a forward thinking and model North/West. Focusing particularly on anti-Muslim racism and US-imperialism, Puar points to homo-tolerance as "a barometer by which the right to and capacity for national sovereignty is evaluated" (Puar, 2007, p. 4). She argues that today's US and other western imperialisms follow an idea of modernity that includes aspirations towards gay-rights into set of values. To put it slightly differently, an aspiration towards gay-rights means enlightenment, modernity, progress and civilization. Moreover, together these meanings signify and legitimize the North/West and its international policies and development agendas. Religion, on the other hand, has no place in these efforts, despite the fact that many Western countries, especially the US, celebrate Christianity as a cultural core aspect or fundament. Equally blind are these discourses to the participation of religious (Christian) institutions in the development and charity programs all over the globe.

With regards to Russia and the current signification of 'the East' in general, it seems worth relating Puar's ideas to much older writings on the 'invention' of the European East

through the discourses of the European Enlightenment (Neumann, 1999; Wolff, 1994). Larry Wolff and Iver Neumann among others show how contemporary evaluations of Russia and the East go back to the Enlightenment's idea of the region as lacking behind and only recently developing. The connection between the meanings of backwardness, Russia or the post-Soviet (Eastern) space and homosexuality become very visible in current media reports, for example through phrases such as "coming out of the iron closet" (Udensiva-Brenner, 2017) to describe Russian gay-rights activism. The temporal logic and centrality of homo-tolerance and gay-rights is often very explicitly addressed by LGBTIQ+ activists or commentators, who want to create awareness for Russian struggles, out of solidarity. Julie Dorf, Senior Advisor of the Council for Global Equality and founder of the International Gay & Lesbian Human Rights Commission for example sees "[f]ighting homophobia as part of a larger democracy movement in Russia" (Dorf, 2013). She argues in a statement on "Homophobia in Russia" in the liberal, highly popular online news platform *Huffington Post* that what we see in Russia today "is not new—in fact it's an LGBT tradition. Today we find ourselves in the midst of an extraordinary learning moment regarding lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) human rights such as we have not seen since the early '90s" (Dorf, 2013). She rightly points out that anti-gay campaigns and legislation need to be understood not as quasi-natural aspect of Russian culture, or singular initiative by an evil regime, but within a broader and increasing restriction of "basic freedoms for all of Russian civil society. Gays are an easy political scapegoat and as such, Putin's government is test-driving some of their new repression techniques on this vulnerable community" (Dorf, 2013). Although she makes a good point of broadening the analysis, she nevertheless reads Russian socio-politics against the framework, which always positions homophobia in the (Western) past, while prescribing the West a progressive homo-friendly status. The mentioning of Putin again creates the idea of a single perpetrator or root of the problem. Most disappointing, however, is her evaluation of the role of the West and Western activists of creating Russian freedom, a freedom that is now challenged by Putin. Looking back at the recent history of the Russian LGBTIQ+ movement she emphasizes the role the newly founded International Gay & Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC) played.

"In July 1991 [...] a group of 90 diverse American LGBT activists took an historic trip to Russia [...]. We met with government officials, LGBT grassroots activists from all over the country, and held a joint U. S.–Russian LGBT conference and film festival in (then) Leningrad and Moscow, including a 'kiss-in' in front of the Moscow City Hall.

[...] In those days LGBT activists were calling for the repeal of the anti-gay sodomy law—a law that both the U. S. and the Soviet Union had on the books—although in the USSR it actually landed hundreds of gay men in prison or labor camps for up to five years. With the help of Congressman Barney Frank and others, and together with brave Russian activists who risked all in agitating for change, we worked until President Yeltsin got rid of that law. A set of modernizing penal code reforms were established, which helped to repeal not only Russia's sodomy law, but others in the former Soviet Republics as well." (Dorf, 2013)

Dorf's evaluation of the change of legislation in 1993 shows a truly colonial American perspective, or what Brian T. Edwards and Gaonkar Dilip Parameshwar call "a quasi-messianic national ideology" (Edwards & Gaonkar, 2010), that reserves a world-leading role for the USA. Reading Dorf's memories of the events, one gets the impression that US-activists and politicians did not simply assist or support, but really 'lead' the "brave Russian activists who risked all in agitating for change" (Dorf, 2013). Experts in the fields of Russian Gender and Sexuality Studies, such as Igor' Kon, however, strongly contradict this view. Kon describes the changes within the criminal code as well as medical classification system as introduced from above, pointing out that no significant social public discourse accompanied their implementation (Kon, 2003; see also Wiedlack & Neufeld, 2016, p. 175). Kon further suggests that the decriminalization was motivated by Russia's desire to become member to the Council of Europe only (Kon, 2003). Following his and other's opinion, Dorf's writing must be interpreted as a queer version of "Cold War Triumphalism" (Schrecker, 2004), the idea that the USA won the Cold War and with it the obligation to bring democracy and freedom (i.e. everything that the USA already has) to the post-soviet space.

Most significant is, how Dorf understands the role of gays and lesbians in civil society. She centers "LGBT activists" in the midst of "the democracy movement that helped bring down [...] the Soviet Union, ushering in a new Russia. That new Russia brought with it new freedoms and opportunities for a civil society to grow and flourish [...]" (Dorf, 2013). Today, she continues, "LGBT human rights activists are again [...] on the front lines of an enormous struggle for freedom and an open society" (Dorf, 2013). In Dorf's view public visibility of sexual minorities is a sign for progress. States that recognize sexual minorities through right, accordingly, must be progressive. Eastern European and Slavic Studies scholars Francesca Stella (2015), John Binnie (2004) and Brian Baer (2002) criticize such evaluation of nations along the lines of gay visibility, legal inclusion, in short "western-style gay libera-

tion" (Stella, 2015, p. 138). In this comparison, the western model can only "represent [...] the high point of modernity" (Binnie, 2004, p. 85), because it is the goal as well as the measurement for progress. In such a context gays and lesbians functioning as visible signs for this modernity and progress, understood as sphere of "egalitarian sexuality (the global gay)" (Baer, 2002, p. 502). Searching for representations of lesbians and gays (and transgender) that look and act exactly like their peers in the global west, western media can only come to the conclusion that Russia is situated on the periphery of Western European modernity. In other words, this 'Western Gaze,' is a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Bringing works that explain the *orientalization* of Russia (Neumann, 1999; Wolff, 1994) together with Russian Sexuality Studies (Baer, 2002; Stella, 2015) Eastern European (Binnie, 2004; Kulpa, 2014; Kulpa & Mizielińska, 2011, 2012) and US-American Decolonial Queer Studies (Massad, 2007; Puar, 2007, 2013) helps to understand the Western Gaze on Russian homophobia and the geotemporal logic it follows. Piecing these works together can also help to understand how signs and embodiments of vulnerability and homosexuality become mobilized within processes of geotemporal localization. In other words, it allows for an understanding of the signification and the display of homosexuality and vulnerability in the invention of geographical, social and cultural East/West differences and similarities, and the hegemonies that follow their evaluation.

I want to briefly come back to the statement by Dorf (2013) on "Homophobia in Russia". In the final abstract, her text explicitly calls western activists and her readers to intervene into today's homophobic climate: "Focusing our outrage on the new anti-gay law is proving to be a very powerful catalyzing force in politics and the media. Let's keep that up." (Dorf, 2013). Her call for solidarity however, comes with a pedagogical impetus. "[L]et's also seize the attention to contextualize these abuses and call for the broader reforms needed in Russia to keep some basic level of democratic freedom for its citizens" (Dorf, 2013). Dorf ends her statement with a reference to and playful conversion of the notorious legitimization of homophobic propaganda as promotion of 'traditional values:' "Twenty-two years ago, Russian and American LGBT activists helped fight together for democratic reforms for all—that's a gay tradition we should all support" (Dorf, 2013). This nicely phrased call to action is also a piece of "leveraged pedagogy." Discourses that position Russia "as an object of Western pedagogy" (Kulpa, 2014, p. 432) are a common trend in Western liberal media, but also in supranational institutions and national commentators. In Winter 2017 the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled that "Russia's so-called gay propaganda law reinforces

'stigma and prejudice' and violates the right to freedom of expression" (Batchelor, 2017). Furthermore, the law is "incompatible with the values—of equality, pluralism and tolerance—of a democratic society" (Batchelor, 2017). The British *Independent* quoted the judges saying that there was a "clear European consensus about the recognition of individuals' right to openly identify themselves as gay, lesbian or any other sexual minority, and to promote their own rights and freedoms" (Batchelor, 2017). Although Russia is one of the 47 members of the Council of Europe, which the ECHR oversees, the ruling seems to be more symbolic than effective.

Analysts such as Fred LeBlanc (2013) and Helen Lenskyi (2014) have shown the nationalism that often evolved from such "leveraged pedagogy." US and UK media presented their nations as "gay-friendly, tolerant, and sexually liberated society" and enacted "pro-national, pro-Western, and anti-Othering scripts that continually (re)produce the [Russian] Other as intolerant, sexually repressed, and uncivilized" (LeBlanc, 2013, p. 7). One of the latest examples of public speeches in support of Russian LGBTIQ+ was a speech by the British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson at Plekhanov University in Moscow in December 2017. Johnson "spoke about the importance of civil liberties [...], before meeting with a group of activists who are fighting for LGBT rights in the country" (Duffy, 2017). According to the UK gay news outlet Pink News he further told his Russian audience that "[the British] celebrate people's freedom of choice, including whom to love" (Duffy, 2017). Considering the fact that the UK is increasingly closing its borders towards new immigrants (through Brexit, the British 'exit' from the European Union), not the least those from Eastern Europe, Johnson's praise of freedom of choice seems cruel. It obviously does not include the freedom of movement. However, his words clearly mark the importance of the dichotomy of homo-tolerance/homophobia and UK (West)/Russia for the meanings of freedom and/as UK superiority. "Russia Should Learn from Britain's Record on Gay Rights" (Wintemute, 2013) wrote the *The Guardian* already in 2013, right after the introduction of the Russian anti-gay propaganda law. Analyzing English-speaking media discourses between Summer 2013 and February 2014 (Sochi Winter Olympics), LeBlanc states that references to the Russian homophobic *Other*, having "momentarily trumped Arab homophobia in the [pro-gay nationalistic] media's discussion" (LeBlanc, 2013, p. 7).

From the perspective of Winter 2017 LeBlanc's observation of "Russian" trumping "Arab homophobia" seems interesting in a new and cruel way. It highlights the discursive connection between US-American (and Western) anti-Muslim LGBTIQ+-friendly national-

ism, as analyzed in great detail by scholars such as Puar or Massad, and forms of Russian othering. In the recent reports on homophobic violence in the Russian region of Chechnya, the seemingly 'natural' connection, or complementarity of Muslim (here 'Arab') and Russian otherness in the Western perspective is more obvious than ever. Based on an article by the Russian-language news outlet *Meduza*, English-language news proliferated the rumors that Chechen immigrants wanted to impose Sharia law in Germany in Summer of 2017 (Durden, 2017; Kern, 2017; Shuster, 2017). Although the fears of a "Chechen morality police going around Berlin" have been rejected by German gay rights activists as well as credible news sites (Shuster, 2017), the concern "that Chechens do bring their moral codes with them to Europe, and [that] Kadyrov's security services have also managed to plant agents or win sympathizers within the Chechen diaspora" (Shuster, 2017) is persistently shared publicly. Although its exact meaning is seldom explained, 'Sharia law' symbolizes an anti-gay, anti-women stance that is equated with Chechen Muslim beliefs. Calling up 'Sharia,' a western audience understands immediately that Russia is on a dangerous, anti-modern, uncivilized path, by allowing, if not supporting its Muslim population to practice their unjust faith.

Interestingly enough, a reference to "Chechnya with its medieval ways" (Kern, 2017) reaffirms the opinion that Russian homophobia is backward and anti-modern. Gay subjects, especially gay men, become the central figures in an imaginary war between Western and Russian values, "Modernity vs. Forces of Yesteryear" (Simonyi, 2015). Preferably white gay victimized Russian bodies become displayed as evidence for Russian backwardness and Western progress. Yet, they are more than a simple symbol. Gays become seen as carriers of culture and sophistication, and "[l]iberated from the pressures of discrimination, they will be able to exercise their creative power to the maximum" (Simonyi, 2015).

The perfect victim Or the dangers of visibility

From the introduction of the anti-gay propaganda law in Summer 2013, Anglophone news articles, TV-reports, documentaries and photo series almost exclusively illustrated Russian homophobia by showing white young gay cisgender male victims. The young survivors of homophobic physical attacks were residents of the metropolises Saint Petersburg (Wiedlack, 2017), or Moscow (Wiedlack & Neufeld, 2016), their pictures taken after being attacked, wounded or scared. By focusing only on such white gay, predominantly male, fragile and wounded, though able-bodied and young bodied, media discourses did not

only victimize the Russian gay men, but privileged them as primary recipients of western compassion and solidarity. The preference for young male (relatively) white able-bodied and normatively beautiful victims did not change after the Russian newspaper *Novaya Gazeta* broke the news about gay purges in the Russian republic of Chechnya on 1 April 2017. The focus shifted away from the metropolitan areas of Moscow and Saint Petersburg, but the narrative remained the same: western media continued interpreting the conflict line between a progressive homo-tolerant West, with the ethical and moral obligation to 'help' the oppressed gays and a backward (Muslim) Russia (e.g. Brook, 2017; Burke, 2017; "Chechnya anti-gay violence: Newspaper fears 'retribution' for reports", 2017; Garcia, 2017; Koonin, 2017; Kramer, 2017a, p. A13, 2017b, p. A10; Walker, 2017). Initially more sensitive to the men's vulnerability, or maybe just because they could not find any escaped Chechen victims willing to go on camera, the reports did not show or describe the victims. Even when filming personal testimonies, the faces and other identifiable body parts stayed obscured, behind curtains or in the shadow. Yet, in September 2017, half a year after the first violent purges had been reported, *Time* magazine brought a detailed video interview and personal report, accompanied by a stylized photograph showing "Movsar Eskarkhanov, a 28-year-old from the Russian region of Chechnya" (Shuster, 2017) and asylum seeker to Germany. *Time* reporter Simon Shuster used the young man's real name, even the nickname, and described every detail of his asylum process and current location. "Eskarkhanov, [...] agreed to meet [...] in a safe house for Chechen exiles in Berlin. [H]e looked pale and emaciated, but flashes of anger and pride cut through his recollections," Shuster (2017) emphasized. The report and the page-filling image of Eskarkhanov emphasize his petit posture: "Thin and frail from the stress of his travels, Eskarkhanov had come to Germany and applied for asylum, first in the summer of 2013 and again in the fall of [2016], to escape the persecution he faced back home for being gay" (Shuster, 2017). His application was denied by Germany in every instance, and he was waiting to be deported back to Russia. Going public was, maybe, his attempt to warm the German officials' or some other nation's hearts to take him in. Yet, after the *Time* coverage, Eskarkhanov disappeared from the public eye. Then, in November 2017 the *BBC's* Russian-language service announced that a state-run television network *Grozny TV*, in the capital of the Chechen region had published a video of Eskarkhanov's "begging the Chechen people and authorities for forgiveness" (Russian BBC, 2017). According to the *BBC*, "Grozny's report accuses Western journalists of 'framing' Eskarkhanov and 'disgracing him before the Chechen people and Chechnya's ruler'" (Russian BBC, 2017).

The reports let room to assume that Eskarkhanov had been pressured to apologize on *Grozny TV* and that his retraction from his previous allegations of having had to experience anti-gay violence was equally done under extortion. And indeed in December 2017 *LGBTQ Nation* reported that “Eskarkhanov said [in another interview] that he was forced to apologize on national TV. He told Russian television state *RTVi* that *Grozny TV* indirectly threatened his family if he continued to speak out.” (Bollinger, 2017).

Eskarkhanov’s story and photograph in *Time* must be understood within the vast amount of coverage not only about gay Chechens, but gay Russians in general. The personalization of homophobia by portraying young gay victims of violence and the enthusiastic circulation of their image, showing an almost stylized focus on their fragile, wounded and hurting bodies shows a tendency to the creation of gay icons. The Anglophone context has a long-standing history of worshipping of gay icons (Smith, 1999, p. XV) or modern martyrs (Janes, 2015, p. 5). “Queer martyrdom” (Janes, 2015, p. 5) emerged within the nineteenth-century in reference to Catholic Christian imagery. And since then, artists and activists communicated their feelings of sexual deviance through the celebration of “queer martyrdom.” Creating and celebrating “visual images and imaginary visions of suffering” inherited from “ecclesiastical contexts” allowed gays to “develop concepts of male same-sex desire that projected the self as dutiful and penitent rather than shameful” (Janes, 2015, p. 5). Images of queer martyrs played a crucial role in creating “notions of queer sensibility” (Janes, 2015, p. 5). Dominic Janes shows that queer martyrdom became historically a sign for “queer triumph over adversity, or sad tableaux of sexual failure” (Janes, 2015, p. 5). Through the “use of melodrama, posing, and stylization (Janes, 2015, p. 27) queer iconography creates an “exalted drama around the sufferings and privations of sexual and gender deviants” (Janes, 2015, p. 12). Janes understands martyrdom as “a social formation” that requires three social positions: the martyr, sacrificing himself, violence embodied by the oppressor, and a witness, who can testify” (Janes, 2015, p. 9). Historic models for queer martyrdom are Oscar Wilde or Derek Jarman,² or Harvey Milk.³ Especially during the years of the HIV/Aids crisis “the older model of queer martyrdom recovered relevance and importance” (Janes, 2015, p. 29).

² Derek Jarman was an English film director, stage designer, artist, and author. Jarman, who was diagnosed with HIV in 1986, was a leading campaigner against the British ‘Clause 28,’ that banned the ‘promotion of homosexuality’ (Peake, 1999, p. 418) in schools during the 1980s. He was an outspoken gay rights activist and after being diagnosed, he also worked to raise awareness of HIV/AIDS in public until his death in 1994 (1).

³ Harvey Milk was a San Francisco based American politician and the first openly gay men to be elected to public office in California. He was assassinated by another city supervisor on November 27, 1978. News media described Milk as a martyr as early as 1979 (e.g. Red., 1979), as well as by biographers (Novak, 2003; Shilts, 1982).

In Shuster's *Time* article Eskharkhanov is presented as one of the most recent of many queer Russian martyrs. Like his predecessors Kirill Fedorov, Dmitry Chizhevsky (Wiedlack, 2017), Nikolay Alexeyev or Danil Grachev (Wiedlack & Neufeld, 2016), he signifies both the "queer triumph" as well as the "sad tableaux of sexual failure," to use Janes words again. His figure is almost hurtfully "[t]hin and frail" (Shuster, 2017) as Shuster emphasizes, yet, his pose is triumphant. He is "pale and emaciated" (Shuster, 2017), but he defies the brutality that awaits him in Russia, and through the Chechen community elsewhere. What differentiates Eskharkhanov from the other Russian victims of homophobic violence that became celebrated as queer martyrs by western media, is that the visibility he received evidently backfired. Once out of Germany, he was forced or maybe felt forced to publicly commit to a homophobic stance himself on *Grozny TV*, humiliating himself and his suffering. Through the exposure within western media he became even bigger a target within Chechnya. His appearance on *Grozny TV* could have become a perfect example for already existing discourses that claim that western media 'invented' the systematic violence against gays within the Russian region.

Eskharkhanov's case brings up the question of solidarity and consciousness-raising as part of international LGBTIQ+ activism and support again. The severe consequences his exposure had spoken to a moving away from the celebration of queer martyrs for the purposes of creating feelings of care and the wish to take action. Awareness-raising to homophobia and queer suffering needs to be depersonalized or collectivized. This also entails moving away from feelings of pity and benevolence as only viable reason for Western support and solidarity. Dorf was right in stating that the issue is much bigger than the single issued struggle of homophobia in Russia. Yet, a nationalistic or EU-enthusiastic shaming of Russia that implies a western superiority, is equally unproductive or counterproductive. Recently, Russia has taken much pride in differentiating itself in every way from the West, which has increasingly been described as 'degenerate.' Viewing "Russia's anti-gay legislation as evidence of Russian authoritarianism" (Rivkin-Fish & Hartblay, 2014, p. 98), that is more motivated by proving Russian 'faulness' completely ignores international homophobic movements and tendencies, for example lead by "the collaborations between U. S. Evangelicals and Russian conservatives," as Michelle Rivkin-Fish and Cassandra Hartblay (Rivkin-Fish & Hartblay, 2014, p. 98) have pointed out. They argue that current discourses on homosexuality in Russia position "Putin as a rogue despot, exceptional among contemporary political leaders" (Rivkin-Fish & Hartblay, 2014, p. 98). Yet, "Russia's gay politics [are] another example of global cultural

politics between religious fundamentalism and secular morality that plays out every day in the West" (Rivkin-Fish & Hartblay, 2014, p. 98).

Geotemporal paradigms and the representation of violence

Understanding the rise in anti-gay violence (Silva, 2017) as well as the homophobic legislation as sign that "Russia has been sliding back toward the Middle Ages" (Nemtsova, 2015), clearly speaks to the evaluation of positive changes in the sectors of gender equality and sexual citizenship rights as a country's successful modernization or transition by North/Western hegemonic institutions like the EU or UN (Binnie, 2004; Binnie & Klesse, 2013; Kulpa & Mizielińska, 2011; Stella, 2015). Although this simple formula could be applied to any country, including the USA or UK, the application of labels such as backward or medieval are arguably reserved for Eastern European, and Eurasian nations or countries of the global South. The public or legislative homophobia within the global West are barely ever understood as colliding with its status as progressive and modern. That Russia had or still has more progressive laws than Western countries, especially considering the right to have an abortion or the right to change one's sex, according to one's gender identification equally does not challenge western hegemony.⁴

My critical stance on the western gaze on Russia is no attempt to ignore the homophobic violence occurring in the region. However, the usage of words such as "utterly barbaric" and "despicable" (Butterworth, 2017), medieval or backward to mark this violence as wrong seem utterly unnecessary. Following that observation, the suggestion that Chechnya is not from the 'enlightened' world, but from a "remote" (Brook, 2017; Kramer, 2017b, p. A10) part of Russia, only signifies western superiority and speaks the West free of any allegations of homophobia. Embedding homo-tolerance within the idea of western superiority, in connection to freedom and democracy allows xenophobic and anti-Muslim advocates such as the UK Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs Johnson (coolnessofhind, 2014; Johnston, 2016) to be celebrated by liberals as gay advocates. In other words, such a discursive connection makes gay advocacy a tool to demonize and

⁴ Ireland, although it finally implemented gay marriage in 2015, has still one of the most restrictive abortion laws (Werber, 2015). The US State South Carolina banned abortion after 19 weeks in 2016 (Reilly, 2016), making it the 17th state introducing such a ban (McLeod, 2016) Moreover, the State of California allowed gay marriage in San Francisco in 2004, to ban it afterwards and reintroduce it in 2008. In 2009 another ban was implemented, but later declared unconstitutional.

marginalize Islam (and the political liberals who accept it) and entirely consistent with Johnson's right wing worldview. It is in line with the xenophobic Brexit, as much as the so-called anti-Muslim ban by the young Trump administration. Johnson and co. reject homophobic violence elsewhere, to legitimize anti-Muslim racism, and signify the nation as modern, socially liberal and tolerant. Ironically, liberal media, such as the *New York Times* equally *other* Chechnya as "predominantly Muslim North Caucasus region" (Kramer, 2017b, p. A10; Kramer, 2017a, p. A13), explaining the current anti-gay violence in Chechnya as pressing "agendas of traditional Muslim values" (Kramer, 2017b, p. A10; Kramer, 2017a, p. A13). So do *BBC News* (BBC, 2017), *Vox News* (Garcia, 2017), *CNN* (Lister, Ilyushina & Tarasova, 2017), *The Daily Mail* (Burke, 2017), *The Huffington Post* (Healey, 2017; Lucas, 2017).

The proclamation of western cultural and political superiority that arrives through all of these public condemnations of Russian homophobia once more exemplifies what Kulpa's and Mizielińska's describe as the geotemporal paradigm of Eastern Europe. Such rejections of anti-gay violence support a problematic concept of time and progress in which the West serves as a model, while the East only ever appears as lacking behind (Kulpa & Mizielińska, 2012, p. 23). Especially the journalistic pieces on anti-gay violence in Chechnya highlight how Anglophone media centers gays in "Russia's Culture Wars" (Trudolyubov, 2014), the negotiation of cultural values between western modernity and oriental barbarism, backwardness, authoritarianism and religion. And "area specialists [and gay activists equally speculate] about the prospects for a convergence of the 'uncivilized' Russia with a united Europe" (Dutkiewicz, 2011, p. 10; Kagan, 2004). Such views refer back to the European Enlightenment, where Russia was constructed as in between Western European civilization and the 'barbarian Orient.' Through the focus on anti-gay violence in Chechnya, western public figures and media could not only reconfirm their own superiority, but reestablish the notion of Russia going in the wrong geotemporal direction, through the emphasis on the political support of the Chechen leader Ramzan A. Kadyrov by president Putin (see for e.g. Brook, 2017; O'Hara, 2017; Walker, 2017). Labeling the prisons where Chechen gays are incarcerated and tortured as "gay concentration camps" (O'Hara, 2017) the European past is brought up. This suggests not only that Europe has long overcome homophobia, but also that what is happening in Chechnya or Russia is untimely. Most importantly, the recent discourses on Russia re-signify Islam through homophobia, backwardness and cruelty. The secular West (in ignoring the power of religious groups within Europe) becomes representative as ally and savior of gays, as a sphere where the vulnerability of gays is recognized

and protection is granted. According to this logic, such recognition and protection is not only morally and ethically right for modern and civilized peoples and nations, but it is also a logical consequence of modern progress.

Conclusion

The described English-speaking media discourses on Russian gay-rights issues follow a geotemporal logic that locates Russia on the fringe of modernity, and supports Western superiority. Part of these discourses is what Kulpa calls a “leveraged pedagogy,” a pedagogically framed exercise of power in the name of liberalism, tolerance and freedom. Through the personalization and individualization of victimhood and pain newspapers, magazines, journals and websites create queer martyrs as visual evidence of Russia’s brutality and inhumanity. Through the focus on vulnerable, sacred, mostly white gay men, lesbian, trans*, other non-normative subjects as well as LGBTIQ+ political agents become invisible. Such a focus on gay vulnerability allows for a reduction of the victims of homophobic violence to mere objects of North/Western pity, in need of the help of North/Western actors. It creates a discourse on values and ethics that locate Russia on the move away from modernity – a homo-tolerant modernity, which is reserved for the (already homo-tolerant) North/West. Focus on Chechnya and Islam increases the artificial difference between the enlightened and secular West and the areas of homophobia.

Yet, the individualization of the victims of homophobic violence has another aspect. Through a visibility oriented politics that includes images and the writing about personal details, it creates a lot of visibility not only for Russian Chechen homophobia and the suffering of gays, but also for the individual men. As shown in the case of Movsar Eskarkhanov, such publicity and visibility can be very dangerous for the individuals and increase the harm they are subjected to. LGBT activists in Russia and the Caucasus have long cautioned that Western interventions actually often worsened their situation (Kreeger, 2013; Nemtsova, 2017; Rettman, 2015; Taylor, 2014). Western-style visibility politics and homophobia shaming from western countries create unwanted attention (Nemtsova, 2017). The question is, accordingly, how to address homophobia and condemn it, without perpetuating western imperialism, leveraged pedagogy and a gay-fronted nationalism. Avoiding the creation of queer martyrs and focusing on people, without individualizing their suffering seems appropriate. Taking a hint from Rivkin-Fish and Hartblay (2014) instead of supporting discourses of western

superiority, a focus on the transnational and global homophobic networks could be fruitful in the fight against homophobia in the West and ‘the Rest’ of the world. Sharing resources and giving money to helplines in Russia, and supporting LGBT and other organizations that try to rescue the Chechen victims of homophobia seems also appropriate.

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Quantum Leap⁵ 2.0 or the Western gaze on Russian homophobia

Abstract

This paper analyzes recent discourses about Russian homophobia within Anglophone media. It argues that western liberal media, supranational institutions such as the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), and gay rights activists create discourses that center gay issues in the midst of an East-West oppositionality. Such a binary construction creates the image of a just, democratic and homophile West in opposition to an undemocratic, unjust, homo-

⁵ Quantum Leap is an American sci-fi TV-show about a physicist who time-travels through history. It starred Scott Bakula as Dr. Sam Beckett, and originally aired on NBC, from 1989 through 1993. Every episode, the fictional Doctor arrives at a new historic point of crises, where mistakes or wrong decisions had been made.

phobic East, dominated by Russia. It attaches the notions of progress, equality and freedom not only to a homo-tolerant or homo-inclusive legislation and society, but actually binds all these aspects to the global territory of Western nations. Russia, Eastern Europe and Eurasia, on the other hand, become attached to the notion of homophobia, hence backwardness, and anti-modern conservatism. The key figures and visual representations of all these discourses, that simultaneously signify western homo-tolerant progress as well as Russian anti-gay backwardness are white young gay men, who became victims of anti-gay violence.

In using images of frightened, beaten or otherwise harmed young white men, liberal media, supranational institutions, and gay rights activists render the gay subject not only as vulnerable, and without agency, but also as globally uniform and carrier of western insignia. In this way, gays are symbolized by western signs, and become symbols themselves, standing in for western progress, modernity and development. Somehow paradoxically, such a focus on gay men allows for ignorance towards lesbians, transgender, intersex and other queers as well as the troubling nationalism, homophobia and racism within Western, Anglophone countries, such as the USA or the UK. Moreover, it allows for what Kulpa calls "leveraged pedagogy," a condemnation or reprimand of Russian policies, from a point of moral and ethical (western) superiority.

Keywords:

gay, Russia, homophobia, homonationalism, Chechnya, 'the West,' western media, leveraged pedagogy

"Zagubiony w czasie" 2.0 albo zachodnie spojrzenie na rosyjską homofobię

Abstrakt

Przedmiotem niniejszej analizy są dyskursy o rosyjskiej homofobii obecne we współczesnych mediach anglojęzycznych. Autorka stwierdza, że zachodnie liberalne media, aktywiści gejoscy, oraz organizacje ponadnarodowe, takie jak Europejski Trybunał Praw Człowieka, budują dyskurs umieszczający kwestię gejoską w centrum opozycji Wschód-Zachód. Taka binarna konstrukcja tworzy obraz praworządneho, demokratycznego i przyjaznego homoseksualistom Zachodu przeciwstawionego niedemokratycznemu, niesprawiedliwemu i homofobicznemu Wschodowi, zdominowanemu przez Rosję. Łączy ona idee postępu, równości i wolności nie tylko z tolerancyjnym i włączającym prawodawstwem, ale wiąże te aspekty z samym terytorium państw zachodnich. Z drugiej strony Rosja, Europa Wschodnia i Eurazja zostają skojarzone z ideami homofobii, zacofania i antynowoczesnego konserwatyizmu. Kluczowymi postaciami i reprezentacją wizualną tych dyskursów, która ukazuje zarówno zachodni tolerancyjny dla homoseksualizmu postęp, jak i rosyjskie antygejoskie zacofanie, stają się młodzi biali mężczyźni, którzy padli ofiarą homofobicznej przemocy.

Wykorzystując obrazy przerażonych, pobitych, czy w inny sposób skrzywdzonych młodych białych mężczyzn, liberalne media, instytucje międzynarodowe i aktywiści gejoscy

nie tylko przedstawiają gejów jako bezbronnych i pozbawionych sprawczości, ale również jako jednolitą grupę nosicieli zachodnich wartości. W ten sposób utożsamieni z symbolami Zachodu geje sami stają się symbolami zachodniego postępu, nowoczesności i rozwoju. Paradoksalnie, skupienie się na homoseksualnych mężczyznach pozwala lekceważyć lesbijki, osoby transpłciowe, interseksualne czy w inny sposób nieheteronormatywne. Pozwala również przemilczeć kłopotliwy nacjonalizm, homofobię i rasizm w państwach anglojęzycznego Zachodu, takich jak USA i Wielka Brytania. Umożliwia ono wreszcie potępienie przez Zachód rosyjskiej polityki z pozycji moralnej i etycznej wyższości, które Robert Kulpa określa mianem „pedagogiki nacisku”.

Słowa kluczowe:

gej, Rosja, homofobia, homonacjonalizm, Czeczenia, „Zachód”, zachodnie media, *leveraged pedagogy*

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