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The State and the People: Human Rights in Russia's Apolitical World

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The State and the People:
Human Rights in Russia's Apolitical World

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College

by
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Introduction

Building Something New out of Something Old:

The Russia of Today

“Hundreds of people, including a prominent opposition figure, were arrested in Moscow Sunday [March 26th, 2017] for participating in unauthorized protests, according to state media and a human rights group. Russian human rights group OVD-Info tweeted that more than 700 had been detained in Moscow -- while state-run news agency Ria Novosti said 500 had been held.”¹

Russia has never been a country known for its appreciation of the voices of its average citizens. Changes to this have slowly occurred over the country’s history though, starting in 1861 when the serfs, the peasants who made up the lower class of tsarist Russia and were by far the majority, were emancipated from their landowners in contracts that can be considered a type of slavery.² Just a little more than 50 years later the Bolshevik revolution occurs, a worker’s revolution, a class revolution that was for the salt of the Earth. Unfortunately, this did not fully occur in the Soviet times, a hierarchy of power was still implemented, and corruption became widespread by the time the Soviet Union dissolved. This continued over into the 90s, and with it a feeling of helplessness in the people of Russia. No governmental assistance had been established with everyone fighting for their own wellbeing. Then on New Year’s Eve of the new millennium,

¹ Mortensen, Antonia, Fred Pleitgen, Matt Rehbein, and Ryan Prior. "Report: Hundreds Arrested at Anti-corruption Protests in Russia." CNN. Cable News Network, 27 Mar. 2017. Web. 30 Apr. 2017.

² Lynch, Michael. "The Emancipation of the Russian Serfs, 1861: A Charter of Freedom or an Act of Betrayal?" The Emancipation of the Russian Serfs, 1861: A Charter of Freedom or an Act of Betrayal? | History Today. History Today, Dec. 2003. Web. 30 Apr. 2017.

Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin announces that he will become the next president of the Russian Federation.

Putin made promises to bring back a government that the citizens of Russia can depend on and can expect to take charge and represent the country of Russia as a strong presence. In his New Year's Eve essay Putin has stated that an "important lesson of the 1990s is that Russia needs to form a system for the state to regulate the economy and social sphere."³ Control during the 90s was completely monopolized by oligarchs who used their money to influence politicians all the way up to Boris Yeltsin himself. Private practice had invaded the political realm and taken it over. Putin's reaction to this has been for there to be a strong State structure that utilizes all the tools at its disposal to secure control over a potential threat. This utilization has given birth to a centralized control scheme with Putin on the top. He has continued centralization processes sixteen years into his administrations regime, in "April [of 2016] with the creation of the National Guard, a new body that oversees Interior Ministry troops, OMON riot police, and SOBR special forces. The Federal Migration Service (FMS) and Federal Drug Control Service (FSKN) were also folded into the Interior Ministry at the time."⁴ But with the rise of a strong centralized government is the emergence of authoritarian practices. Putin is sacrificing the comfort of the individual for the security of the citizens, but there has been evidence that his promises are not entirely correct.

The implementation of human rights in Russia would greatly improve the wellbeing of the country as a whole through breaking down the centralization of power,

³ Putin, Vladimir. "Vladimir Putin's First Paper as President: 'Russia at the Turn of the Millennium' - A Strategy for Russia's Revival." Sott.net. Quantum Future Group, 31 Dec. 1999. Web. 30 Apr. 2017.

⁴ Kaylan, Melik. "Putin Brings Back The KGB As Russia Moves From Authoritarian To Totalitarian." Forbes. Forbes Magazine, 20 Sept. 2016. Web. 30 Apr. 2017.

resulting in the population having more say in the country's future. Putin has done all that he can to deny this to happen, continually utilizing a rhetoric of populism that is derived from Russian nationalism to reject human rights as Western. He has emphasized that due to the false claim that human rights are Western they have no purpose being in Russia because their presence is one that would destroy Russia from the inside out. The result, in Putin's words, would be that Russia would just become any other Western country in its cultural significance. Coincidentally Putin would be able more easily keep his concentrated level of power if human rights were not in the minds of Russian citizens. But Russian's need to realize that human rights is something more than just Western interpretations, they are about the rights of the individual regardless of the nationalistic background. Human rights can be representative in any type of communal culture, including Russia.

This paper is broken down into three chapters, each one focusing on how the Russian identity of the 21st century has been utilized to develop a relationship with human rights. The first chapter is about the Russian identity that Putin is motivating the citizens to embody. This citizen is one that exists in the confines of the populist support, one that not only prides themselves in believing in the government, but one that exclusively relies on the support of this government. This type of belief system encourages the dismissal of human rights as being something that legitimizes the West's control of the international rule of law. The second chapter focuses on how Putin's administration deals with human rights organizations and laws that are from the West. In this chapter, there is the explanation to how Putin defines and differs his Russia from a Russia that contains and acknowledges human rights. We see how the populist structure

that Putin has created in the first chapter reacts towards conventional human right related topics as we know them here in the West, such as Amnesty International or an unbiased court case. The third chapter shows how human rights have been properly utilized by Russians as being Russian in design. These movements are also shown to be Russian in their goals, which focus on demographics that Putin's Russia supports, such as soldiers and families. Even though Putin has utilized all he can do as the head of a centralized government to stop a belief in human rights as able to be Russian, the citizens have the ability to see the positive influence, even with Putin's absorbent amount of propaganda against anything anti-Putin.

This paper is about how nationalism and authoritarianism in the 21st century is not always the same stereotype as they were in the 20th century, when tyranny had to be destroyed by an outsider force to restructure the entire government, such as the Nazis. Even with the power that Putin has gathered over seventeen years in power, protest movements are still happening that are declaring that regardless of what the political machinations of Russia are stating, there is a resistance of Russian citizens. Conformity among the Russian populace has not become the staple that Putin wants the world to believe them to be. There is an opposition to Putin, even if his rhetoric is focusing around just how unified the country has become after a decade of post-Soviet chaos.

This paper will explain the irony that is arising from Putin's populist declaration of a certain Russian identity. While there is a certain way that Russian conservatives want the population to be unified, the results contradict what the long-term goal should be. Rather than politicians adjusting their own rhetoric in order to properly represent Russia in its entirety, people have had to adjust to reflect the politician's attributes and opinions.

Putin has stated that "everybody should join, coordinate their efforts, their obligations and rights in order to maintain the higher historical right of Russia - to be strong."⁵ The centralization of power, symbolically a unification of the entirety of Russia is attempting to capitalize on self-sacrifice of the individual in order for Russia to become strong as a nation. The contradiction here is that this does not have to be the case, the individual makes up a nation, and therefore must be properly represented in order to the nation to be truly in unity. While Putin has used anti-Western rhetoric, claims of sovereignty to restrict human rights that have origins in Western countries, through his seventeen year reign the populace has successfully come together for causes that are uniquely about their situations as Russian citizens.

⁵ "Analysing Putin's Speech." Katehon Think Tank. Geopolitics & Tradition. Katehon Think Tank, 06 Oct. 2016. Web. 30 Apr. 2017.

Chapter 1

The Bones Remain: Today's Sociological Structure of Russia

"Above all, we should acknowledge that the collapse of the Soviet Union was a major geopolitical disaster of the century. As for the Russian nation, it became a genuine drama. Tens of millions of our co-citizens and co-patriots found themselves outside Russian territory. Moreover, the epidemic of disintegration infected Russia itself."⁶

-Vladimir Putin

The Russian Man's Type of Nationalism

Putin's centralized government, its actions and the strength it wants to be seen as having, are boastfully shown in order to create a nation that is completely personified by the government itself. This exclusivity has been created in order to guarantee that the risk of Western influences is irrelevant to the unified strength of the Russian identity. Human rights especially have been viewed by Putin as just another tool that the West is using to destroy the sovereignty that he has over the Russian nation. Putin has stated before that "Western states dominate and politicize the human rights agenda [and its cosmopolitan way of thinking], using it as a means to exert pressure."⁷ In order to deter any potential influence that human rights could have on the nation, the government has encouraged the population to define themselves as Russian. This Russian identity has been created by the government in order to continue an agenda that helps to solidify Putin's centralization of

⁶ Sanders, Katie. "Did Vladimir Putin Call the Breakup of the USSR 'the Greatest Geopolitical Tragedy of the 20th Century?'" PunditFact. Politifact.com, 6 Mar. 2014. Web. 30 Apr. 2017.

⁷ Putin, Vladimir. "Vladimir Putin: "Russia and the Changing World"." GlobalResearch. RT, 22 Sept. 2015. Web. 30 Apr. 2017.

the State under his control. This type of nationalism encourages unity and solidification, but this version of civilian harmony requires there to be a conforming populace that is willing to be submissive to the State's strength, maximizing State power. The reasoning for this maximization of State power, as explained by the Russian government, is because of the West and its agenda against the nation of Russian in its entirety. The Russian identity that Putin has encouraged not only needs to be passive to the will of the State, but in its fruition, is anti-Western. He has claimed that the Russian identity is under attack by the West, who want the Russian identity to not be truly Russian, but to be tainted by the influence of European and globalists culture. Therefore, the citizens need to stand behind the government's actions in order to successfully build Russia's identity. This identity is not only about Russian culture but it is also one that is in rejection of human rights and other Western concepts. 21st century Russia is one that is defined by the government, the Russian state has become the vocal point on how the Russian identity should be defined.

A Masculine Identity in Putin's Supporters

One essential part of the identity of every individual is how they identify their gender and how they want that role to be seen. Stereotypical male masculinity is an identity that Putin has heavily encouraged as how a Russian male should be seen and how he should act. This has been reflected in Putin's personal activities, either when he has a photo taken of him without his shirt on performing some athletic activity, or when he is showing his dominance over corrupt businessmen.⁸ In order for this masculine stereotype to be considered uniquely Russian, Putin has resurrected an old Russian word that he has used to embody the Russian male: muzhik. This word originated in tsarist Russia as a

⁸ Kuznetsov, Alexsei. "Putin Erupts In Struggling Russian Town." CBS News. CBS Interactive, 08 June 2009. Web. 30 Apr. 2017.

generic term for the serfs or peasants of the landowners. But now in the 21st century Putin considers himself a muzhik, and wants positive male role models to be viewed as muzhiks, such as when he called Leonardo DiCaprio ““a real man" (or "muzhik") for his persistence”⁹ when DiCaprio donated one million dollars to a charity saving Russian tigers. Putin’s influence has turned this phrase into a “norm of modern Russian masculinity,” finding its way into advertisements, movies, pop songs, and elegies as a signifier of “real” manhood.”¹⁰

The reason that Putin wishes to encourage males to be stereotypically masculine is because of the strength that lies in this stereotype. The nation of Russia needs to be strong and brazen against a world that does not wish for the Russian identity to be seen as such, therefore he has encouraged this strength in order to defy the West. Putin’s own actions being seen as masculine help bolster support for the preservation of his governmental power. “This was again another way of saying that the populist decrees who the real people are and supposedly unifies them [in this case it being Putin in line with the common citizens].”¹¹ The strength that men have is supposed to be seen as something bigger than just Putin encouraging other men to work out. The purpose is to break down the barriers between a president and the average male citizen in order for them to be unified by a common strength for a purpose more significant than just the individual.

Feminism’s Contrast to Russian Masculinity

⁹ "Vladimir Putin: Leonardo DiCaprio Is a 'real Man'." The Telegraph. Telegraph Media Group, 24 Nov. 2010. Web. 30 Apr. 2017.

¹⁰ Sperling, Valerie. Sex, Politics, and Putin: Political Legitimacy in Russia. Page 36. New York: Oxford UP, 2015. Print.

¹¹ Myers, Joanne. "What Is Populism and How Did Trump Use It to Win: Interview with Prof. Jan-Werner Muller." The #1 Model United Nations Community / MunPlanet. PassBlue, 18 Nov. 2016. Web. 30 Apr. 2017.

While masculinity has been painted by Putin as a way to encourage male Russian identity, he considers feminism in juxtaposition to the unity that Russian masculinity encourages. Feminism is considered by many Russians to be a Western trifle that has no place in Russian society. Feminism is not just unnecessary, but it is detrimental to Russian unity by placing the individual before the societal whole. As an ideological presence, it has been labeled as an authoritarian directive of globalists that actually slows down the development of a feminine Russian identity, rather than enriching it. Putin has stated that “[supporting the existence of international powers] does not mean interfering in the internal affairs of other countries, and especially not imposing a regime that determines how these states should live and develop. It is obvious that such interference does not promote the development of democratic states at all.”¹² The promotion of the individual through feminism is seen by Putin to not be a priority for the Russian nation. The individual needs to first be defined by their identity as part of the nation. Feminism is considered to be something that renders a Russian identity as obsolete by being identified as a part of a Western agenda. To be a feminist is to not believe in a Russian identity. A Russian identity in contrast to feminism is to be part of something more important than just your individual needs and also to benefit from a community that is beyond a gender identity. Putin identifies feminism to be a motive by Westerners to encourage the liquidation of Russian nationalism, to faction off parts of Putin’s Russian identity.

Finding a Community in a Post-Ideological Society

The strong revitalization of a national community is Putin’s way of pulling the heartstrings of those Russians who remember the failure of the Soviet Union. The failure

¹² Isaac, Jeffrey C. "Thoughts on Putin and Trump." Public Seminar. The Editorial Board of Public Seminar, 26 Jan. 2017. Web. 30 Apr. 2017.

of communism was the Russian's failure as part of an international community. This international community was one that wished to represent a superstructure that broke down barriers between people of tradition and culture in order to see a semblance in every person. It was the sacrifice of the individual at a massive scale, and Russia's failure to be part of that is still resonating within the citizens of Russia, who wish to cling to an idealistic community that they can claim to be their own. "They said on the radio that Lenin's hand was sawed off from the monument in the center of town in the middle of the night. Traded in for scrap...for kopecks. It used to be an icon. An idol! Now, he's nothing but scrap metal."¹³ Ideology has been shown to be nothing more than that, an idea that only can exist with institutions that stand behind it. Therefore, Putin wants the Russian populace to believe in a nationalistic idea that can be taken up by a local community, this local community being the Russian people in a world of alienating cultures. This localization of thought is in comparison to not just the failure of the Soviet system, but of the system that the Western world promotes, one that is globally connected by bonds similar to the Soviet Union. The nationalistic claim that Putin endorses is one that draws people together by something not ideological, but communal.

Putin states that this communal union is under attack from the international system, which would prefer Russia to be involved in something that is ideological in its motivation, and therefore beyond any type of cultural barrier. The cultural barriers that define Russia are what hold it together in its identity, and Putin has stressed that there is a necessity for a nation to remove any ideological barriers in order to be a nation, rather than potentially an international movement. This resonates in the citizens of Russia

¹³ Alexievich, Svetlana. *Secondhand Time*. Page 173. N.p.: Random House Group, 2016. Print.

because of the fall of the Soviet Union and the proceeding years. During this time people's individuality was revealed through their greed, and people who used to be supposedly devoted communists completely reverted to capitalistic agendas that served their own purpose. "The Communists aren't what they used to be. Now [in the 90s] we have Communists who make hundreds of thousands of dollars a year. An apartment in London, a palace in Cyprus... What kind of communists are these?"¹⁴ For those that held the Soviet Union dearly, this was a complete shock to them, people around them just adjusted their ways of life to the world around them. It was discovered that ideology does not truly represent the identity of a community, the person who actually believed in an international communist revolution discovered that he was now alone in a post-ideology nation.

Putin's populist rhetoric is a direct response to the lack of purpose that the Russian community has felt in the 90s when Western institutions influenced a country that did not know how to identify itself in the capitalistic world that surrounded them. Yeltsin's "policies perfectly suited the Western agenda for Russia, a superpower-turned economic and military weakling, a subservient client state and a source of cheap energy and minerals."¹⁵ In order for Russia to adjust its way into the capitalistic world Yeltsin decided that the aid of the West would help aid the process. Unfortunately, they were not able to help fight against the corruption that interfered and turned the nation into a state run by mobsters who forced money out of the country. Yeltsin continually had to stay submissive to these Western influences in order for him to keep his personal power as the

¹⁴ Alexievich, 120

¹⁵ Radyuhin, Vladimir. "Why the West Loved Yeltsin and Hates Putin." *The Hindu*. The Hindu, 08 Oct. 2016. Web. 01 May 2017.

first ever president of Russia. It does not matter if the West actually is at fault for the damage in the 90s. It does matter though that they influenced the president of Russia during a time in which Russia was involved in a horrid economic and sociological crisis, therefore Putin is legitimized in say that “rather than bringing about reforms, an aggressive foreign interference has resulted in a brazen destruction of national institutions and the lifestyle itself.”¹⁶ Putin’s purpose as the president of Russia is to get back Russia from the influences of Western powers, ones that did not help in the development of Russia.

The Divide Between the Political Perspectives of Russia and the West

The emergence of Putin’s rhetoric of a Russia for Russians creates a distinction between Russia and other nations, this distinction relies on the motive that for Russia to have a strong identity it must refuse to be Europeanized. After ten post-Soviet years of cooperation between Europe and Russia, this breaking point was one that Europeans heavily disagreed with and continually oppose. Putin has defined Russia as independent in who and how its actions are influenced and “this exceptionalism has caused mounting problems on the international stage”¹⁷ with constant denouncements by Western powers. But Putin has twisted these denouncements around, claiming that their purpose is to create Western influence in Russia, removing Putin’s sovereignty.

This differentiation in political structures between Russia and the West have continually supported Putin’s rhetoric that for Russia’s identity for be fully conceptualized, it must have no interactions with what could be considered West in

¹⁶ Staff, Washington Post. "Read Putin’s U.N. General Assembly Speech." The Washington Post. WP Company, 28 Sept. 2015. Web. 30 Apr. 2017.

¹⁷ Tisdall, Simon. "Putin's Disturbing Message for the West: Your Rules Don't Apply." The Guardian. Guardian News and Media, 21 Jan. 2016. Web. 30 Apr. 2017.

fruition. While European countries are considered states, Russia considers itself to be a nation in contrast to those globalist organizations. “The discourse of nations is couched especially in terms of passion and identification, what that of states – kindred in many ways – is phrased more in terms of reason and interests.”¹⁸ The development of Europe through the 20th century can be historically viewed as creating different types of globalist projects (such as the EU or NATO) that encourage a global sense of comradery and tolerance of other nations through universalization of international laws and morals. But these globalists projects not only alienate a nation such as Russia that has just so recently given itself an autonomous identity, they invariably create contact with such a nation as Russia because of the fragility of the Russian identity. This fragility though is due to the fact that Putin’s administration are the people who have fabricated the identity of the Russian people, rather than an accurate assessment of the Russian population.

“Nations only exist in the context of nationalism”¹⁹ and Putin has encouraged the existence of a Russian concept of nationalism and the identity it pursues by contrasting it with goals of the globalists. Nationalism and the right to be uniquely Russian have become opposed to the existence of such instruments of Western thought such as NATO. NATO as an institution has allowed Putin to speak vehemently about the importance for Russia as a nation to have strong borders to oppose outsider influences and influencing the strength of Russia’s nationalism. Through the post-Soviet years, NATO has slowly been moving its own borders closer to Russia. Putin has used these actions to declare that the West is trying its best to create pressure on the actions of Russia. He has said before that "when a country joins NATO, it becomes next to impossible for it to resist pressure

¹⁸ Calhoun, Craig. Nationalism. Page 3. Buckingham: Open U.P., 1997. Print.

¹⁹ Calhoun, 99

from a major NATO leader such as the United States and hence it may deploy anything - a missile defense system, new bases or, if need be, missile strike systems."²⁰ The variable of uncertainty gives Putin an advantage when he is talking about a threat from the West that the Russian identity faces. The idea of potential danger encourages fearmongering among politicians such as Putin who need a unified population to be in agreement with the centralized government. Danger from outside Russia's borders encourages a national identity that needs to stay strong in times of hypothetical danger.

NATO is viewed by Russian politicians as continuing a Cold war agenda against the potential of Russian growth, either financially, militaristically, or from a sociologically. The current Russian administration believes that its goals to become a thriving nation are being prevented by the expansion of NATO's borders. "The Alliance's creation was part of a broader effort to serve three purposes: deterring Soviet expansionism, forbidding the revival of nationalist militarism in Europe through a strong North American presence on the continent, and encouraging European political integration."²¹ The continuation of NATO's existence is perceived as evidence that Russia is under attack from the West and its beliefs.

Putin's actions against this hypothetical threat from the West have increased with zeal over the course of his regime's time in office, finding new ways to label certain identities or ways of thinking Western in order to guarantee the continuation of his centralized power. One way has been a law passed in 2012 that is able to label certain NGOs as being foreign agents, the purpose of such a law aids Putin's agenda to have

²⁰ Tass. "Putin Explains Why Russia Worries about NATO Enlargement." Russia Beyond The Headlines. RBTH Network, 21 Nov. 2016. Web. 30 Apr. 2017.

²¹ Nato. "A Short History of NATO." NATO. NATO Public Diplomacy Division, 1 Jan. 2012. Web. 30 Apr. 2017.

control over how the public is influenced by political presences. NGOs are labeled as foreign agents if they are involved in “political activity”, to include virtually any form of commentary on public policy or the actions of public officials.”²² In this light NGOs have been seen as extensions of NATO in their agenda against the revitalization of a Russian identity that is exclusively influenced by Russian culture.

Comparing Representational Strength of the Presidents of Russia

This exclusively Russian influence that would mold an identity for the population has been attempted to be centralized around the image of Putin and the populist regime that he controls. Putin as an individual, rather than as the State, wants to set an example for who the Russian identity should be and how he (as the masculine image) should act. This image of a man who considers his strength to be self-reliant helps propel the esteem of the nation itself. “Putin’s popularity derives from his embodiment of hegemonic masculinity.”²³ This stereotypical view of a masculine male brings forth an identity that does not need the aid of others, and therefore able to handle any situation at hand while keeping his dignity. Putin as a figure head is a man who is able to handle any situation and as long as he has complete control over the nation of Russia, Russia will be fine.

Putin wants his position as head of a centralized government to be in contrast to Boris Yeltsin as a president who is the embodiment of Russian identity. Yeltsin in comparison is seen as an example of a Western politician and therefore has ruined the potential for Russia to have Western influences. “Despite positive attitudes toward market democratic reform, Yeltsin, and the West and an unthreatening international

²² Amnesty International. "Amnesty International." Russia: Four Years of Putin's 'Foreign Agents' Law to Shackle and Silence NGOs. Amnesty International, 18 Nov. 2016. Web. 30 Apr. 2017.

²³ Sperling, 13

environment, liberal internationalists were accused of betraying Russia's national interests in pursuing policies unbecoming to Russia's historical status."²⁴ The behavior of Yeltsin towards the international realm was seen by the populace of Russia as submissive to greater powers than Russia by accepting its role as a State among other States, being seen as insignificant to the bigger picture. "Yeltsin was not just an unpopular president: he was the first politician whom Russians had ever trusted."²⁵ This trust and the betrayal of it is what sparked the desire for the Russian nation to find a president that is strong and shameless in representing Russia as a country that has to put its own interests before those of the international world.

The representation of a positive role model has been continually generated by Putin in the press,²⁶ drawing out just how explicitly different he and Yeltsin are. This emphasis is heavily pushed in order for it to seem like there is a correlation between how somebody is in their personal life and their professional life. Putin gained popularity because in contrast to Yeltsin, who was inebriated in front of the camera on many occasions and had multiple heart attacks by the time he left office due to poor health, Putin is viewed as somebody who could potentially be a good role model for how you should live your personal life.

But initially Yeltsin was seen as good candidate to be the first president of Russia due to how he was viewed. The people viewed him as being a president that is militaristically driven and therefore determined to pave a future for Russia. Much of this

²⁴ Clunan, Anne L. "Historical Aspirations and the Domestic Politics of Russia's Pursuit of International Status." *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 47.3-4 (2014): 283. Web.

²⁵ "Gessen, Masha. *The Man without a Face: The Unlikely Rise of Vladimir Putin*. Page 12. NY, NY, USA: Riverhead, 2014. Print.

²⁶ This ranges from Putin finding an opportunity to take a shirtless photo while fishing or holding a rifle, or even a video of said president lifting weights with his Prime Minister Dimitri Medvedev. The video concluded with them grilling steaks.

enthusiasm was due to the success of the 1991 coup and Yeltsin's role as a representative for a new Russia, a new nation. When the coup had ended one image struck people as a perfect example of how Yeltsin was a great choice for becoming the president of Russia. It is a photograph of Yeltsin on a tank, with the tri-colored flag of Russia waving in the wind behind him as he is making a speech on the great future of the Russian people.²⁷ This pride in militarism, with a president on a tank, and the power that holds is an essential part to how the Russian identity has been seen over the years. "[The Soviet] ideology was also militarized. But Gorbachev was profoundly civilian."²⁸ Yeltsin brought back the militaristic strength that the Russian population was looking for in a leader that was the choice of the people.

A huge part of his downfall is due to the fact that it the population of Russia eventually realized that Yeltsin was not the one directing the nation towards its determined future. Casting Western stigma aside, the head of the Russian nation is somebody that has been seen as the individual that will lead the nation into the future. But if there those that are influencing the president and directing his actions, then it is determined that he cannot represent the people, because he is not even representing himself.

This dual representation of one's self and the country is essential in order to understand how Putin is able to deem his sovereignty as the most important factor in guaranteeing the sanctity of the Russian people and their unique culture. His symbolic representation of the country allows him to justify actions that would be deemed undemocratic in most governments of the world. "We see that populists [such as Putin]

²⁷ Alexievich

²⁸ Alexievich, 124

will justify whatever they are doing in the name of their basic monopoly to moral representation of the people.”²⁹ The question of rights and the individual they represent are considered irrelevant trifles that just damage the nations progress. This internal damage arises due to the fact that rights inherently give people power, power that can be used to challenge the sovereignty of Putin. Therefore, Putin continually states that human rights do not belong in Russia due to the fact that if rights are to be enabled then Putin, the man who has deemed himself a representative for what the Russian identity is, can lose his seat of power and with him the loss of the Russian identity.

Identity in Conformity

With Putin representing what he has determined to be the Russian identity, he declares that it is necessary for the citizens of Russia to submit in unity to his Russian government in order to preserve their identity against a global threat. When Western powers denounce the actions of Putin, they are not just denouncing his government but also the nation in its entirety by doing so. This has reinvigorated Western-based fearmongering, allowing nationalistic notions to reshape a perception of the West as truly against being opposed to the Russian way of life. “[Soviet citizens] made everything up, and, as it later turned out, everything [the Soviet citizens] thought [they] knew was nothing but figments of [their] imaginations: The West.”³⁰ Nationalists needed to recreate the image of what Russia was and how it related to the West in order to bolster fear of international presences. Putin’s brazen nature adds tension to the international realm due to the responses he receives from the West. He then twists this dialogue around in order for it to be perceived as though his, and therefore the nation’s, sovereignty are under

²⁹ Muller & Myers

³⁰ Alexievich, 19

assault because the West does not want Russia to grow to its full potential as an independent nation.

Putin's nationalism that is supposed to represent the majority has to have this enemy in the West in order for there to be a powerful rejection of human rights. With this validation of Western desires that conflict with the majority interest of Russia, Putin centralizes power in order to draw an oppositional distinction between these two groups of people. The populist goal of the Russian government is that with this distinction Russian citizens can easily see how they should identify themselves in order to do their part against a Western threat. "In the short term – where most governments actually live [, Russia being no exception] – democracy and human rights often conflict, and popular sovereignty for a majority is often achieved at the cost of ethnic cleansing [or a less extreme action of ostracizing] a minority."³¹ The Russian identity is created from the top down in order for there to be an established structural identity that can be identified from its initial birth as being part of a strong institution. It does not need the consent of the population due to the fact that this identity surrounds the world that they live in. The Russian population is pressured into being part of this identity out of a desire to be viewed as a real Russian in the eyes of the State. People have to cooperate with Putin's administration and the identity that they have created in order to feel as though they are truly part of the Russian world.

People cast aside their individuality in order to become part of a unified state that Putin can dictate and control through his sovereignty. Rights of the individual have to be compromised in Putin's Russia in order for the government to have real control over this

³¹ Ignatieff, Michael. *Human Rights as Politics and Idolatry*. Page 25. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2011. Print.

unified identity that will unquestionably support their actions. Strength through unity is what Putin believes will be the salvation of the Russian identity in the 21st century, allowing it to be heard in the international realm while still being allowed to keep its independently decided decisions as a nation. On New Year's Eve of 1999 Putin wrote and published an essay titled *Russia on the Threshold of the New Millennium* where he stated that he “welcomed recent “positive changes”, especially the Russian people’s embrace of “supranational universal values” such as freedom of expression and travel, as well as “fundamental human rights and political liberties”. But he also highlighted traditional “Russian values”, especially patriotism – pride in “a nation capable of great achievements” – and “social solidarity”, which, he asserted, had “always prevailed over individualism.””³² Putin has deemed that while he believes and comprehends why the globalists work the way they work, those attributes cannot be part of the modern-day Russia, at least for now. Russian’s need a traditional culture that is designed exclusively for them in order to establish an identity that can unify a country in nationalistic patriotism. Even though Putin claims that he recognizes the significance of human rights, over the years as he has centralized more power he has done all that he can to identify human rights as not globalist, but Western with the goal of destroying the unifying strength of Russia.

Social solidarity has shifted in Russia into a sphere that is controlled by the power that Putin has grabbed over the course of the 21st century. The individual, his wellbeing is cast aside for a supposed façade of the national identity through strength and pride. Putin has “treated each individual as directly a member of the state. The political community

³² Spohr, Kristina, and David Reynolds. "Putin's Revenge." *Putin's Revenge*. New Statesman, 12 Jan. 2017. Web. 30 Apr. 2017.

thus became the whole people (even if it was granted little power).”³³ The community must follow and conform to the actions of the government in order to be deemed as a proper Russian citizen. If an individual chooses not to follow in line with this identity, then they are rejected as members of the community around them. They are labeled as detrimental to Russian society and the progression of the Russian nation. Therefore, as a member of Russian society they must be supportive of the Russian government that has deemed itself as the Russian identity, rather than the actual Russian citizens.

Russia’s Compensation of Strength for a Loss of Identity

This strange contradiction in which the government, rather than the genuine citizen is thought-out as the Russian identity has been considered a necessity in order for Russia to not become a victim of Western influence in the post-Soviet world. Russia wants to have the freedom to develop its own identity without the support of a pre-created structure that was thought up by non-Russians. After seventy hard years of sacrifice, only to end up with a loss of their identity, losing this identity inadvertently to the Western world. Putin has pandered to the Russian identity as being in a tangential spot after the loss of an international identity with an ideological movement at the hands of another international identity with an opposing ideological mindset. Modern day Russia has attempted to neuter the significance of losing personal identity in Russia by emphasizing the importance that comes with societal structures that are strong enough to resist pressure opposing them. Without this unity Putin’s power will crumble, enabling the Russian population to gain a real voice. But Putin has stated that it is not his own

³³ Calhoun, 73

personal power that will fall apart, but the country in its entirety, governmental strength needs to be enforced in order for there to be stability.

The government of Russia states that its doctrine to be one that needs to exist in order for the population of Russia to live the best lives they could possibly have. In accordance to this way of thinking, those Russian citizens that protest against the current Russian identity are considered by the government to be part of the problem. They are labeled by the State as not concerned citizens of the same nation, but rather people who are just destructive and unproductive in their actions. Putin has said that “the absence of civil accord and unity is one of the reasons why our reforms are so slow and painful. Most of our energy is spent on political squabbling, instead of handling the concrete steps toward Russia's renewal.”³⁴ These are Putin’s distorted concerns with those Russians who disagree with him one way or another. Putin’s definition of civil accord is not simply a sense of harmony among the populace, but rather one of submission. But this type of submission does not declare the nation of Russia to be one that is weak in its integrity. Putin wants this submission to be not be viewed an act of degradation, but an act that perceives the populations trust in what Putin’s government wants to do, allowing Putin to be in full control of the fate of Russia.

So those Russian citizens that disagree with Putin and the identity he wants to implant are attempting to become as alienated as possible from the world that surrounds them. Representing their lives through the public sphere has become an impossibility due to the harshness of Putin’s strength. If these individuals are to declare to the world around them that they exist and identify as Russian citizens, then those other citizens who follow

³⁴ “Vladimir Putin's first paper as president: 'Russia at the Turn of the Millennium' - A Strategy for Russia's Revival”

Putin's creed will respond with a resounding no, these individuals do not fit the governments criteria as individuals with Russian identities. For the common citizen "it's possible to live well in Russia as long as you stay out of politics"³⁵ but these people's identities are practically vanishing from the public's reality. "This is made especially important by the political ideologies emphasizing citizenship, for the participation of citizens demands a kind of lateral connection to each other and a kind of exclusive loyalty to the state not required by empires and other older forms of polity."³⁶ It is not just that these identities do not belong in Russia, but that these identities cannot belong in Russia due to the Russian state's definition of citizenship. Populism has become the political structure that binds a majority to a certain identity made by the State and removes minorities unique existences from public knowledge.

The Russian's Desire for a Government representing Russians

Much of the popularity for Putin's populist government came from the promise of a strong government to represent the Russian population. Putin's actions, and the reason that the majority of Russian citizens are satisfied with his authoritarian techniques, are a reaction against the lack of control that the Russian government had during the 90s. The brazen nature of Putin seems embarrassing to many Westerners, but for Russians the concept of a bold and shameless president is something that they take pride in. If there is an air of confidence at the top, then the rest of the nation feels as though that proper individual is leading the nation someday into the future, rather than allowing some other influence to be in control. Putin's role is supposed to be symbolism for the country and its relation to the 90s, where there was corruption, now there is strength.

³⁵ Alexievich, 296

³⁶ Calhoun, 124

Corruption was the staple for how the Russian government worked during the 90s, most importantly with the inclusion of Boris Yeltsin being on the oligarch's payroll. "[I]n this country people no longer [felt] that the country's territory belongs to them, to the citizenry"³⁷ and the government was not purposed to serve the population, as it should, but rather to aid the wealthiest individuals who could pay off the State for ultimate control. The State in its entirety had been bought by the most successful members of capitalism, those who understood how it worked, while everyone else was exploited by utilizing their complete lack of understanding on how the free market worked. Putin as a political candidate wanted to be seen in opposition to these oligarchs by being relatable to the common citizen as a "man of the people". "After university, Putin spent half a year pushing papers at the KGB offices in Leningrad. Then he spent six months going to KGB officer school. "It was an entirely unremarkable school in Leningrad." he told his biographers."³⁸ Putin wanted to play down any dramatization that would make his life seem to be unusual in any way in order not to risk alienating the majority populace of Russia. "They [, the writers of Putin's biography] were not there to investigate the man; their job was to write down a legend." This mythos though was to be based off of not the individual that Putin is, but of the man of Putin's Russian identity, the man who everyone is encouraged to become.

Putin simply used Yeltsin's unfortunate circumstance and bad decision making to his advantage in creating a reaction to the political corruption of the 90s. The response was able to be molded in such a specific way that allowed Putin to be viewed as the

³⁷ Gessen, Masha. *Words Will Break Cement: The Passion of Pussy Riot*. Page 212. New York: Riverhead, 2014. Print.

³⁸ "The Man Without a Face", 61

candidate who return the representative power to the people from oligarchs. Oligarchs were the term that “was used in Russia to describe certain affluent and influential Russian businessmen who helped Yeltsin to be re-elected in 1996”, even though he had a dismal 10% approval rating just in 1992, and left office “with an approval rating as low as 2% by some estimates.” The opinion of the majority became completely irrelevant in the face of extraordinary wealth. Not only did these oligarchs gain the deciding factor for how the government was run, but they also had nothing in common with the common man and just blatantly exploited the populace to their advantage. Putin’s image was made to make it seem as though he was the choice that the majority population had made even though he was practically unknown when he was declared as the next president of Russia. But with his time in office he has played up the power of the people as something that he is gratefully for, and therefore properly represents.

Putin’s Symbolic Justice for Populism

Putin created this false appreciation for his populist support by punishing oligarchs who had gained independent wealth, dividing themselves off from the rest of the population. For the common man, there was no State that was there for their benefit, so Putin exploited this anger and created a populist schadenfreude that was at the oligarch’s expense. This was to prove that the State was back in command of Russia in its entirety. In the 90s, much of the natural gas and mineral industries (ones that are the top exports of Russia’s trade)³⁹ were controlled by oligarchs (many of which had deep connections with the mafia or were mobsters themselves). The nature of what was wrong or right was not determined by any political force, but by those that had enough money to

³⁹ Simoes, Alexander. "Russia." OEC - Russia (RUS) Exports, Imports, and Trade Partners. N.p., n.d. Web. 30 Apr. 2017.

do whatever they wanted. Through this action there was just a cycle in which the oligarchs expanded their businesses and the power that came with it. Due to the lack of power in the government decisions were made by those who could. The populist support for Putin's monopolization of power a reaction to this.

The current Russian regime has been able to centralize the power of the government with the approval of the majority in order to make sure that no independently controlled structures can have more power in Russian than the Russian government itself. The freedom of the individual that the 90s allowed and the exploitation that came with that have been twisted around by the Russian state to be perceived as being interconnected. When Putin had been elected to be president on the eve of the new millennium he wrote that a "major issue [of the 90s] is the rational regulation of natural monopolies. This is a key question, as they largely determine the structure of production and consumer prices. They therefore influence both economic and financial processes, as well as people's income."⁴⁰ Putin believes that those who are in charge of monopolies practically control the fate of the majority, therefore the only monopoly of power that there can be in Russia must be the Russian government. But for this monopoly of power to be legitimized as the Russian government it needs to be the government of the people. This monopolization also applies to the population and the identity that that population has. The majority has the desire to view themselves as a power, so Putin has taken the majority as the monopolization of what the Russian identity is. This action makes the majority believe themselves to be the ones with the real power over the State.

The Sacrifice of Personal Agency for the Sake of Nationalistic Unity

⁴⁰ "Vladimir Putin's first paper as president: 'Russia at the Turn of the Millennium' - A Strategy for Russia's Revival"

While Putin's reaction against the 90s oligarchs did establish him as the face of populist Russia, since then he has had to create new forces of opposition in order for his centralized power to be continually legitimized. One classic way of legitimizing his power has been by utilizing scapegoats in order for it to seem like there is a perceived threat. Nationalism and its xenophobic activity have been powerful attributes in the rhetoric of the Russian regime. The fear that xenophobia has created allows Putin to force his Russian identity upon the citizens. He has portrayed foreigners as not just people from different nations, but as people who are different from the Russian identity. Due to the fact that the Russian identity is not clearly defined outside of Putin's propaganda, he has monopolized the definition of the Russian identity, creating a nationalistic unity that only he can dictate for.

The average Russian not only has to be weary of the foreigner, but now even a Russian citizen can be perceived as dangerous. These outliers of Russian society have become people viewed as non-Russian due to their differing opinions from the government. "Because these ideas about dignity, worth, and human sacredness appear to confuse what is with what ought to be, they are controversial, and because they are controversial, they are likely to garment commitment to the practical responsibilities entailed by human rights instead of strengthening them."⁴¹ The Russian government has twisted the significance of the Russian identity around in order to pursue their own agenda. People in Russia are made to believe that they owe something towards the betterment of the Russian government, as though they are dependent on the survivability of the current administration. Outliers in Russian society are invariably to contain the

⁴¹ Ignatieff, 54

same identity of those beyond the borders of Russia. Their words of dissidence have the potential to damage the unity of Russia and the identity that bonds the populace together underneath Putin. Nationalism in Russia has further distanced the divide between the concept of free speech and conformity.

This aggression against differing opinions, even if they are from citizens of Russia, come from a fear of independent thought. In Russia unity powered by the population's loyalty has always equated to a powerful State. This powerful State is not a perk in Putin's mind, he believes that an essential part of the Russian identity is to rely on the government as the controlling factor in a citizen's life. Putin claims that in a historical context "the majority of Russians are used to depending more on the state for improvements in their own condition than with their own efforts, initiatives, and flair for business. And it will take a long time for this habit to die."⁴² Putin believes that the Russian populace is not able to advance as a community by their own terms. This type of freedom in his mind is not possible, the government has to funnel the populace down a very specific trench in order for the community to advance. In these terms, Putin is stating that grassroots organizations, movements centered around rights and most importantly ran by local citizens cannot be run by Russians simply because they do not know how to.

For Putin, this personal agency of the citizen is something he cannot have in order to keep the power that he has. So, he has created implications that the government needs to be there for the citizens in order for there to be stability and improvements built on top of this stability. "[But] human rights is a language of individual empowerment, and

⁴² "Vladimir Putin's first paper as president: 'Russia at the Turn of the Millennium' - A Strategy for Russia's Revival"

empowerment for individuals is desirable because when individuals have agency, they can protect themselves against injustices.”⁴³ The majority populace of Russia is unaware of the agency they can declare on the nation. Putin has downplayed the significance of the individual in order to enhance the allure of a unified nation. Such public actions like the 2012 election protests not only can create a declaration of the awareness of the citizen’s power, but it then has the potential to create awareness among other members of the citizenry.⁴⁴ This potential for the population to realize its true power and the fragility of a populist government has unfortunately not been fully realized. This lack of realization is due to the government’s ability to create an illusion that the Russian identity was created by the population, rather than fabricated by the government in control.

The Illusion of Personal Agency in Russian Life

The government has slowly been able to utilize its amassed power into convincing the majority of the population that they are the ones who control the country, that Putin really is just their representation. This has allowed the government’s actions to be continually justified as just the will of the people, twisting and mocking the definition of a real democracy. While propaganda and oppression are essential parts of how the Russian government works, the citizen does not see their lives as ones that are oppressed. This is due to the common Russian citizen’s perspective on how his life is informed and therefore narrated. Media being Putin’s essential delivery vehicle to the population has allowed the government to portray Western news as simply fake. The media states that the Western news organizations are attempting to fabricate a world that works around

⁴³ Ignatieff, 57

⁴⁴ Sandford, Daniel. "Russian Election: Biggest Protests since Fall of USSR." BBC News. BBC, 10 Dec. 2011. Web. 30 Apr. 2017.

their agenda against the sanctity of Russian life, while ironically the Russian media is doing the exact same thing. The people are told that the Russian government simply exist in order to peruse the democratic and properly represented nation.

Due to this illusion of agency the populace does not see the need to have human rights in their thinking, they have been made to believe that the State has given them every civil right they could ever need. With the citizens of Russia being content with the supposed rights that they have been given, the actions that the government does afterwards are thought of as insignificant for the population which believes that they have all they could possibly have. “The ideologies of nation and nationalism were born partly as ways of icing specific form and shape to citizenship in the world.”⁴⁵ The illusion that the population has made the choice to be shaped in this identity has gone to create a populace that sees their government as a government that has finally listened to their requests after years of not being exclusively represented as a nation and the identity that nation embodies.

Russia’s Identity Problem

The ironic part about Putin’s version of the Russian identity is that it is a lie. It does not really unify the Russian population because every individual does not abide by the identity that Putin has dictated onto the populace. “The Russian people’s happiness has never had anything to do with money. That’s the difference between the “Russian idea” and the American Dream.”⁴⁶ Russian’s don’t have some type of ideological goal to reach as individual citizens, they sympathize with their historical communities instead of with their own selves, and this have been exploited by the government for its own

⁴⁵ Calhoun, 89

⁴⁶ Alexievich, 291

benefit. Russia's fake identity, the one that the government promotes creates a sense of rootlessness with members of the population, this is core reason for how and why Russia operates the way it does in the world today due to its lack of self-comprehension.

The government of Russia is only able to consider those civilians that are willing to submit to the nationalistic agenda set by Putin. People who do not wish to conform are excluded from Putin's picture of a united Russia, which will exist with or without those who are considered nonconformists. Therefore, what will happen to those that are not recognized as being part of Russia, even though they have been born and raised there? "Home, it has famously been said, is the place where they always have to take you in. In an important sense, it is this sense of having a home that many important people derive from ideas of membership in a nation."⁴⁷ If Putin and his centralized government are supposed to be viewed as a government that really is there for every person, then those undesirables have only one choice, to disappear. Their identities do not align with how the majority wants to be seen, and therefore there is really no other choice for these individuals, their identities have no worth as Russian citizens.

This inaction of a singular Russian identity cannot continue if the nation wishes to develop and grow in actual unity. But Putin's Russian state cannot abide by individuals and the rights they deserve because they cannot risk the potential for there to be a stronger institution than the government itself. "The Universal Declaration of Human Rights [, globally recognized as the heart of human rights] represented a return by the European tradition to its natural law heritage, a return intended to restore agency, to give individuals the civic courage to stand up when the state ordered them to do wrong."⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Calhoun, 19

⁴⁸ Ignatieff, 5

Putin does not care about the West, and he does not care about how the nation of Russia is influenced by the West, this is only rhetoric to motivate the populace to have something that will bring them closer to Putin's state. What Putin does care about is a restored agency in the population of Russia and the concept of a unification of the population which is not controlled by the State.

Russia's Current Position Between Stagnation and Progression

This identity that Putin has forced onto the population cannot work, it will not work. Individuality is an essential part of human nature, and for a nation to properly work together all walks of life must be accounted for, this is what human rights wants to achieve. Contrary to Putin's rhetoric, rights are not determined by culture, but by individuals who make up that culture. Even if Putin will not acknowledge how human rights should be properly defined, the population of Russia needs to conceptualize human rights as something that can be uniquely Russian. This would appeal to both the marginalized individuals in Russia and the nationalists who want a Russia that is defined by exclusively being Russian. It would also benefit both groups by properly unifying them as Russian, creating the real Russian identity that has been lost in generations of authoritarian leaders.

Chapter 2

A Lashing of Tongues: The Vocabulary of the Human Rights Argument

“One cannot but weep just thinking about it. But compassion, tears, and words on the part of the government are absolutely insufficient. We have to act, we have to increase the effectiveness of the government in combating the entire complex of problems facing the country...”⁴⁹

-Vladimir Putin

Putin’s Institutions against Western Thought

In order for Putin’s Russian identity to successfully define its nation as being something completely Russian, the government has utilized institutions and tools to separate itself from the world around it. Putin’s state has created a barrier between Russian and Western thought through structures and ways of thinking that the government has labeled as completely and uniquely Russian. These institutions are not just labeled as Russian due to their unique traits, but because their strong traditional structures are in contradiction to the open mindset of Western thinking. This creates a dichotomy of ideological contradictions in which Russia propels itself by being exclusively Russian. But these tools are not used to propel the Russian identity, but to guarantee Putin’s exclusive power. Through Putin’s Russian identity though, there is a transparency between Putin’s personal agenda and the sovereignty of the Russian nation. Therefore, Western influence in Russia has become choked out under the pretext of being in opposition of Russia’s sovereignty. The tools that the government has used to remove

⁴⁹ “The Man Without a Face”, 190

Western influence completely encompasses a citizen's way of life. The structures that will be talked about in this chapter are the president's unique position, Russia's claim to sovereignty, the Russian Orthodox church, the traditional family, the justice system, the mental psyche of the individual, and the media. Each one of these structures creates a divide that solidifies in one way or another the significance that the Russian nation is imbued with. But within the significance of the Russian nation comes the significance of the Russian identity, created with these institutions that have the power to claim personal sovereignty in order to imbue Putin with real control over an aspect of the Russian nation.

Strong President, Submissive Supporters

One of the most essential tools that Putin has utilized to deviate his Russian identity as the true identity of the nation is his position as the president of Russia. The strong president is a Russian trait that the citizens want as a reflection of their unified character as a nation. This is the type of president that will only support actions that are beneficial for his people. Yeltsin on the other hand is so heavily criticized because he was considered a submissive president whose actions were heavily influenced by liberal politicians who wanted Yeltsin to think globally rather than locally. It is not who influences the president that matters though, but rather the fact that he takes other people's opinions so seriously. Putin is considered a good president due to his confidence in his own actions. His decisive nature is something that the majority population wants in a president, this decisiveness can be something they can rely on. This independently thinking individual helps solidify the populist rhetoric, influencing a desire for the country to be separated from the ways and opinions of the world outside of Russia.

As a president who is considered independently strong, he wants there to be faith in every aspect that represents the country he believes to be leading into the future. Putin's speeches normalize this identity, one which juxtaposes Western and globalizing thought. This type of personality as a vocalized leader creates "what Michel Foucault called a 'discursive formation' a way of speaking that shapes our consciousness"⁵⁰ and influences those who hear what he says. When the population has this continual exposure to Putin's actions and his speeches the meaning behind his words become legitimized through normalization. But in the West Putin's rhetoric is continually shocking due to the fact that the West is not exclusively exposed to his discourse as the Russian population is. Therefore, the Russian population doesn't understand why the West responds the way it does, supporting Putin's claim that the West wishes to destroy Russian culture just because they act independently.

Putin's response to Western statements about his brazen nature is deemed as necessary in the face of globalization, because if Putin can be threatened, then so can the rest of the nation. With this type of president Russia is trying to be perceived by its population as a government one can entirely rely. This reliance depends on having complete faith in nationalistic pride which disregards any voice from outside of Russia, even if it is a voice of reason. Independence and with it the ability to make decisions with no one else's input is an essential part of the Russian identity from Putin's perspective. He has asked the question of "what is the meaning of state sovereignty? It basically means freedom, every person and every state being free to choose their future"⁵¹ is his

⁵⁰ Calhoun, 3

⁵¹ Guzman, Timothy Alexander. "Putin Asked Obama: "What Is the Meaning of State Sovereignty?"" GlobalResearch. Silent Crow News, 4 Oct. 2015. Web. 30 Apr. 2017.

answer to this, explaining his actions as the representative power of Russia. Freedom is taken in incredibly broad terms by the Russian government. They have removed factual logic in order to fuel a nationalistic façade that can supply an answer for every question. It's fairly similar to how faith worked in the Soviet Union where "you used to be able to get up in the morning, read Pravda, and know all you needed to know, understand everything you needed to understand."⁵² Putin wants the pride that Russian citizens have for their nation to be something unquestionably perfect in design. The criticism that the Russian government receives from the West would just encourage the Russian identity to believe in this flawless structure that is facing a world which wants to destroy its national sovereignty.

This façade is in a state of continually being an institutional presence in the citizens lives when it is talked about and invoked in one way or another. This presence can be created either from the West's reactions or from the citizens, regardless if they believe in it or not. But for the façade to become strong this illusion of flawless nationalism becomes stronger when more citizens follow in Putin's footsteps, creating a cycle of increasing supporters. This political faith is symbolized in Putin, who is able to dictate and display how important the sovereignty of Russia is in order for the Russian identity to be kept safe from outsider influence. While there are many other tools that are utilized to encourage this façade of nationalistic perfection, they are all directed by Putin's figurehead position as the leader of the Russian nation. "[T]he embodiment in politics of the patriarchal hierarchy on which they rest shapes citizens' perception of the public sphere and way in which political power should be distributed."⁵³

⁵² Alexievich, 6

⁵³ Sperling, 295

Centralizing Russian Power against Human Rights

In order to preserve this sovereignty, which resides in the personal power that Putin holds, organizations with Western origins have become identified not by their purpose, but by an agenda that Putin has imposed onto the citizens. This populism is supposed to oppose Western NGOs due to the supposition that those organizations, due to their Western origins are in Russia with the intention to destroy Russian sovereignty because they are potentially in opposition to Putin's agenda. If a NGO is involved in any way involved in "political activity", then it must be registered as a foreign agent with the risk of continual repercussion's once the government has added them to the list of foreign agent organizations. "In the last four years, 148 non-governmental organizations have been included on the list of "foreign agents" in Russia, of which 27 have closed down altogether."⁵⁴ With this law the government has been able to easily track the actions of these NGOs in case they dare to oppose the government in some way.

This law helps the Russian government create the distinction between the nation against a Western world which has an agenda that does not include the freedom of choice which the Russian identity wants to have. Anything from the West needs to be labeled as being part of the West, not just literally, but from an institutionalized way of thinking. Just because an organization was conceived in the West makes it automatically indoctrinated into a globalized way of thinking, opposing the Russian way of life. The reason for this type of statist loyalty is a reflection of Putin's opinions on the Russian identity. The Russian identity for him is one that is loyal to the State due to the fact that he is a representative member of this nationalistic community, if that citizen decides to

⁵⁴ International, Amnesty. "Agents of the People: Four Years of Foreign Agents Law in Russia." Amnesty International USA. Amnesty International USA, 17 Nov. 2017. Web. 30 Apr. 2017.

oppose the State then he is supporting the West. The amount of control that Putin has needs to be justified, and labeling NGOs as representatives of foreign ideas allows Putin to be seen as having a reason to be controlling so much of the State.

Russia's Moral Superiority

The national identity of Russia that Putin projected also needed a reason to be special and unique compared to the West, something more than just a need to protect their sovereignty. The result was an identity that was morally superior in its hard-lined traditional ways compared to the progressive tolerance of the West, which accepted any doctrine, itself having no real cultural distinction. The West's sense of tolerance cannot compare itself when Russia declares its presence as being morally superior because of the West's lack of nationalistic groundings. In comparison to Russia the West gives off an impression of being a void of acceptance that really has no identity of its own. Traditions define the Russian identity as having a structure which determines how something can be considered Russian.

Things that have been considered Western due to tolerance towards them have been deemed as unacceptable for the Russian government and the identity it perpetuates. In order for things to be determined as anti-Russian in thought Putin has tried to erase them from the public sphere of Russian thought. If they do not exist in the public eye, then one cannot acknowledge them as being a part of the community. Members of the marginalized LGBTI community are a perfect example in the Russian world because their sexualities are considered by Putin to not be part of their identities, but a personal choice. In order to try to remove non-heteronormativity's existence from his Russian identity Putin has created a law that removes the promotion of the realities that LGBTI

individuals face. “The effect of the so-called “propaganda law” was to severely restrict the right to freedom of expression of LGBTI individuals and groups and foster increased and widespread discrimination and harassment against them.”⁵⁵ This belief that homosexuality is something that can be spread through education continually fuels the belief that tolerant thought is not for the acceptance of people who are different out of no choice of their own, but who choose to be different and are deviant because of their decision to do so. Putin has made sure to balance out this law to not seem so incredibly critical of individuals who were born differently.

““We do not have a ban on non-traditional sexual relationships,” said Putin in comments reported by Russian agencies. “We have a ban on the propaganda of homosexuality and paedophilia. I want to underline this. Propaganda among children. These are absolutely different things – a ban on something or a ban on the propaganda of that thing.””⁵⁶

Putin is bringing international ideological notions of thought while trying to downplay the impact that the propaganda law would have on the LGBTI community by stating that there is no real LGBTI community in Russia. There are no reason children should be educated about sexual identifications that are not a part of the Russian identity. Normalizing these minorities would be a rejection of the freedom that Russia holds because these minorities are part of the Western identity. For the homosexual community, this makes it incredibly difficult to be taken seriously as a legitimate group of people. This lack of recognition creates a lack of responsibility from the side of the government

⁵⁵ "Agents of the People: Four Years of Foreign Agents Law in Russia.", 27

⁵⁶ Walker, Shaun. "Vladimir Putin: Gay People at Winter Olympics Must 'leave Children Alone'." The Guardian. Guardian News and Media, 17 Jan. 2014. Web. 30 Apr. 2017.

for the safety of the targeted group because of the division between the Russian people and LGBTI individuals as part of a non-Russian identity. The division is funneled by an illusion of ignorance of who homosexuals are and the scientific reality that their sexuality is not a choice originating in Western influence but rather something entirely out of their control. To completely ignore the factor is ignoring scientific reasoning. This creates a reality that appeals to Putin's conservative crowd, a self-belief that they are in the right. This correctness is part of the nationalistic appeal that Putin is encouraging in the populace. Every individual who is a representative of the Russian identity is someone the majority populace would consider to be like them, one of the common citizens. This commonality in a majority population ordains their moral superiority as something exclusive to the Russian identity that they want to be a symbolic representation of.

The Russian Orthodox Church: Russia's Moral Legitimizer

For the Russian identity to be considered as moral superior in its traditional ways, the Orthodox Church has become an essential resource to label the Russian populace as following the proper steps that God has laid out for them. The Church represents both Putin's Russian identity, giving it a divine sense of justification for their actions as a unified state, ordained by a heavenly presence. Faith in a higher power is an essential part Putin's nationalistic façade which emphasizes the importance of freedom against international presences. This faith is in the government's freedom to be the monopolizing power in the Russian nation, being the determiner for the nation's future. The Church's presence solidifies this necessity for the community to have faith in its State by giving them a reassurance that God is behind the Russian state. "The Church and state under

Putting have demonstrated a relationship of mutual reliance and apparent admiration.”⁵⁷

These two institutions have become entangled in order to build a national identity that supports its own beliefs and convinces the populace of its importance by displaying its moralistic significance.

By combining the institutional significance that the Church has and the State has in a realm that thrives on nationalistic significance, Putin’s actions are seen as the highest importance in leading the populace. This monopolization of what is morally good while Putin is running a government, that cannot always be perfect in its actions due to the morally grey nature of politics, has vast potential for solidifying power and support without having repercussions. The Russian identity wants to be approved for having strength and solidarity in something a community can believe in as a congregation would. This labeling of the moral high ground that a certain society gains from their justified reasons of why and how they can do the things they do is essential to why westernized (or traditional) human rights cannot be incorporated into modern-day Russian society. The moral representation that God imbues means that any type of rhetoric the international realm of human rights might have are insignificant in the grand scheme of things. Even if human rights are meant to represent the entirety of mankind, they are nothing compared to the power commanded by God.

Religion helped the Russian government exclaim how the globalist ways of thinking are inherently wrong. In similar fashion to how the Soviet Union became its own atheistic religion, the Western ways of human rights have become labeled as a faith in an institution. This institution is labeled as the highest possible way of thinking in universal

⁵⁷ Sperling, 273

Christ like ways of performing charity. “To be sure, humanists do not literally worship human rights, but [they] use the language to say that there is something inviolate about the dignity of each human being.”⁵⁸ But with the reinvigoration of the Russian church in the post-Soviet world, God has become the highest calling, these reformations have created new perspectives in the Russian world. “In these processes, certain versions of collective culture were constructed as ‘authentic’, others forgotten, constructed as ‘deviant’, or relegated to ‘minorities’. This involved not just inventing new traditions, but also the fixing of previously more flexible and continually renewed traditions and the institutionalization both of biases and of powerful agents of cultural regulation.”⁵⁹ Putin and the tools he is utilizing are each exclaimed as part of these new traditions that are built upon the ruins of the Soviet Union, both being of a similar institutionalized division between them and the West. Human rights have been vocalized by the Russian government as the religion of the West, something is viewed as wanting to delegitimize the significance the Orthodox church, another aspect of Russian culture.

The Russian Court and Centralizing Power

The Russian governments use of strong nationalism as an aspect of Russian culture that has to stay is due to a recollection of historical significance that strong leaders have had throughout Russia’s history. Even with the West claiming Putin’s actions as self-interested, there is a significance between a Russian and a Westerner when it comes to who is dictating laws in Russia. For the citizens of Russia an authoritarian presence that is Russian is still better than those Western democrats because it is at least a genuine Russian who is in charge. From a national identity standpoint, the

⁵⁸ Ignatieff, 83

⁵⁹ Calhoun, 83

country is still in control of its own sovereignty. There is a preservation of the Russian government for the Russian, even if it is one that is corrupt, it is still identified as being Russian.

This corruption, where bias has been performed in order to propel some sort of power, has become clearly visible in the Russian court system, which Putin has used to his advantage. The court has found itself becoming another functionary tool of the nationalistic power structure in order to centralize all conventional power structures. Due to its use by the government it has become a way that the Russian state can extend its control over the population in order to help stability in Russia, which is coincidentally his grasp on power. Putin wants to emphasize his strength as a symbolic representation for the strength of the state. The purpose of this strength is supposed to be seen as preserving the greater good, which is considered the sovereignty of Russian power in Putin's eyes. For the Russian government, control over the courts is considered just another necessity in order to fight Western influence.

When Putin reacts against Western influence in these certain institutions of power the Russian government's insecurity over power is revealed. For Putin to guarantee nationalism under his domain, he needs to make sure there is no potential for someone else to gain relative power in Russia. NGOs who are trying to establish real justice would inadvertently take power away from Putin. Even if it was not their purpose the Russian administration is convinced that if an organization of some type is not associated with Putin, then they must have intentions that are contrived to Putin's own. If a movement of some type is to be involved in a Russian situation, they Putin wants that organization to submit to his superiority to guarantee there is no conflict of interest. The NGO

organization called Pravovaia Osnova (a Legal Foundation) is a perfect example of a group that opposes a Russian area of thought, the prison system. The NGO was created with a mission to assist the lives of prisoners in Russia who live in horrid conditions. Since this organization has questioned the status quo of a Russian institution, it has been labeled as a Western accomplice. “Larisa Zakharova, a member of Pravovaia Osnova, told Amnesty International that when the decision was made to classify the organization as a “foreign agent”, they were told that providing free legal aid, complaining against officials, taking cases to court to challenge unlawful regulations was political activity aimed at changing government’s policy.”⁶⁰ This political response to Pravovaia Osnova was more than just directed at that one NGO, it was a warning to human rights affiliates of any type. The only people who are meant to change how a part of Russia works is the Russian government, and they will use all their power to make sure it stays that way.

Putin’s Court

The judicial court’s connection to the nation has been one that has been revived from the Soviet time period when the court was just an extension of the State. The State’s will is legally dictated through the justice system. In order to be legally recognized the Russian state has to twist how the legal system works in order to be perceived as following the international realms respect for the legal system. With this illusion, the court has become utilized in the similar authoritarian fashion to the past, the only difference is that now the purpose is to preserve Putin’s Russian identity, rather than an ideological State. In the Soviet time “it was the prosecutor’s job to present the state’s position, which amounted to creating a legal pretext for jailing people for exercising rights guaranteed to

⁶⁰ "Agents of the People: Four Years of Foreign Agents Law in Russia.", 18

them by the Soviet constitution.”⁶¹ The most famous trial that the Russian administration utilized to acknowledge their personal power in the face of rebellion was the trial of three members of the protest-punk band Pussy Riot. They were convicted for acts of hooliganism which resulted in two years in prison because they performed a “punk prayer” which denounced Putin and his affiliation with the Church in the Christ the Savior cathedral which is in close proximity to the Kremlin. But while this is the most public examples of the current Russian administration flexing their judicial muscles, this utilization of the court has been wide spread throughout the 21st century. Businessmen especially have become victims if they have decided not to align themselves under Putin’s dominance as a continuation of rounding up the oligarchs in the early years of Putin’s time as president.

Putin’s representation as being an embodiment of the majority’s will mean that he has no faults as an individual because they majority voice has formulated a democracy. Putin’s only duty is to run that democracy as a strong and independent being, being the type of authority that the Russian majority wants in their president. His perfection as a leader is due to the fact that he is no viewed as an individual, but just as the brain that pushes the different arms of the Russian identity. With the Russian identity being represented in all these different ways and with different institutions, the government can encapsulate practically every part of an individual’s life. The majority population feels like they are being completely represented, therefore this regime is the only one they think they would ever need. “What the populist specifically does is to say, "Because I

⁶¹ “Words will Break Cement”, 168

didn't win, the system is rigged." And that in a democracy is not an acceptable argument."⁶²

Putin's morals are applied into the Russian beliefs. There is an obvious connection to be made between nationalism, that is attempting to determine the future of the State, and an alignment with heavenly pre-destination, determined by the Church. The Holy Patriarch becomes another authoritarian unit which still represents one aspect of cultural significance of the Russian nation. This allows the actions of Putin to be recognized and respect by another institution that is supposed to be independent of the State. Of course, this is not the actual case, due to the close relationship of higher members of the Orthodox church and Putin. But the illusion of choice creates a unification between these different establishments, which are supposed to be thinking independently, which both cohabitate the realm of proper Russian organizations. This allows the actions of the Russian government to be seen as morally correct in opposition of people who might disagree. Those people who oppose the Russian government are seen as lacking morals themselves, being viewed as degenerates rather than just differing opinions from the status quo. This basis has cultural reasoning that is understood from a fundamentally Western perspective. Due to the fact that Russian powers are utilizing institutions that are culturally significant to them, the West has no ability to interfere with these power structures on the basis of cultural tolerance.

Psychiatry Being an International Legitimization

But the Russian government does not just use exclusively Russian tools in order to solidify their authoritarian agendas. They have also utilized psychiatry, an

⁶² Muller & Myers

internationally respected field of medicine, in order to create evidence to why the Russian government has to be so rigid in the way it controls the nation of Russia. It is so effective because the study itself is widely respected by Western states and therefore is legitimized. Even if it is obvious that the Russian state is twisting psychological interpretations of the mental stability of individuals, the West cannot comment on it. If the West would attempt to react to how psychology is being used in Russia, then the Russian government would simply turn that question back onto Western powers, each of which interprets psychology a little bit differently, resulting in the West being humiliated. “The dominance of certain scientific paradigms (e.g. in which psychiatry is exclusively a medical, neurobiological discipline) with the accompanying vocabulary (subversive views are symptoms of a mental disorder) and treatment goals (disciplining and “adjusting” the victim to the prevailing political discourse) make it very difficult to have an alternative approach.”⁶³ This study allows an internationally accepted way of analyzing individuals become just another tool utilized by Russia to push its agenda in a world of globalizing human rights. This world tries to give justice to those that are unjustly accused, such as the marginalized individuals that do not fit Putin’s Russian identity. But the West cannot give an alternate answer that would make Putin’s accusations that utilize psychology void.

The Russian’s way of utilizing psychology is controversial because it labels an individual as mentally unstable in their reasoning behind their dissident actions. The members of Pussy Riot who were tried became victims of this classification, becoming

⁶³ Voren, Robert Van. "POLITICAL ABUSE OF PSYCHIATRY IN RUSSIA: BACK TO THE USSR?" CICERO FOUNDATION GREAT DEBATE PAPER. Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas. Mar. 2015. Cicero Foundation. Web. 30 Apr. 2017.

examples of individuals who are completely opposed to Putin's nationalistic ideas.⁶⁴ The reaction of the Russian government to Pussy Riots "punk prayer" are a perfect example of how the Russian government wants the Russian identity to be identified as a certain type of individual. Even with the international coverage that the case received, it just emphasized the power that Putin wanted display to the world, he and his regime have the power to determine people's fates in Russia, and the world has no influence on them.⁶⁵ The trial of the Pussy Riot band members was just to set an example for what will happen to those who wish to openly defy the power structure that Putin has set for the population.

From the perspective of the West, Pussy Riot is not viewed as a controversial band. They sing about what they think is wrong with the society that they inhabit; this society being completely controlled by the presence of Putin. But in populist Russia a band like Pussy Riot cannot exist because their public presence makes Putin's symbolic representation of the people void. Due to the fact that Pussy Riot has tried their best to make their voices as public as possible, they are publicly announcing that Putin's voice does not accurately represent ever Russian citizens. Pussy Riot's technique has been to turn what was before some average public place in Russia into a place where they could speak their opinions of all the crooked things that have been hidden away.⁶⁶ This exposure of opinions that differ from the government is detrimental to the existence of Putin's populist regime. Even the existence of a band such as Pussy Riot is damaging

⁶⁴ Smith-Spark, Laura. "Russian Court Imprisons Pussy Riot Band Members on Hooliganism Charges." CNN. Cable News Network, 18 Aug. 2012. Web. 30 Apr. 2017.

⁶⁵ Elder, Miriam. "Pussy Riot: Madonna Supports Punk Trio at Concert in Russia." The Guardian. Guardian News and Media, 07 Aug. 2012. Web. 30 Apr. 2017.

⁶⁶ "Pussy Riot." Riot Artists. Riot Artists, n.d. Web. 30 Apr. 2017.

because it reveals the fact that Putin and his administration are not fully capable to satisfy every Russian's needs.

Putin's response to the dissidence of Pussy Riot has been to label their actions as reactions for being mentally unstable. He has done this in order to say that the reasons for their actions are not directly linked to any fundamental problems of the State, but just being because of the individual's mental disorders. Putin is using psychiatry to interpret the purpose of Pussy Riot's actions as a result of individual issues. The supposed evidence of these mental disorders reject the meaning behind the music of Pussy Riot and the purpose of forming the band. Every action they had performed up to their imprisonment would have been viewed as absolutely pointless, it would all be considered fabrications from the minds of mentally unwell people. "[The psychiatrists hired by the court during the trial] had found [Pussy Riot] sane and fit for trial but had nonetheless diagnosed each with a personality disorder. Maria, they said, suffered from emotional distress brought on by her desire to protest. Nadya and Kat were both labeled with something called "mixed personality disorder." Nadya's symptoms were her "active position in life" and "heightened ambitions," while Kat exhibited an abnormal "insistence on her own point of view."⁶⁷ While such supposed symptoms as "heightened ambitions" or "insistence on her own point of view" are laughably absurd to imagine in a court of law, the resulting factor that is so significant is how these young women are labeled. The government will utilize this case as a referral for future endeavors involving protesters, proving the unstable mental conditions of those protesting the Russian state. The

⁶⁷ "Words will Break Cement", 189

significance is that they refuse submit to Putin's Russian identity because they are mentally unwell, rather than having opposing opinions.

With the court deciding to question the mental stability of protestors, rather than questioning the purpose for them protesting is an example of unquestioning loyalty to the Russian state. The court sees the State as a respected institution which doesn't need to be scrutinized in comparison to those who question it. Below are the results verbatim of the Pussy Riot trial, and they tell two things. One: a definition of how somebody can be considered a dissident against the populist Russian state. Two: a warning against anybody who would be inspired by the actions of Pussy Riot.

“The prosecutor read out the charges in rapid fire. Sometime before February 17, 2012, Nadya had entered into conspiracy with Maria, Kat, “and other persons unknown to the investigators for the purpose of rudely disrupting the social order in a manner that would express a clear lack of regard for societal norms, motivated by hatred and enmity, motivated by hatred for a particular social group, in the form of carrying out offensive actions inside a religious institution aimed at attracting the attention of a broad spectrum of citizen believers.” The conspirators had “distributed roles among themselves and purposefully acquired clothing to be worn, clothes that clearly contradicted church norms, discipline, rules, and regulations inside the church.” Being aware of the offensiveness of their attire “to the entire Russian Orthodox world” and “the criminality of their intent and the scale of the insult they planned to inflict,” they used balaclavas to disguise their identities and thus make it more difficult for them to be charged. “This increases the gravity of their deed and makes I look like a well-planned act of malicious

intent, meant to denigrate the feelings and beliefs of the numerous disciples of the Orthodox faith and diminish the spiritual foundation of the state.”⁶⁸

Under the guise of rigid scientific definitions of how certain things are, ranging from juridical laws to psychiatry, the court has bent the reasoning behind how somebody can be tried under these supposedly factual definitions. The Church and the court have legitimized the State by acting as though they are independently controlled institutions. But they actually submit to Putin’s Russia, declaring it as the highest point of power in the Russian nation and therefore should be respected as such. With these illusions, Putin has centralized more than just the Russian government. He can have domain over all aspects of the proper Russian life, the Russian identity he has approved of. The success behind the government’s political abuse of psychiatry is built upon these organizations that Putin has amassed under his control. While the court dictates public law, the Church dictates public order. Since these two sides are under control of the anti-Western government, human rights organizations with Western origins discover that it is incredibly difficult to become grounded in Russian society. From either a literal or figurative standpoint Russian nationalism is already so deeply entrenched in the populace, while at the same time rejecting anything West as being detrimental to Russia’s preservation as an identity.

The Fragility of Putin’s Russian Identity

With the Russian population facing a world of tolerance and acceptance of different types of individuals, the Orthodox church becomes an essential way for the Russian identity to comprehend its own presence, and how a proper Russian citizen

⁶⁸ “Words will Break Cement”, 162-163

should be. It supplies a guide for the citizens on which it lays claim of how a member of a society should be and how they should be representing themselves. The Church is the moral backbone of Russia, and upon the church is the influence of Putin, which has encouraged the acts of conformity and obedience under nationalistic pride. While the actions of Pussy Riot do not seem that intense from a physical perspective, no one was harmed during or after (excluding the band members who were detained, becoming malnourished and dehydrated) the protest song was performed, but it still had a powerful impact on the structural stability of the Russian identity. Due to the purpose behind the band's actions that are questioning and therefore damaging the idea behind Putin's exclusive Russian identity and reveal's the sensitivity of the populist identity. Exposure of nonconforming thoughts is a powerfully dangerous action on its own because Putin has done everything he can to minimize alternative ways of living. Deviating from the Russian government's interpretation of what a good citizen is can create an impact that influences those around the dissident individual, then Putin loses ultimate control of Russia.

This fragility in the stability of Putin's power seems to be on the verge of collapse at any moment, but fortunately Putin has a powerful ally to secure his strength: the majority population. What keeps Putin afloat and stops Russia from progressing as a nation is the belief that Putin's actions are for the people by the people. Putin as an individual is to be viewed simply as the mediator between the desires of the majority and the change they want to see in the nation. Putin has emphasized that for this nation to be kept under the control of the populace, then stability and the grounding actions that follow suit have to occur. For the government stability is synonymous with government

centralization. But in this realm of stability there is no potential for improvements in how the people actually identify themselves, rather than just following the structure that the government has laid out for them. The citizens of Russia, the majority of Russians at least do not have an active part in deciding what determines their identity. Progression has to exist in a system of development over the course of time, with it being a given that there is the possibility for risk and failure. But the Russian media has responded by fear mongering and creating a general sense of paranoia among the citizens. The comfort in the security that the government provides those that conform has become easier for the majority of the populace, rather than risking their lives for the idea of something better.

Conformity against New Ways of Thinking

Progressive ideas, such as the ones human rights want to promote, can only be at their maximum potential if some type of authority, which the population respects, approves of the intentions behind those ideas. New ways of thinking about the rights of an individual such as gender norms are contrary to Russian traditions and their structures. Therefore, these ways of thinking about rights are considered contrary to the Russian identity. “In 2012, in discussion of a proposed “gender equality” law, a prominent Church spokesman, archpriest Dmitri Smirnov, equated use of the term “gender” with betraying the country’s interests and (according to a summary of his remarks on a Russian feminist website) “affirmed that people’s right to define their gender roles for themselves would lead to a ‘blow to the birthrate’ and the destruction of the institution of the family.””⁶⁹ Western human rights would not just be contrary to Russian thinking and Russian identity, but they would be fundamentally detrimental for the continuation of the Russian

⁶⁹ Sperling, 284

people. This idea that for an individual to acknowledge the goodness that human rights could potentially bring to the Russian population is immediately rejected. Due to the well-respected authorities that surround the life of a Russian citizen and continually denounce human rights, he or she is intensely pressured into following suit.

Human rights become the juxtaposition to the survival of the Russian identity defined by the authorities of Russia. Uniformity, what the Russian government claims to be an essential part of the nation's stability, is broken down by human rights. Human rights are supposed to be for the individual and define the individual, therefore Russia has made the distinction that human rights would break up the nation. In their mind the results would be a nation full of citizens that define themselves not as Russian, but as something else. The nationalistic strength, that brazen pride in the Russian identity versus the West would become an insignificant trifle and Putin would lose support for his authoritarian actions. Putin wants Russia to be similar to "the Bolsheviks' gender policy [which] was about the straightforward acknowledgement of equality between men and women"⁷⁰ with the continuation of stereotypical gender roles. People's roles in Putin's Russia should be identified as Russians, in his mind that is the only identity they need in order to succeed.

Centralization of Media

In order for Putin to convey his message successfully to the citizens of Russia, defining what traits they should have as Russian citizens, the government has slowly taken over the media. This control of the media does two things that help continue to support nationalism and its authoritarian reign. First it allows Putin's view to be directed

⁷⁰ Pahiria, Oleksandr. "Gender in the USSR." The Ukrainian Week. Ukrainian Week LLC, 18 Apr. 2012. Web. 30 Apr. 2017.

at the citizen without the opinions that an independently controlled news media would convey. Secondly it cuts off any opinions that might oppose the president and his affiliates. The nationalistic message for unity against the West is conveyed to the populace exactly the way Putin wants it to be told. A perfect way to summarize how Putin views and treats the media was said by the man himself, who was explaining his perception of the media to Alexey Venediktov, the editor in chief of Echo of Moscow, the capital's last independent radio station. "Here's an owner, they have their own politics, and for them it's an instrument. The government also is an owner and the media that belong to the government must carry out our instructions. And media that belong to private businessmen, they follow their orders. Look at [Rupert] Murdoch. Whatever he says, will be."⁷¹ Putin looks at these different institutions inside of Russia as aspects of a business which he is the president of. While this is considered an improper way for a president to be as the leader of a democratic country, this is not how Putin wants to be viewed. His strength is in his unification of all aspects of Russian life, the media becoming a projection of the greatness behind Putin's nationalism.

The media has become a funnel for the opinions of the Russian regime through multiple techniques, but an important one has been the State's utilization of funds. The government has forced the media to accept a life line of cash in order for their news organization to stay afloat. They have cut Western connections to the Russian media, therefore if a news channel wants to stay afloat they must take money from the State, which of course gives implications of loyalty, similar to being part of the same business. For Putin to keep a guarantee on power the West has to be removed from any type of

⁷¹ Dougherty, Jill. "How the Media Became One of Putin's Most Powerful Weapons." The Atlantic. Atlantic Media Company, 21 Apr. 2015. Web. 30 Apr. 2017.

news organization in Russia. In order to make this removal of Western influence successful he created a bill that was “quietly signed into law [in 2014 that] will limit foreign ownership of media assets to 20 percent by the beginning of 2017.”⁷²

So, with foreign influences removed, Putin only has to deal with wealthy organizations which might oppose him who are from inside Russia’s borders. Fortunately, with Putin’s control over the judicial system would-be investors are intimidated by just how influential Putin is over Russian laws. He can twist Russian laws in order to fit his interpretation. This is one such article of the Russian Criminal Code:

“Article 319. Insult of a Representative of Power. Public insult of a representative of power during the discharge by him of his official duties, or in connection with their discharge, Shall be punishable with a fine in an amount of up to 40 thousand roubles, or in the amount of the wage or salary, or any other income of the convicted person for a period of up to three months, or by compulsory works for a term of 120 to 180 hours, or by corrective labour for a term of six to twelve months.”⁷³

Such an article is built upon a conceptual basis of honor and respect for the discharged official, something that is recognized by the international community to be Eastern in philosophical notions of respect. Therefore, it is respected by the West out of 21st century notions of cultural acceptances of others while it can be utilized by Putin’s administration in order to place fear over members of the media.

⁷² Birnbaum, Michael. "Russia's Putin Signs Law Extending Kremlin's Grip over Media." The Washington Post. WP Company, 15 Oct. 2014. Web. 01 May 2017.

⁷³ "Russian Federation." Russian Federation: Criminal Code of the Russian Federation No. 63-FZ of June 13, 1996 (as Last Amended on June 29, 2009). N.p., 29 June 2009. Web. 30 Apr. 2017.

But the fear of being imprisoned is the least of the media's worries. Being able to even afford to publicize their news stories is the first issue for the media, and the Russian government gives them no space to speak differing opinions. In the mind of the populace government, to have opinions that contradict the government is to be anti-Russian and against the unification of the Russian identity. The Russian identity needs to be influenced exclusively by what the State believes in, and Putin has made sure of this by utilizing how public funds are used. "None of this is even to mention the extent to which Russian arts depend on state funding and cannot accept funding from certain nonprofit sources without accepting labels that might get them tagged as anti-Russian."⁷⁴ Influential organizations, even if they are supposed to be voices of factual evidence, cannot exist in the Russian environment. If they want to exist they have to lose their independence and submit to say what the government wants them to say.

Freedom and independence are viewed with a tinge of irony in Russia. While Putin determines the country to be a free nation due to the fact that the Western world has no influence over the Russian people, institutions and the individuals of Russia have to submit to the State. This is in order for there to be perfect unity under Putin, as though there is a necessity to be aligned to one person and put faith in that individual. Putin has created incentive though for people to submit to his strength, he has utilized his nationwide connections to reward submissive people who are willing to work the system in similar fashion. "By 2011, human-rights activists estimated that fully 15 percent of the Russian prison population was made up of entrepreneurs who had been thrown behind bars by well-connected competitors who used the court system to take over other

⁷⁴ Rosenberg, Alyssa. "Opinion | How Censorship Works in Vladimir Putin's Russia." The Washington Post. WP Company, 09 Feb. 2016. Web. 30 Apr. 2017.

people's businesses.”⁷⁵ Putin simply wants there to be submission, and has convinced the country through the media that submission will create national strength in order to prevent influence from outside while solidifying the national identity. With loyalty to the Russian government “the integration of economies on a national level not only knitted together dispersed individuals and communities, it helped to define the unit of identity.”⁷⁶ Senses of communication and allegiance were not actually built through the communities of people, but upwards towards the authoritative units. There is no real unity being created between the people who actually are members of the Russian identity. But the media's goal is to make sure this does not seem like the case, that on the contrary by the fact that the Russian government is powerful, then therefore is the unity of the Russian people.

Putin's News Outlet

But the ultimate example of Russian unity under Putin in the form of the media is a monopolizing news station called RT (Russia Today). Also, known as “the international arm of Russia's state-run news network, RT, once known as Russia Today, is getting a 30 percent funding bump in the proposed 2015 budget, and other state news outlets also are receiving injections of cash”⁷⁷ This news network is Putin's main media projector of the Russian state's nationalism, even going beyond the borders of Russia. Its available not only in Russian but also English, Arabic, Spanish, German, and French, its domain is more than just propaganda for the citizens of Russia; its labeled as the opposition to Western news corporations, a view from the other side that claims to have been

⁷⁵ “The Man Without a Face”, 266

⁷⁶ Calhoun, 69

⁷⁷ Birnbaum

marginalized against. It's philosophy that has a lot in common with the conservative media of the USA, which believes that there is a majority media bias against them in favor of liberals, and therefore they must keep on declaring their decisive division from the liberal media.⁷⁸ Through this conduit, Putin has delivered a completed definition of what Russia is and what it will be, with no space to add anything or take anything away from it.

RT tries to show its purpose as being something that is necessary in a world dominated by Western influences. There is a need to this decisive side to any news story in order to contradict the Western media and their biases. This news network is just a small part of the world that Putin controls, all of it being perceived as necessary against a looming Western threat supposedly marginalizes every aspect of Russian life. In similar fashion to how Putin twists interpretations in order for them to appeal to his agenda, he twists the news to seem as though his Russia has the upper hand. Take this example on how the Kremlin is viewed: "this admission [of Russia] blew the cover off of Obama's greatest deception, the US-Russia reset hoax."⁷⁹ Putin's Russian identity needs to be seen as a unified people that are on the winning side of any battle, regardless of how factual the battle is.

The Potential for the Coexistence of Nationalism and Human Rights

The identity of Russia that Putin is placing on the forefront and the tools he has used to keep him under the government's submission has made sure there is no space for

⁷⁸ Turley, Stephen, Joseph Mussomeli, Bruce Frohnen, Peter S. Rieth, and James V. Schall. "Why Is the Media So Liberal?" *The Imaginative Conservative*. *The Imaginative Conservative*, 16 Sept. 2016. Web. 30 Apr. 2017.

⁷⁹ Bridge, Robert. "Lost Legacy: How Barack Obama Deliberately Destroyed the US-Russia Relationship." RT International. Autonomous Nonprofit Organization "TV-Novosti", 17 Jan. 2017. Web. 01 May 2017.

human rights to be involved. Putin has made sure to politicize the entirety of Russian sociological culture and every aspect the individual citizen lives in. Putin has made Russia to appear as a democracy in which the citizen's voices are heard, but it is just Putin who is heard. His restrictions have allowed the Western world to be slandered and demonized, building up the Russian state's role to be something that is completely necessary for Russian culture to survive. Russian political legitimacy is when "our choices [as the citizens of the nation] are constrained by the dominating paradigms of discourse and action in which we are immersed."⁸⁰ Putin's government, and all the powerful institutions underneath control the realm of discourse and the subjects that are allowed to be exposed to the public.

This exclusivity of influence does not mean that human rights will never find a place in Russia, it just means that if human rights are to find a place in Russia and become something more than a stigma of foreign ideas, they must be made in Russia, not brought to it. Even if human rights have been heavily advocated in the West in comparison to the East, this is only because those specific organizations there are imbued with Western traditions of culture and thought. Russian's have their own strong cultural sentiments that can be easily rectified with human rights lingo. "In such a future [(where the East understands the universality of human rights)], shared among equals, rights are no the universal credo of a global society, not a secular religion, but something much more limited and yet just as valuable: the shared vocabulary from which our arguments can begin, and the bare human minimum from which differing ideas of human flourishing can take root."⁸¹ The West's definition of human rights is one that is symbolized by such

⁸⁰ Sperling, 6

⁸¹ Ignatieff, 95

terms as universalization and globalization, terms that define themselves by wanting to represent humanity in its whole. Putin has twisted this definition around though, and has made the argument that the West's desire for universalization of human rights is focusing on giving the West cultural superiority, bulldozing opposing ways of cultural thinking. For human rights to truly be properly accepted by skewed perspective of Russia it must be taken up by the Russian people. Xenophobia has crippled foreign organization who have attempted to bring human rights to Russia. Being an outsider tags them as culturally different and therefore detrimental to Russian society because they are looked at as attempting to change Russia to reflect their own societies. Human rights can be Russian, it just has to be human rights for Russians, by Russians.

Chapter 3

Hope and Belief in the Double-Headed Eagle: Human Rights of Russia

“The core, the binding fabric of this unique civilization – is the Russian people, Russian culture. This is the cultural code that has, in the recent years, been subject to some serious trials, which people have tried and continue to try to break. And it has, nevertheless, prevailed. At the same time, it needs to be nourished, strengthened, and protected.”⁸²

-Vladimir Putin

Grassroots Organizations in an Apolitical Russia

The people of Russia have had a dramatic change in perspective depending on what time period in history they had lived through, for those born around 1990, they have only seen the modern-day Russia, one that is supposed to be democratic, equal in its contemporary values to any other first world nation. But its identity lies on a fragile surface of paranoia, one that Putin wants to reinforce with aggressive revisionists ideals that assert its own superiority by its defiance against the West. The results have been disastrous and have only brought Russia down a rabbit hole consisting of illusions of grandeur which resemble the Soviet Union in its pre-perestroika days. An authoritarian regime does not improve the country its governing. Only the people who make up that country can improve their country by properly representing a nation and its culture. But “how do ordinary people become activists in an apolitical society?”⁸³ The answer is to work within the apolitical system of Russia. Grassroots movements must be created

⁸²"Putin Trumpets Russia's 'cultural Dominance'." RT International. Autonomous Nonprofit Organization "TV-Novosti", 23 Jan. 2012. Web. 30 Apr. 2017.

⁸³ Clement, Carine. "Unlikely Mobilisations: How Ordinary Russian People Become Involved in Collective Action." *European Journal of Cultural and Political Sociology* 2.3-4 (2015): 211-40. Web.

entirely from cultural and financial resources that lay inside of the country. If there is ever a bit of suspicion that an influence of some type has come from outside the country then Putin or one of his cohorts will automatically claim that the organization is a Western tool, invading Russia in order to further its own agenda, resulting in the further damaging of the Russian nation.

While chapter two explained the reasoning to why and how Putin used certain tools in order to eliminate other voices rather than his own (or those of his choosing) to be spoken, there is a historical mirroring that Russia has with the modern day western world. During the Cold War the motives behind the actions of the Soviet Union resembled how the West currently acts, excluding the obvious ideological differences between capitalism and communism, the end goals, a world existing in harmony because of the influences that certain nations have. The only difference now is that while the Soviet Union and their dreams died off, such anti-Soviet organizations like NATO never dissolved once the Soviet Union declared its defeat. Russia gives the illusion that it is innumerable outnumbered by its enemies, who still have a vendetta against the nation, even though the Cold War in all official jargon has been long gone. “A crucial dimension of [understanding roles of smaller communities under the umbrella of something with a greater purpose] was the destruction of highly local crafts in favor of more nationally integrated occupational categories.”⁸⁴ This can go beyond the nation though, for the Western world has been perceived by Putin as attempting to shape nations for the bettering of humanity in its whole. It’s what Putin’s propaganda machine considers to be the Western danger that Russians need to be aware of. The origin of this fear though is

⁸⁴ Calhoun, 81

one that has a bruised ego attached to it. The Soviet Union was once another one of these international organizations that believed that the greater good justifies the means behind their actions. Its opposition to the West and its organizations such as NATO are black and white, two ideologies that cannot cohabitate inside the same political State. The victory of the West and the liquidation of the Soviet Union created a reality that Putin declared to be the death of Russian culture through such tools like human rights.

With the previous paragraph in mind, if the people of Russia want to successfully integrate human rights into the Russian psyche it needs to have two important features to succeed: number one, it must be Russian in design and can be proven to help advance and preserve the national identity of Russia. Number two, it must still follow a human rights protocol that is inclusive to every group of peoples that do and could possibly inhabit Russia. Regardless of the unique (and by Putin's philosophy, exclusive) nature of post-Soviet Russia, there is a necessity for Russians to explain through actions demonstrating to their fellow citizens that human rights can be Russian while still sticking to the core nature of what human rights are supposed to represent. "In keeping with the idea that human rights can be defended on a plurality of grounds, [Article 1 of the Universal Declaration] point[s] not to a single foundation for human rights but to several."⁸⁵ Human rights are not exclusively about the laws that they create and formulate, first they must be defined and agreed to by the people they are supposed to represent. Therefore, rights don't define the people they represent, but rather the people define rights. This foundation determines just how successful the true impact is. The influence that creates

⁸⁵ Ignatieff, xxv

an improvement for a community in its entirety rather than improving the lives of a selected few requires representatives of every voice.

The Importance of the Citizen's Participation in Relation to Political Power

Russia considers its strength to lie upon its solidarity in defiance, defiance against outsider influence and defiance against outsider voices, resulting in solely defining its nationhood. There is a necessity for the population to become its own voice, properly representing themselves in the nation of their birth. The relevance of the citizen's voice in comparison to the other, the foreigner, has been a respected opinion in the ideology of Russia even in the courts of the Soviet era. "By Russian law, a witness or victim of an alleged crime can testify only to the facts; witness opinions must be disallowed when offered and must never be solicited. But those who testified as witnesses against Soviet dissidents were often asked to render their opinions on the anti-Soviet nature of actions or materials attributed to defendants-and their opinions, scripted by the KGB, often made it into the wording of the courts' verdicts."⁸⁶ Phrasal usage has always been essential in influencing legal structures such as politics or the court of law, being used to shift the influential power that facts would presumably have over such legal institutions.

Putin once said that "a person without a country must therefore be understood to lack not only a place in the external world but a proper self."⁸⁷ He is arguing that Russia is trying to be taken from the Russian people by the globalists through tools such as human rights in order to reshape it, the result being a Russia reflecting the outsider influence of the West, rather than being influence from the inside, a Russia for Russians. A real Russia needs to preserve as much cultural heritage it can muster in a world where

⁸⁶"Words will Break Cement," 176

⁸⁷ Calhoun, 46

the West has decided how the world will stay stable against the risk of the rising of revisionist powers and how a revisionist power can be defined. The claim by Putin is that a person needs not a culture, but a well-controlled government that is able to dictate what is right or wrong in society, and therefore the culture that society represents.

But Putin's accusations against human rights and its globalist arms, ones that are taking Russia from its people are not just improbable but also hypocritical due to his administration's own actions since the turn of the millennia. "Though nationalist self-descriptions generally emphasize mass participation and cross-class unity, for example, nationalism is often an elite project structured in ways which maintain or institute patterns of domination."⁸⁸ This is why the interference of official protests (those that are pre-approved by the government and therefore deemed official) are just not enough, the exposure of the problems not to become entangled into the system that Putin has created, basically twisting a system that he has already twisted.

Rediscovering the Public Sphere (and what happened to it?)

But before Russians are able to ornament human rights with their own cultural significances they first must be aware of the control that a group of citizens can have with enough will power and knowledge. The authoritarian nature of Putin's administration and of past authorities are very relevant to the lives of Russian citizens due to their prevalent nature throughout Russian times. It is a necessity that this realization is achieved in order for the populace to gain a voice that is coming from somebody who is not a state politician in order to encourage a diversity of voices that represent more than the supposed unified whole that Putin represents. One example of the power of grassroots

⁸⁸ Calhoun, 111

movements in Russia was the realization of the power of the people with a utilization of unions, which previously had a reputation in the early 2000s to be weak and practically ineffective against management. Alexei Etmanov, a union worker explained that: “with my comrades, we have taught them [their fellow workers] to use the union as a weapon of struggle and to say “we” when they are talking about the union.”⁸⁹ Structures have always been known to be represented at the State level and represented by the State, Putin wanted to emphasize this.

Putin’s desired results of the Russian state are a country in which the citizens see their participation to be simply futile, resulting in a narcissistic attitude against the concept of change at the level of the citizens. Not only would these desired results give the public the illusion that their political participation is worthless, but it would also continually reinforce the superiority of those in power and their ability to create real change to the State and its structures. This evokes the prideful emotions of unity inside the Soviet Union that preceded the revolution up to the victory of World War 2 (the generation born after this was the first real dissident generation), a bond of teamwork that requires the participation of population. “The problem with Russia, however, was that the huge country was as atomized as it had ever been. Putin’s policies had effectively destroyed public space.”⁹⁰ In Putin’s era the ideologies of the early Soviet Union have been turned and twisted around in order to promote authoritarian motives. “Individuals only become persons in social relationships that are already shaped by culture.”⁹¹ Whether it’s the State’s propaganda through the radio, or a local citizen on a soap box

⁸⁹ “Unlikely mobilisations: how ordinary Russian people become involved in collective action”, 228

⁹⁰ “The Man Without a Face”, 262

⁹¹ Calhoun, 30

speaking from one citizen to another, a speech focusing on the influential power that a community has given the listener an awareness to his responsibility, depending on the message of the speech.

Throughout every historical period of Russia, from the imperial age of the tsars up till the 1990's, the notion of representation and ownership went hand in hand, if you were to own (or in Soviet times, to direct) a factory your voice was the voice of sovereignty, workers could not expect to get something good if they were to protest. Only in the 21st century has the consolidation of power has finally been seen as unnatural and unnecessary. Physical spaces have become more than a representation for an ideology, or an individual and their power, now it is about a unique group of peoples that exists inside a unique location and have a unique profession. "The appropriation of common places played a role in mobilisation. These included physical spaces in the workplace and the words and ideas linked to the workers' movement. Union activists achieved a visible presence on the shop floor by putting up posters throughout the factory and distributing leaflets."⁹² Representation does not have to be something that is universal in theory and practice as it had been in both the Soviet and Imperial times. Different groups of people represent different ways of life and how to live that life, but regardless of these differences the best way for these people to be represented is for them to represent themselves.

The Building of Big Changes from the Ground Up

Many movements of gradual significance that have been occurring inside of Russia have gone unnoticed in the international sphere due to their relatively

⁹² "Unlikely mobilisations: how ordinary Russian people become involved in collective action", 230

uninteresting actions, especially when in comparison to groups such as Pussy Riot, who create a jarring romanization of rebellion against the conformist nature of the Russian state. But these little issues and how the people are dealing with them are noteworthy in understanding how long-term change can arise in the apolitical state of modern Russia. “Much thanks to the single largest demonstrations [that eventually arose] to have been organized in a middle-sized Russian city in recent years, with 12,000 taking to the street on 30 January 2010, the movement eventually resulted in the de facto dismissal of the sitting regional governor Georgy Boos. However, behind it lie more bread-and-butter type of issues that had sparked it in the first place, such as transport taxes, jobs, car import duties and utility bills.”⁹³ These kinds of movements work so effectively in an authoritarian state such as Russia due to the fact that there is no way for an authority figure (who wishes to concentrate as much power as possible) to label those activities as being malignant against the sovereignty of the state.

The miniscule nature of these movements that have occurred in Kaliningrad allowed these citizens to become aware about their own personal ability to create change in the political system. This a crucial necessity to encourage change in a nation. But at the same time, it is not perceived as an opposition to the standard quo that Putin emphasizes and encourages. As explained in chapter 2, any type of organization that makes the impression that they are existing as a contrasting force to Putin (and therefore the entirety of the political structure of Russia, as described in chapter 1) will immediately be labeled and prosecuted as having malevolent intentions against Russia in its entirety. Take for

⁹³ Clement, Carine. "'From 'Local' to 'Political': The Kaliningrad Mass Protest Movement of 2009-2010 in Russia'." *Urban Grassroots Movements in Central and Eastern Europe* (2015): 163-93. Ashgate Publishing. Web. 30 Apr. 2017.

example in 2005, when “police have detained Russian opposition leader and well-known Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny, who was handing out leaflets in the Moscow subway. Navalny was raising support for an anti-government rally. According to a police spokesperson, the pair [Navalny and one of his associates] was detained "for attempting to cause a public disturbance.””⁹⁴ Alexei Navalny and his associate were simply attempting to help spread awareness of a type of power that the simple citizen has, the power that arises in numbers. But this is too open in questioning the current establishment’s reign of power to last before being considered detrimental to the Russian way of life. So therefore, the changes start in the Russian way of life, not creating revolutionary changes filled with unpredictability and violence, but awareness and improvements for the greater populace.

This momentum, starting from little incidents and eventually resulting in the removal of a local politician have the possibility of going even higher in their influence and improvement for the local citizens. Much of the influence over who is elected in local states (and who even gets to be on the ballot) comes from the Duma, the lower legislative house of the Russian federation, which in turn is heavily dominated by Putin’s influence. “In the past, seats were allocated only from countrywide party lists according to the parties’ share of the popular vote. Now, voters elect part of the deputies directly — the candidate who gets the most votes in a certain district wins that district. Three “systemic” opposition parties represented in the State Duma almost always vote in favour of Kremlin-proposed legislation — an arrangement set to be continued through the

⁹⁴ (www.dw.com), Deutsche Welle. "Kremlin Critic Alexei Navalny Detained in Moscow Subway | News | DW.COM | 15.02.2015." DW.COM. Deutsch Welle, 15 Feb. 2015. Web. 30 Apr. 2017.

upcoming elections.”⁹⁵ There are many struggles that go in for those at the bottom (civilians who begin by focused at the local sphere, the sphere that is directly related to their personal lives) have to go through to gain any influence over structural change. Due to Russia’s apolitical nature, if citizens first declare their disgruntled opinions, resulting in significant claims, nothing good will come of it due to Putin’s inherent power. “In fact, judging from the Kaliningrad case considered, one might even go as far as to claim that such a process of scale shift, or movement spread [in Russia], only becomes possible when there is no definite departure from local settings and ordinary concerns.”⁹⁶ The momentum that the citizens gain with every achievement results in a slow amass of power that could almost be seen as a type of salami slicing. As long as the people slowly gain power through re-discovering their rights, the government can’t label them as a potential menace to their balancing act of society under their regime.

Putin’s political representation was meant to be interpreted as much more than just embodying the political sphere, it means to denote the proper authority to all places of life inside of Russia. But with the emergence of these grassroots groups, authoritarian power is being dispersed and taken by others. The societal improvement lies in the fact that these people who make up the organizations are the ones who actually know what is going on in their field of knowledge. These citizens know what should and shouldn’t be done in these special institutions and how they can be improved over a long period of time. “Doctors and patients of the so-called Fishermen’s Hospital in the city of Kaliningrad (Medical Unit No. 1, previously reserved for employees of the fishing

⁹⁵ Hill, Kathrin. "Russia: How to Exercise Political Control." *Financial Times*. The Financial Times, 7 Sept. 2016. Web. 30 Apr. 2017.

⁹⁶ “From ‘Local’ to ‘Political’: The Kaliningrad Mass Protest Movement of 2009-2010 in Russia”, 190

industry), which had been slated for closure, began to mobilize towards the end of 2008. This campaign to save the hospital (which, besides picket lines, also consisted of media interventions, petitions, lobbying and parliamentary pressure) eventually transformed itself into a movement addressing broader public-health issues in the region (specifically, the healthcare budget as well as healthcare quality and access, which had deteriorated following an earlier experimental pilot program in healthcare finance).⁹⁷ Specialists, if given the proper amount of power needed to accelerate their own fields of interest can dramatically help to improve their areas. The Putin administrations monopoly of power has damaged the local economies of Russia. Local organizations must retake control of their areas of expertise in order for progression to ensure. Putin's power does not allow him to have knowledge of every individual region and every region different subsects and so on, responsibilities must be given to those who know these places, because they work and live in these places.

Redefining the Portrait of the Orthodox Church

Pussy Riot, the protest-art band, have always known that for Russia's general public to be aware that human rights can be Russian, Russian's have to be the ones to make their fellow citizens aware of that fact. While they are anything but subtle with their messages against the current regime and its agenda, they still are an example of proper representation of real Russian culture while also supporting marginalized communities that the dominating population have considered to be naturally un-Russian, such as feminists and the homosexual community. They have used attributes of not just their lives, but of other Russian citizens who would claim that they have nothing to do with

⁹⁷ "From 'Local' to 'Political': The Kaliningrad Mass Protest Movement of 2009-2010 in Russia", page 171-172

them, and that they have nothing in common. One example was when Pussy Riot claimed that “without securing the patriarch’s blessing, we dared in our performance to combine the visual images of Orthodox culture and the culture of protest, making intelligent people suspect that Orthodox culture may belong not only to the Russian Orthodox Church, the patriarch, and Putin: it can end up on the side of civil riot and the protest culture in Russia.”⁹⁸ Putin, and with him the State’s cultural domination are proven here to not be fully successful due to Pussy Riot’s declaration. Culture can be embraced by anybody who has a proper understanding of what aesthetic features represent it and formulate a comprehension that multiple individuals can understand and agree upon. Seeing these similar images that have had solidified definitions for many years becoming something new (yet similar) help people garnish a level of comprehension that create flexibility, a flexibility to understand tolerance at a cultural level.

Unfortunately, due to assumptions that have been inspired and influenced by Putin’s propaganda, Pussy Riot in its entirety has been labeled as anti-religious and anti-Orthodox, confirmed by their punk protest in an Orthodox Church, but also influenced by uninformed Russian people who were previously unaware of what it meant to be in a punk rock group and were then informed by the domineering administration. The funding that the Russian political powers have enables them to twist the interpretations of people’s actions and even how Westerners perceive and comprehend these actions. “The Pussy Riot punk prayer consciously invokes the “Mother of God”—a key symbol in Eastern Orthodox Christianity—to chase away Putin, thus uniting religious, feminine iconography with political protest in a message intended to communicate, not merely to

⁹⁸ “Words will Break Cement”, 219

provoke.”⁹⁹ Pussy Riot’s actions are both good and bad when it comes to how effective their actions were in combating the governments monopoly on cultural influence and power in the long term. Even though they have attempted to show that such traditionally conservative institutions such as the Orthodox church are less rigid in interpretation than they are believed to be, the aggressive way it had been achieved resulted in mixed reactions, depending on the audience. For those (presumably) younger and more liberal people, they might look upon the protest as a creative nuisance, but the response being one completely unnecessary and there suspicious and authoritarian. But for those more conservative people, the protest helped cement in their biased opinions against liberal and so-called Westernized mindsets, mindsets that are degraded morally, proven by such absurd acts like the punk prayer. The punk prayer is filled with shock value, but you cannot shock people that already dislike you, you must try to persuade them with results, not just raw action.

Combating the Aftermath of Terrorist Attacks

The family and its symbolic representation has always been prevalent through Russian history, symbolizing wholesome unity and loyalty to blood, but Putin’s side isn’t the only one to utilize this icon, so have groups that are opposing him and calling for justice. The Beslan School Siege and the lack of honest information that was released after a school in Beslan, North Ossetia, was the scene of a hostage crisis by Chechen terrorists became the scene for mothers of the victims who wanted to find the truth and justice of what happened during the siege. In the age of international terrorism, protection and the security it promises has become one of Putin’s speaking points, “terrorist attacks

⁹⁹ Kan, Elianna. "Pussy Riot: What Was Lost (and Ignored) in Translation." *The American Reader*. *The American Reader*, n.d. Web. 30 Apr. 2017.

took place in Moscow [(, the heart of Russia,)] in 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2006, 2010, 2011”¹⁰⁰, so the significance of fearmongering has certainly not diminished with time. Throughout Putin’s time as president one of his promises has been the unity of Russia, and in this unity a power of protection against those who wish the Russian way of life harm. By covering up true facts about what really happened behind the closed doors of the school Putin wants to be looked upon as somebody who does not negotiate with terrorists, someone who will promise them only with counteractive violence. He wants to be the voice of absolute reason of Russia, yet this organization wants to embody to true purpose of reason, to find honest answers about what happened at the scene of a horrendous event that deeply affected those involved in this organization.

Politicians and other officials have constantly given misinformation about the truth of what happened (ranging from how the siege occurred to the numbers of casualties) to “the Mothers of Beslan. They had been the driving force behind an effort to turn the ongoing trial of the single surviving hostage-taker into a full-fledged investigation of what happened at the school. Increasingly, they had come to believe that the responsibility for the deaths of their children lay with federal troops.”¹⁰¹ “Dozens of survivors [from the Beslan school siege] agree that the first explosion launched by Russian counterterrorism forces broke through the ceiling of the gym, causing the roof to collapse on the hostages who were sitting beneath it. The authorities, meanwhile, insist that the Russian military refrained from using heavy weapons until the survivors had left the school.”¹⁰² The Mothers of Beslan have been widely accepted because they represent

¹⁰⁰ Alexievich, 362

¹⁰¹ “The Man without a Face”, 192

¹⁰² Nemtsova, Anna. "The Ghosts of Beslan." Foreign Policy. N.p., 14 Sept. 2014. Web. 30 Apr. 2017.

a sense of honest decency that victims deserve, but they are not only victims of a tragic event, but they are mothers. The sympathetic nature of the mother, the one who binds a family together embodies Russia not only religiously through the Holy Mother, but through even traditional gender norms and how they play out. While the husband is expected to leave the household in order to work at a job, the mother stays, cooking, cleaning, and making sure the children are being properly raised and are properly behaving. They are practically responsible for the potential future of Russia because of the power they hold inside of the household. The paternal figure might still represent the spokesperson for the family unit, he would not be able to contain this unit without the structural support that the mother supplies. The mother is a key component, and her organizational power represents true Russian citizens going after the justice that they deserve after bearing so much hardship.

Not only are the Mothers of Beslan an excellent example of how rights can be gained in Russia from a representational perspective, how they began their movement is another aspect that defines them as being benign in their end goals. Involvement and questioning the honesty of the answers that the Russian government give have been labeled in the past as malicious in nature due to the fact that they are questioning in the first place, but the Mothers of Beslan are being involved they were forced into the situation and the tragedy that be felled their families. Ms. Sadakava, one of the mothers of the victims said that “the only politics we knew was to raise our children to be worthy, healthy and beautiful. You know, one of the other women was asked in an interview, ‘Why are you so political?’ She answered with this phrase: ‘We entered politics to the

extent that politics entered us.”¹⁰³ Since the siege of Beslan resulted in so many deaths and contrary opinions between the survivors themselves and politicians who are supposed to properly represent them that there was a responsibility to themselves to take back the factual knowledge of the siege. The distortion of factual information about the deaths that had severely traumatized these families was a reality that they could not accept, Putin’s façade is limiting in how they can shape reality. The death of one’s child needs to be called for, the Mothers of Beslan knew (due to surviving hostages that were inside the school building during the siege) that Putin writing off the whole setup on exclusively the fault of Chechen terrorists is unacceptable.

Eventually somebody in the Russian government must be held accountable for what happened and the dishonesty in the aftermath. “The Beslan Mothers Committee scored a victory of sorts [one] week when Alexander Dzasokhov, the head of the North Ossetia region that includes Beslan, resigned.”¹⁰⁴ Even though the resignation of Dzasokhov (presumably one that was forced) was just an attempt to give the Mothers of Beslan some sort of satisfaction, it still shows how and why organizations such as these ones can find a place to reside and gain popularity inside of the Russian realm and gain rights that they deserve. “To confuse rights with aspirations, and rights conventions with syncretic syntheses of world values, is to wish away the conflicts that define the very content of rights.”¹⁰⁵ The current political structure that Putin wants to encourage is one of political pride and one built on reliance in the actions of the government, because of

¹⁰³ Wexler, Martha. "Mothers of Beslan Become Political Force." NPR. NPR, 22 July 2005. Web. 30 Apr. 2017.

¹⁰⁴ Arnold, Chloe. "Europe | Beslan Mothers' Futile Quest for Relief." BBC News. BBC, 04 June 2005. Web. 30 Apr. 2017.

¹⁰⁵ Ignatieff, 67

this Putin must accept at least some of the minimal demands of the Mothers of Beslan, rather than flat out denying them and labeling them as enemies of the State. The Mothers of Beslan have faced terrible circumstances, and Putin must deliver onto them some sort of justice, if not he is jeopardizing the promises of his nationalist creed and their legitimacy as honest truth.

Mothers of Russian Soldiers

The Committee of Soldiers' Mothers of Russia is one of the first successful organizations of local community activism to become representative of a group of individuals and the rights they properly deserve. Even though they were organized and effective before Putin's time in office (being created in 1989), they are a prime example of how rights can be given who are properly represented and understood as being a portion of Russian existence. The reason that this was one of the first successful organizations for rights is because of this representation; a strong military and the soldiers that make up the military have always been a point of pride in Russia, so there was a wide understanding by the populace when there was a demand for soldiers to have rights. Beforehand "the statistics [were] terrible: in times of peace, four to five thousand soldiers die[d] every year, without counting those participating in military actions. Cold, hunger, and the absence of medicines are to blame. Also, and what is most terrible, young recruits are subjected to maltreatment and torture by older soldiers and officers."¹⁰⁶ Such figures are not just embarrassing due to Russia's claims to being a superpower, but due to their reliance on their military for the sake of a strong national security. If Russia is to live up to its promises as a country that can be defined by its own rules in a post-Soviet

¹⁰⁶ Odile, Albert. "In Russia, the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers Has Become a Link in Civil Society That Can No Longer Be Muffled." D-p-h. CDTM, Mar. 1997. Web. 30 Apr. 2017.

world, citizen participation such as this is a necessity in order to adapt and progress as a country.

The Committee of Soldiers' Mothers was unique Russian not because they focused on soldiers, but because of the harrowing respect that the committee wished to give those who but their lives on the line for their country. It was not just about making the soldiers' lives more comfortable, it was making sure that the profession would be kept and considered to be honorable, even with so many horrid events happening in the Chechnya war at the time. One massive influence was the desire for mothers to find their sons who have presumably passed away, some even going so far as to travel all the way to war-torn Chechnya in order to find them. On "25 September 1999: The first official burial of unidentified remnants of military men killed in Chechnya from Laboratory number 124, in the city of Rostov-on-Don, took place at the Bogorodskoy cemetery in the Moscow region."¹⁰⁷ Eventually this event of burying the remnants of soldiers became about soldiers in their entirety, beyond simply the mother's disappeared son.

Symbolically these mothers were there to honor these men not only as soldiers who had died for their country, but as mothers. There is a powerful representation in this act; the soldier's country, which these men had sacrificed their lives to supposedly defend, has cast them aside, not even taking time to discover their names. But the mother, or the motherlike figure has come to sacrifice their own lives in order to bring a proper semblance of honor to the unknown soldier, who had died with no one and no country to honor him before he was found by the maternal figure. This motto and the actions that

¹⁰⁷ "History of Committee of Soldiers' Mothers of Russia." THE RUSSIAN-WIDE NGO "COMMITTEE OF SOLDIERS' MOTHERS OF RUSSIA". N.p., n.d. Web. 30 Apr. 2017.

come with it are ones that are unifying in respect, concepts that Russia considers to be part of the country's internal structure.

Even though the Chechen wars have come and gone, this organization has continued to be active members in their mission for people to be aware of the rights that soldiers have and deserve to have honored. "Since the establishment of the "Committee of Soldier's Mothers of Russia", the organization has been engaged in educational activity in the sphere of protection of the rights of recruits, military men and their parents. In all regional branches of the organization, regular consultative-informative work at offices, educational institutions and military units is carried out."¹⁰⁸ It is important to have specific goals for such an organization, but the importance of education, especially in a society such as Russia is essential for continuing the spread of rights, and even the awareness of said rights. Another important aspect is that these specific rights are a good way to introduce the public to the concept of universal rights because who these rights specifically focus on, the soldiers in the military. Due to the patriotic strength that Russia prides itself on, they want to have soldiers that constitutional rights because they appreciate the soldiers for the sacrifice they had made, universal respect for a group helps peoples understand why human beings deserve to have rights and what greatness these rights do in both the long term and the short term.

Going Beyond the Specifics: Unifying Groups of People

With each group focusing on a singular topic, there is eventually a time when organizations need to utilize their momentum to join up with other groups who have also been successful in their won fields of expertise. The reason that these groups should have

¹⁰⁸ THE RUSSIAN-WIDE NGO "COMMITTEE OF SOLDIERS' MOTHERS OF RUSSIA".

been previously successful is not just for the sake of having advocating experience, but by having been legitimized by the apolitical society of Russia. “This convergence process came about not simply as the result of the bridging work carried out by leaders; it was, to at least an equal degree, a product of communicational dynamics among ordinary activists as well. In addition, what is also important to point out is that all this increase in generality and commonality in the course of the Kaliningrad movement formation was not exclusively brought about through some strategic calculation.”¹⁰⁹ The experience of mobilization and the rewards that come from it, the satisfaction of finding of group of so-called regular people being like-minded and the reality that by working together they can actually achieve the goals they set out to accomplish. These grassroots differ in organizational power in comparison to politically controlled organizations because of the significance of the common man and their role in the bigger picture. Rather than being just another number to add on to a statistic, such as those who participate in Russia United rallies, their participation includes real involvement in order to keep their movements afloat. The symbolic power this holds has the potential to be incredibly charismatic for those who have peak an interest in the mobilization, if they are to join they will not just be part of something bigger than them, but they will have a real purpose being part of the movement.

Putin has not been able to label these groups as being enemies of the state not only because of their comparatively small and specialized focuses on specific areas of interest, but because they both support relatively similar doctrines. What multiple mobilized groups have in common are a sense of unity to work together in order to create

¹⁰⁹ “From ‘Local’ to ‘Political’: The Kaliningrad Mass Protest Movement of 2009-2010 in Russia”, 184

a prosperous Russia for the future, emphasizing features that are almost exactly the same as what Putin has promoted in his speeches. “What prevailed and continues to prevail, despite some divergences, is a common aspiration for unity and fraternity, in which all express the same courage and dignity by going down to the street and publicly affirming their right to be respected as citizens. Overall, the movement avoids political, social, and ideological division, and presents itself as a movement determined to ensure that “the state” (understood in fairly monolithic terms) recognizes “citizenship” and “citizens.””¹¹⁰

The commonality of unification has been heavily dominated in Putin’s philosophy about how nationalism will make Russia develop a powerful national identity. The difference that divides these two groups though is how power is represented and therefore who is supposed to have it. Putin’s emphasis is on unquestioning trust in the actions of the government with the promise of long term prosperity in reward. These grassroots organizations though have ideas that align much more heavily with the promises that nationalism derives its significance off of. While Putin is trying to establish a Russian identity that is derived from hard-lined historical traditions, the local organizations are establishing a Russian identity based off of the actual people who live and represent Russia, regardless of cultural relevance.

Even though we have seen that Putin’s relationship with the real citizens of Russia is one of a factitious nature, there is still the formidable position that Putin plays in the question of how he is dealt with when rights for the common man are being applied, and the answer is that he isn’t. Due to the nature of Putin’s structure, his personal protection is the top priority, but fortunately the way Putin has marketed his personality

¹¹⁰ Clement, Carine. "Civic Mobilization in Russia: Protest and Daily Life." Books & Ideas. Lavedesidees.fr, 14 June 2013. Web. 30 Apr. 2017.

has allowed him to become a symbolically bigger target than just as the president of a country, he has embodied more than just his professional position. “As for Putin himself, his role strikes me as inessential: slogans demanding his resignation were rare and brandished primarily by the movement’s leaders. “Anti-Putin” sentiment mostly reflected the rejection of the political system he represents (first, the “power ladder,” which refers to the absolute subordination of civil servants and political officials to their superiors, in which the public and voters count for naught).”¹¹¹ The tools that Putin has used to absorb the entirety of the Russian government and all the responsibilities that come along with it can and have been utilized against him. It is not that he has simply bitten off more than he can chew, but it is the fact that there is no proper way for a country to progress with so much power to be concentrated at the top.

The oversaturation of power is especially visible in Russia considering the geographic scale that the government has to deal with. In similar relations to Americans living in the Rust Belt, many Russians who do not live in the major cities such as Moscow or Saint Petersburg have been swept aside. “Most Russians live in housing built in the late Soviet period. A report released last year by the Russian Union of Engineers found that 20 percent of city dwellings lack hot water, 12 percent have no central heating and 10 percent no indoor plumbing. Gas leaks, explosions and heating breakdowns happen with increasing frequency, but in most places infrastructure is simply edging quietly toward collapse.”¹¹² The administrations lack of actions to help areas that are not the major cities has been noticed by the locals, who wish to act to their own accord due to

¹¹¹ “Civic Mobilization in Russia: Protest and Daily Life”

¹¹² Barry, Ellen. “The Russia Left Behind.” The New York Times. The New York Times, n.d. Web. 30 Apr. 2017.

the fact that they know best, because they live there, it's their lives that are in these predicaments. The representation of the State has become something literally embodied in its geographic location, one that focuses on the major cities where the majority of citizens live in, including the major political players. Those that are outside of the peripheries of these politicians become invisible. A true sense of unity, a word Putin relies so heavily on for creating support, can only be completed if proper representation for every citizen is achieved. The political power that Putin gives to those in close proximity to himself must be spread out more widely to create politically active citizens that will further their own personal agendas for improving their situations.

The Potential Future(s) of Mobilization in Russia

The continuation of grassroots movements requires multiple objectives in order to keep on expanding and gaining influence and spreading knowledge about the purpose of grassroots movements. One of these objectives is the necessary inclusion of indefinite end goals; once specific achievements have been completed, there is danger of the whole movement disappearing. "Another factor contributing to the demobilization of the movement [in Kaliningrad] was that some of the specific goals the movement had pursued in fact ended up being also achieved. The transport tax hike was revoked, for instance, and the legal right of kiosk owners to conduct business on municipal grounds was recognized; the regional health minister, for his part, resigned and, in the end, also the efforts to remove Governor Boos from office paid off."¹¹³ All of the achievements that happened in Kaliningrad were great in the localized sphere, but the end goals were imagined to be exclusively labeled as the end of their necessary efforts as a movement.

¹¹³ "From 'Local' to 'Political': The Kaliningrad Mass Protest Movement of 2009-2010 in Russia", 188

The momentum that these movements have gained, the momentum that has been built up over successful periods of legitimization and recognition from their fellow citizens needs to continually exist in order to keep the momentum going, making the process of progress to become more and more significant.

The unification of the populace of Russia, rather than just the idea populace of Russia that Putin wants to enact, would result in the real recreation of the Russian identity, rather than just some fabrication that is trying to be forced upon the world. Even if these organizations have completed their localized goals, there can be a continuation of work to do by spreading education about rights, and specifically explaining their significance due to the fact that these organizations have been successful in the past by claiming these rights. “Activists need to keep promoting the idea that citizens can no longer rely on the state to fix their problems; they need to keep fighting attempts by the government to smear them in the press and they must continue to encourage their fellow campaigners to local government positions, as three Khimki activists did successfully this September [of 2016].”¹¹⁴ Putin’s false promise that the Russian state will be 100 percent as a dependent support system. As statistics have proven over the years to not have become possible, sixteen years after Putin was first chosen as the president of Russia. With that discovery, there have been organizations that have worked to make changes happen in their community. There needs to be an emphasize on the fact that they worked for their community, rather than being some grandiose nationwide attempt at reformation, they started out small, in the places they have lived in, the places they knew better than the government that was supposed to represent them.

¹¹⁴ Chirikova, Yevgenia. "In Russia It Is Getting Harder to Ignore the Grassroots Movement." *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, 15 Nov. 2016. Web. 30 Apr. 2017.

“Declining living standards, rising poverty, and the economic crisis are seen as far more troubling. In a society that has abandoned the democratic illusions and the rousing, abstract slogans about human rights that it embraced in the 1990s, these priorities are not terribly surprising. This is particularly true given that the public is largely unaware of this repression and that, in some instances, the latter is widely supported by public opinion.”¹¹⁵ Russia and its relationship to the authoritarian presence is one that can be described in the actions of a reluctant sigh and the shrug of one’s shoulders. It has always been this way in Russia, so for there to the potential of self-improvement requires more than a non-Russian exclaiming the greatness of self-realization and the power of claiming one’s rights. It requires the efforts of the citizens themselves, seeing that teamwork can become effective in order not propel a single being’s agenda, one that has been masked as being for every man, but an agenda that is actually for every man because it has been partially created with the help of the common man. People taken from different backgrounds, professions, and geographical locations, yet all living in the Russian Federation. This is how human rights can be successfully integrated into the Russian way of life, there must be a realization on the power of the people as a figure, rather than just following a figure.

¹¹⁵ Clement, Carine. "Putin, Patriotism and Political Apathy." Books & Ideas. Lavedesidees.fr, 19 Oct. 2015. Web. 30 Apr. 2017.

Conclusion

The Hope of a Broken People: Creating the Real Russian Identity

Putin's populism is just one of the many ways that authoritarian leaders have tried to work in between two vantage points of political society: on one side is the tyrannical leader who will have to respond to military reactions from other nations or a civil war, on the other side there is the democratic leader who could not be labeled as authoritarian. Leaders such as Putin do all that they can to hold power within their means by making sure that human rights do not become part of the common vernacular of the population. Creating myths and constructs about what a nation is have been crucial in order to legitimize the rejection of human rights as part of a nation's sovereignty. But this is simply not how someone can define the conceptualization of human rights, and the citizens of Russia have been vocal about their awareness of this.

If the population of Russia is to really grasp the meaning of its unified identity as a nation, then conceptualizing their rights as individuals is an essential part to it. This would result in the creation of a population that can represent itself and can accurately shape its identity to be a reflection of the actual citizens that exist inside Russia. This would create a real sense of unity, rather than an authoritarian presence demanding a sense of unity. Putin has just created an identity for them, resulting in something that is artificial and simply dishonest about who the Russian identity encapsulates. The Russian community needs to find a real identity on their own terms, rather than by the archetype that the government wants them to conform to. Not only will this result in the satisfaction of finding an identity that properly represents every individual who makes up Russia one way or another, but it will give the populace the power that they should have as citizens.

Populace power has been utilized by Putin in order to funnel his own agenda which is being perceived as the necessary route for the country in its entirety. If the people are to claim their autonomous power, then Putin would have to readjust his political doings. This would result either in him losing a significant grasp of his centralized power, or turning into a more traditional authoritarian, creating a dramatic reaction from both inside and outside of the country.

This reaction has already begun to take place in Russia. Over the course of the 21st century Russian people have slowly realized that it is not necessary to have government approval if you want something changed in society. An essential part of human rights is this concept of the individual and the voice he or she has. This voice is supposed to be utilized to make an impact on the world around them. “Unlike the rallies in Nemtsov’s memory or even the 2011-2012 protests, this one [in 2017] did not have a permit from the Moscow city authorities. Over the weekend, the mayor’s office warned people that protestors alone would bear the responsibility for any consequences of attending what they deemed an illegal demonstration.”¹¹⁶ But still people acted upon their desires and protested for what they deemed to be right. To act on their desires, rather than waiting for the approval of an authoritarian presence shows that the Russian people are discovering their own power, a power to change their country.

¹¹⁶ Ioffe, Julia. "What Russia's Latest Protests Mean for Putin." The Atlantic. Atlantic Media Company, 27 Mar. 2017. Web. 30 Apr. 2017.

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